

Dear Mr. McIntosh:

I send you herewith, in accordance with your urgent request, a copy of my paper "The Early Scotch Settlers of Cape Breton." When Mr. Jack is through with it I would like to have it returned. Tell him to have the Gaelic words correctly spelled as I gave them them only phonetic spelling.

Yours very truly
W.D. Morrison

The Early Scotch Settlers of Cape Breton

By D. M'D. Garrison, Dominica No 1 C.B.

Among the pioneer Protestant settlers of Cape Breton were many emigrants from the Highlands and the Islands of Scotland. They were an exceptionally noble class of people, and it is with much regret we note the fewness of their number today. We are happy, however, to believe that their mission has not been in vain: not only did they provide their descendants with a goodly heritage but they succeeded in impressing the new country with their own majestic personality to a degree that is even felt in this revolutionary age, and that we hope may be felt for many years to come.

In selecting this subject for the present meeting of the Literary branch of the Guild my purpose has been, not merely a feeble attempt to erect a tablet commemorative of the heroic achievements of these people while acting their part on the stage of life: but also to tender a slight token of recognition of their influence in molding the lives and the institutions of a later age. The Church of God owes more to Scotland than perhaps to any other country in the world; and not the smallest fraction of this Christianizing power was implanted in the Highlands and in the Isles. Let me

lay down the general proposition that were it not for the significant effect of this Scottish trait today, our Christian Sabbath here in Cape Breton would be in danger of dethronement. I will even put it more emphatically, and say, that only the influence of those of our people who have been in intimate contact with our noble ancestors saves our Sabbath day from the most violent desecration. Avarice and greed are thundering at the gates of our moral natures, and their weapons are powerful. The tendency to open the floodgates of industrialism and submerge the green fields of the Christian Day of Rest is very strong and very persistent. I repeat my conviction that nothing prevent the inundation but the God-fearing and God-loving principles instilled into us by our respected forefathers. Therefore I deem appropriate to make the subject of this paper a topic worthy of our consideration at a meeting of a Society instituted for the purpose of propagating the truths so vividly realized and practiced by the early Scotch settlers.

On this occasion I wish to refer more particularly to those who came from the Isles, reserving for another

opportunity an account of the emigrants from the Main-
 land. My own grandfather was a representative of the
 band of sturdy Scotchmen who "came out" from the is-
 land of Harris in the year 1830: and his tales of the life
 in the Old Country so fired my Imagination in my child-
 hood days that even to this hour I have an ~~over~~^{over} irre-
 sistible longing to visit the Hebrides. Very little reference is
 made to these people in the historical works of our country.
 The explanation is found in the fact that they themselves
 were not a literary people in the modern sense of the term;
 while the National historians failed to determine and
 appreciate the sterling qualities, reserved energy, and
 powerful individuality of the race. All our direct in-
 formation concerning them has either been handed down
 verbally from father to son, or has been registered in the
 songs of the Bards who flourished mighty in each generation.
 Writing was practically unknown among them, so that the
 Bards naturally became the custodians of their traditional lore.
 Beginning with the early part of the nineteenth century they
 were subjected to much unjust oppression and persecution

at the hands of their landlords which culminated in their emigration to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, where they were obliged to speedily adapt themselves to conditions somewhat different to those they had been accustomed to on the other side of the Ocean. It may not prove uninteresting to refer at this stage, briefly, to the home life of these people on the storm beaten shores of the lonely Hebrides. Their dwelling houses were unique and deserve first mention. They consisted of two main compartments, one for the animals and the other for the humans. The house was, as a rule, an oblong structure varying in length according to the means and requirements of the occupier. It had one door but frequently no windows, or at least no more than one. Chimneys did not find favor: the smoke escaping through a barrel, out of which the bottom had been knocked, and fixed thus in the thatch overhead. From a rafter above the fire hung a chain, black and thick crusted with the soot of many years; and by it the three-legged pots were suspended over the peat fire which had been kindled on a hearth of rough stones raised slightly above the floor level. The

roof was of thatch which was kept in its place by heather ropes, weighted with heavy stones that hung over the walls, forming a girdle round the house.

