

THE COMING OF THE "HECTOR"

JUDGE G. PATTERSON

ON 15th September, 1773, the ship "HECTOR" sailed into Pictou Harbour, Nova Scotia, with a precious cargo of some two hundred sons and daughters of the heather. Her coming marks the beginning of Scottish immigration into this country.

They were not, indeed, absolutely the first to come. Just as there had been Frenchmen in Canada before Champlain, or Englishmen in what is now the United States before the Pilgrim Fathers, so there had been some few persons here of Scottish birth and ancestry before the arrival of the *Hector*. We read of a St. Lawrence pilot "*dit l'Ecossais*" who was at work years before Wolfe fell gloriously at Quebec, and a monument in that city now commemorates him. Upon the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, a Highland regiment was disbanded at Quebec. The descendants of those men are in that province to-day, where it is not unusual to meet a Fraser or a Ross or a MacDougall, French in everything but name. In Halifax in 1768 there were enough Scots to form the "North British Society," and—although according to the latest story not more than two individuals are essential for such a purpose—it is fair to suppose that these were a substantial group. Before the *Hector* reached Nova Scotia two ships had come to Prince Edward Island, the *Alexander* and another, with Scottish immigrants on board. But these had arrived as tenants of one of the landed proprietors among whom the whole island had in one day been divided, and there was no connection between them and any that either preceded or followed. The *Alexander*, which came to Charlottetown in 1772, brought passengers driven from their homes in South Uist by the brutal fanaticism of their Laird, MacDonald of Boisdale, who compelled his tenants either to turn Protestant or to leave. Another MacDonald, he of Glenaladale—*clarum et venerabile nomen* among the Catholics of Prince Edward Island and West Scotland—came to their rescue, sold his own estate, and with the proceeds brought the persecuted men of Boisdale to Prince Edward Island. There he settled them on his land as tenants; and for many, many long years they had to pay rent. Naturally they did not try to induce others to follow them; if rent had to be paid, as well pay it in the old land as in the new. Better to bear the ills they had, than fly to others that they knew not of. Thirty-one years passed before

another ship with immigrants came to Charlottetown. But the men of the *Hector* came of their own free will, under no compulsion whatever, to settle not on the land of another, but on their own, and never again knew landlord or factor. At once they began to spread the gospel of land "rent-free" among their kinsmen and friends across the Atlantic who made haste to join them. The *Hector* was thus the pioneer ship of that great movement