A poor, rough, lonely, unsightly, unhealthy spot you say! Well, I grant it: but what does that signify when we consider that these houses were the homes of people who lived happier, holier, and healthier lives than did those who at the same time "moved and had their being" in gilded palaces and stately mansions? What does life signify to the individual anyway unless its prolongation is accompanied by health and contentment? And where could you find a stronger, healthier, and happier people than inhabited those primitive quarters just described? Their descendants living in this Twentieth Century, and participating in the refinements and accessories peculiar to Twentieth Century civilization, may assume an air of supicious disgust on being reminded of these facts; but let me say we have reason to envy rather the solid contentment and unruffled temperament that so often characterized these old people. Ground as many of

them often were between the upper and the nether millstones of poverty and servitude yet they universally presented a smiling countenance, an abiding faith, a cheerful welcome. Reflecting on such phases of character often makes me think that the poor man derives more real enjoyment from the world than the rich. Man is by nature a happy creature, and when Nature is untrammelled by the conventionalities of life we find the highest type of enjoyment. Take the child as an illustration. Its wants are few and easily supplied, and its life is a continuous series of dashes of enjoyment, intermingled indeed with occasional dots of disappointment, but so slight as to be forgotten immediately. Not so the lot of the fully developed man, who early on the voyage of life learns that "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." And I take it that the higher you go in the scale of civilization the more troubles you encounter, and the more bitter the experience. I realize that this is a much debated question, and that the opponents of my view maintain that - the satisfaction enjoyed in the triumph over great difficulties overbalances

the turmoil and worry attendant on such trials. Be that as it may I have about arrived at the conclusion that so far as the individual is concerned it is more conducive to happiness to be ignorant than to be wise. Of course you perceive I am speaking of things material. When we consider the problem in its relationship to the race the human race as a whole, we easily agree that in order that Progress may continue its evolutionary process it is necessary that knowledge and energy should exert their competitive qualities, and that the sum total of the benefits derived from the exercise of such competition and stress results in increased comfort, and therefore increased pleasure to the human family. But this fact does not, by any means, necessitate the assumption that the individual worker, therein concerned, is thereby happier and more comfortable.

But in addition to the simplicity of their lives we have another explanation of the inherent happiness of these people. They were firm believers in God, whom they regarded as the Creator, Preserver, and Judge of the Universe.

Their every action was measured by this unalterable standard. worldly pursuits failed to engulf them. In other words their spiritual nature was highly educated and developed, so that whatever shocks they received in the course of their earthly pilgrimage they never despaired. Here then are two great lessons we, madmen of today, are taught by these heroes of an earlier date: First, to lead simple lives; secondly, to lead Godly lives. In the hurry and shuny of the present times there are two great facts that we are apt to lose sight of. Competition for first place is so keen and severe that we are prone to strut about in borrowed feathers; and nothing is so hard to keep up as Appearances when the foundation is faulty. A prevailing sin of the present day in our country - ~~yea~~, I am afraid, in our community - is deception. We are not actually what we pretend to be; we are not the same to everybody; we do not say what we think, and conversely we do not think as we say. In short we are not honest with our fellow creatures; and ultimately we become dishonest with ourselves and with our

Creator. Let us learn from our ancestors to act honorably and conscientiously towards each other, and to remember our Creator, not only in the days of our youth, but throughout the whole period of our lives, and to square all our actions in accordance with that remembrance.

As I have already stated these people were driven from their homes in Scotland, and their little crofts converted into sheep feeds and deer farms. Landing in Cape Breton they were confronted with a luxuriant vegetation reaching to the very edge of the sea, which teemed with fish of all kinds. Many of them were skilled fishermen, and so dipped their nets with success into the briny deep. But their experience on land taxed their ingenuity. Their first efforts were directed towards the erection of a dwelling house, which was constructed along the lines of the home on the other side. Thus the walls were of spruce logs, and the chinks between filled with moss. The rafters were covered over with

spruce bark, which had been stripped off from the larger trees by means of an ingenious instrument shaped somewhat like a hockey stick. These overlapping spruce coats were held in place by poles fastened to each other and to the lower walls by ropes made of birch stripings. The whole roof was then sodded. As a rule a rough chimney, made of the field stones, stood at one end; and near by swinging, on wooden hinges, the only door without any ~~lock~~^{lock}; but by pulling a string that peeped out through a hole the visitor caused lift the wooden latch and gain entrance. The household furniture was scanty and rough, consisting of a table, or "The Board" as it was called, a shelf for the Bible, and home made chairs. An easy chair sawn out of an empty barrel by a number of cuts at right angles to each other, and then stuffed with moss and covered over with home made drugget, was to be found in the more commodious and comfortable homes. The "Dresser" was the name given to that portion of the house where the kitchen utensils were

stared, the dishes kept, and other articles peculiar to our modern pantry. Slender poles were suspended about a foot from the beams on which articles were placed to dry. Near the chimney stood the "Bhata Groum" or the crooked stick which ~~had~~ saw service when the hock log was installed in the evening. This ceremony was supposed to call for considerable skill so as to ensure the existence of conditions favorable to a good fire for the succeeding twenty-four hours. Next for consideration comes the spinning wheel, which for weeks at a time in the winter season, was engaged with its monotonous hum. Shame was to rest on the unfortunate maiden who did not know how to spin, and woe betide the urchin who in his playful pranks struck the wheel! The matron looked exceedingly dignified when, with a foot on the treadle, she with marvellous dexterity pulled out that delicate roll of wool and, almost quick as thought, made it into a single thread. With what pride she spoke of the age and endurance of her wheel, how little oil it required, and how seldom she broke the

the Atlantic was full of tear-coasing paths.

The hardships endured by these good people in the early years of their settlement, are, to the present generation an unimaginable experience. Sydney was the only town and place of business in the whole of the eastern part of the Island, and the journeying hither and thither to obtain the necessities of life were attended by weary toil and exhausting trials. All the products of exchange had to be carried on the human back, and wonderful are the exploits recorded in evidence of the proverbial strength and endurance of both men and women. It was nothing unusual to carry a burden of 150 pounds for six or seven miles in the depth of a cold and stormy winter with the snow reaching the knee at every step. Names of men have been mentioned who with considerable facility could walk away with a barrel full of salted herring under each arm. Women have been known to walk over a pole extending from bank to bank of a deep and rapid stream

and carry on their backs, fastened with a sangan,
a barrel of meal. A gentleman has told me that his
father, who lived at Catalone, could shoulder four
hundred pounds of salt and make considerable pro-
gress with his burden without halting. And so on ad infinitum.
The first beast of burden to be used was the ox, at first
in single harness and latterly yoked in with a mate. With
these animals loads were carried on sleds in the winter
and on contrivances known as "Drags" in summer. These
consisted of two long spruce poles, one end fastened to the
ox's goke, and the other dragging on the ground. The latter
ends were held at a certain distance apart by a bay fas-
tened to the poles in which the oats, potatoes, or whatever
constituted the load, were carried. The scratching of this
conveyance on the stony part of the road was very musical.
When at a later period the horse appeared on the scene
he was bedecked with harness made of the buck skinning
or rope already referred to; or with no equipment at all he
plodded his way leisurely, carrying on his bare back the laud
and lady of the household and maybe one or two children.

As to their daily occupation we learn that the men were principally engaged in cutting down the forest, and "piling" and "burning" the partially decayed wood and brush. The women helped during the summer in outside work, cleaning up the land and planting seed: in the winter they carded and spun wool, and made clothes for themselves and the family. Before the cloth was ready to be made into garments it was subjected to more or less severe manipulation known as the "Louah" or the "tucking", and the occasion was called the "tucking folic." This next to a wedding was the great festival of the season. Invitations were issued a week in advance, and the young man or young woman who was not bidden felt very badly cut indeed. The process in question was merely the beating of the cloth on a low table made for the purpose, at which the tuckers sat, and which operation they accompanied with the singing of all the known Gaelic songs. At the conclusion refreshments were served, and then preparations made for dancing which was continued till daybreak.

In addition to the "tucking folic" and the "spinning folic"

we have heard of the "stumping frolic", the "cutting frolic" and other frolics, the word indicating that the people worked in concert, one day at one place, and next day at another. In this way they engendered a spirit of brotherhood that proved as beneficial as it was beautiful. Moreover this system led to the development of a form of specialism among them, one man having a particular aptness for fitting logs in building, another for "taking out the back", another for constructing chimneys and so on. I have no desire to subject the character of these good men to any deduction whatever by confessing that these "frolics" were never considered complete or satisfactory unless opened and closed with a draught of heather dew or Jamaica punch.

One of their greatest pastimes was the beilidh - an old celtic word for which there is no precise equivalent in English. It indeed formed the principal means of recreation and instruction, and may be described as an unconventional "At Home" to which all were welcome. It might be held in any house; but the favorite resorts were those where the head of the house was an intelligent, communicative man, or

where there were a number of daughters. To such a house or houses young men and women repaired in large numbers after nightfall. The old tales were rehearsed, anecdotes of days in the Hebrides, fairy stories, and songs sung and composed until all hearts beat as one. It may be added that no industrious woman went to a ceilidh without having with her such an amount of sewing or knitting as would occupy her time throughout the evening. The men as a rule smoked in a semi-circle around the open fire place, or made love with some of the buxom lassies while holding on outstretched arms the skein from which she balled the yarn.

Formerly there were few, if any, tradesmen in the country. Every man was his own shoemaker, and frequently his own tailor. The latter was an itinerant going from house to house to do his work, armed with a pair of scissors, three needles, and a measuring tape. Usually he was diminutive in appearance and deformed in figure. At the same time he was regarded as a possibly dangerous foe on account of his familiarity with the votaries of

witchcraft. Many stories were told of the wonderful influence of the tailor in preventing the formation of cream and of butter, in causing weird and unnatural sounds in his neighbourhood (probably ventriloquism), and in being responsible for the numerous ~~losses~~^{fares} sustained by a family who had been unfortunate enough to incur his resentment. Accordingly we find the tailor to be a factor of the age, and well worthy of the space I have assigned him.

The practice of Medicine was all in the hands of the old women. They invested disease and its treatment with a tinge of mysticism, and exhibited considerable superstition in accounting for the causes. Some of the cures, such as the application of the blood of a black cat, charms, and such like may appear today very amusing. Considerable blame for the existence of such preposterous ideas is to be attached to a so-called medical man known as the "Doctor Bane" or the "White Doctor" who flourished among the Islands of Scotland at the beginning of the last century,

and who according to reports must have been a
fakir of the first water. Many stories are told of his
marvellous skill and his supernatural healing powers.
— statements, that to the scientific mind, blast him
forever as an imposter. Two will suffice to give us
an insight into his pretensions. At a social
gathering in the town of Stornoway a fight took place
resulting in one of the combatants having an eye
completely punched out. The renowned "Doctor Bane"
was hurriedly sent for, and as hurriedly arrived. Glanc-
ing around he espied a bull in a field ^{nearby} ~~nearby~~, had
him brought up, removed one of his ~~visual~~ organs,
and placed it in the man who immediately received
his sight and went away rejoicing. On another
occasion a patient suffering from Dyspepsia consulted
this renowned physician. Without any aseptic pre-
cautions whatever, without an anaesthetic or analgesic
of any kind, he forthwith proceeded to remove the man's
stomach and replace it by another taken, warm and
bleeding, from a sheep. A second operation was

rendered necessary some little time after to extract a lamb, that, by a process of spontaneous generation, had grown in the new gastronomic organ. The attitude of many of the people towards Medicine and Medical Practitioners is well illustrated in the following story told of an old man popularly known as Ian Dubh who, hearing that a doctor had arrived in Sydney on a Man-of-War, sent a messenger for some medicine. A reply came that no medicine could be sent until the doctor saw him first. Instead of complying with this request Ian sent him an old faded photograph of himself, taken many years ago in the old country, and with it another message to the doctor that now seeing what he was like he must send on the medicine at once. But the doctor who was an Englishman could not understand human nature of this kind and so Ian, who was really sick, was obliged to get into a bed of straw in a cart drawn by an ox, and go to Sydney. But disappointment was the lot of the poor man for when the doctor began to question him about his ailments Ian's one answer

to every question was "It is you who art the doctor" I
came home mortified at the ignorance of the medical
man, and never had any faith in doctors after.

I shall not attempt, as it would be utterly impossible,
within the compass of a short paper like this, to
narrate all the characteristics of these people. But
as it was the religious propensities that marked them
pre-eminently I shall now devote a few minutes to a
description of their religious customs and practices.
At all times they seemed to regard themselves as being
under the direct observation of God, and as liable to
immediate punishment if engaged in wrong doing.
Deprived for the most part of spiritual teaching at
the hands of an ordained minister they found themselves
gradually coming under the spiritual influence of
a number of talented old men whose names, even
today, are revered in many a household in our land
and whose work is memorialized on the minutes
and records of our Church courts. Mira in Cape Breton
County, and Baulardaire and Middle River in

Victoria County, were the homes of a number of these men whose knowledge of Scripture lore, and whose eloquent proclamation of Scripture truth were phenomenal. That they were not impostors thriving on the ignorance of their fellow-countrymen is abundantly shown by their relationship and association in Christian work with the ministers who first came to the country, such as Mr. Ferguson of Middle River, Mr. Fraser of Bonaventure, and Dr. MacLeod of Sydney. These clergymen hailed with unspeakable delight a day or two in the company of the above men. They were very strict in having the Catechism taught to the young, and in having family worship conducted in the homes. Once or twice during the week, and at least twice on Sunday, they held public services aided by the lesser luminaries who were equally fervent though not so talented. But the great event of the year, and the one that most prominently declared these men, was the Communion. Types of the manner in which the old time sacrament

was celebrated have come down to the present day, and can be seen as such in some parts of the country, but they are little more than miniature types. For weeks before the occurrence preparations were being made to accommodate the expected crowd. The people came from far and near, arriving at their destination on Wednesday, the day preceding the commencement of the services. From Thursday till Monday evening these services continued almost without intermission — the nights being given up to prayer, praise and exhortation. Thursday was called the day of Fasting, in Gaelic "La Thrashk," and as such was literally observed by the Faithful who abstained entirely from food until the afternoon, and then indulged only in slight refreshment. Friday was known as the "Question Day" "La Caist;" After the preliminary singing and the Invocation of the Divine Blessing the minister called for the "Question." Immediately some old noted Christian inquirer stood up, read or quoted a Bible verse, and

asked for its interpretation, which virtually meant a differential diagnosis between saints and sinners. The minister invariably led off in the discussion that followed, and then from a list, previously prepared, called upon those who addressed the assemblage. Let it be understood that no definite information of the special topic under consideration could possibly be acquired previous to its announcement by the profounder; and the eloquent extemporeaneous presentation of the argument, fortified by quotation and authority from scripture in abundance, testified loudly to the mental ability of these men, as well as to their familiarity with the Bible and with Christian experience. The emotion displayed at this service has been described as something unparalleled in public worship. Old gray headed men, with their ~~and~~ silver locks occasionally streaming to the gentle summer breeze waved, now and again, shout out their exclamations of assent and satisfaction; old women, their heads bent on the breast and covered

only with a cap and handkerchief, their ladies swaying rhythmically backwards and forwards could be seen sobbing quietly, their cheeks wet with running tears. Such scenes as these more frequently occurred when one of the old gladiators, I have already alluded to, would, metaphorically speaking, soar up between earth and heaven and there give vent to his enraptured soul.

On Saturday afternoon, at the conclusion of the preaching for the day, the candidates for sacramental admission presented themselves for examination as to their knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, their experience of its saving power, and their performance of religious duties. Many and trying were the questions put and answered, and sorrowful indeed was the condition of the poor person "put back" for another year. Matters reached their culmination on Sunday when the sacrament was dispensed in the open air. Nobody, however, flippant, could gaze upon the slowly advancing

men and women, mostly past middle age, who rose up from their places on the ground and proceeded, while a psalm was being sung, to the white-covered communion table — I say nobody could gaze upon these people without being impressed with their sincerity and seriousness, with their conviction that their experience was a blessed reality and not a vanishing dream. It was one of the most grand and sublime sights the world ever beheld and compelled one to "think of Him who preached to the multitude on the shores of Gennesaret, with the ripple of the waves on the strand as the undertone of the words of life that fell from his lips."

But we must not forget that there were sheep of another fold in attendance at these open air gatherings. There was the horse-trader with the persuasive tongue and the pleasing manners, His eyes were never off the equine quadruped, nor were his thoughts off the owner. And there was the wife-seeker with his oiled hair, white paper collar, and

grain leather boots - his pocket full of conversation
ready and his umbrella enticingly open, to shelter
from the burning rays of the sun or from the pelting
rain the object of his adoration. Most of the
marriages were known to have been suggested at
the Sacrament, so that invariably the announcement
of the event was the signal for the introduction
of fashion and the donning of style. No basket
bonnet or hat in those days! everything new
appeared at the Sacrament. And then it was
natural to expect that the majority of the
younger people would be attracted more from a
desire for conviviality than for the exercise of
sobriety and solemnity. The young men sometimes
caused disturbances, and made inroads on the sauciness
of the observances that have somewhat reflected
on the propriety of the custom and have been
strongly urged against the continuance of the
open air ordinance. There is no doubt but this fact
largely accounted for the gradual transference of

the meeting place from the open field to the church, and for the reduction of the services to those of the Sabbath Day only. The struggle for the old order of things exists today in some parts of Cape Breton wherever the influence of the Old Men is in the ascendency. This is an indication of the intense devotion that characterized this ceremony, and how dear it was to the hearts of our ~~Ashkenaz~~ fore-fathers. The custom had its origin in the days of the Covenanters when the Presbyterians were a persecuted and despised class, when they were denied the use of churches, freedom of worship and liberty of conscience, when the hearing of a preached Gospel was accompanied by as much avidity as the groaning of a starving man for food. Then circumstances made the people realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was the greatest thing in the world, made them willing to suffer, toil, and sacrifice for it, yea lay down their lives in the cause. Does not the converse today make us sometimes think,

that in our own day and generation the Gospel is made too easy for us, that we are prone to become mere parasites living on the bounty of our past without proper and adequate exertion on our own part to earn our spiritual living? Are we satisfied to build beautiful churches with stained glass windows and firm cushioned, or at least exceedingly comfortable pews, to listen with dull ears and passive minds to a sermon that may not touch up to the point of ignition, a single sin peculiar to the community? The questions are worthy the serious consideration of all of us.

The old people are nearly all gone, and frequently I have urged the propriety of something being done to perpetuate their memory. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this would be a continuation of such papers as have been read here tonight, with a view to their future compilation and publication in book form. I have no hesitation in expressing my own opinion that the achievements of our noble

forefathers are worthy of such a literary monument
Acknowledgements are due the Gaelic newspapers
"Moc Talla" of Sydney, and our local Church magazine
"The Blue Banner" for their assiduity in collecting
and publishing facts and tradition concerning our
ancestors, calculated to give a true and vivid
insight into the times and the people. They have
crossed the "Great Divide" and we who take up their
work should have a deep sense of our responsibility.
Let us see to it that we perform our duty with
honor to ourselves and with satisfaction to
posterity.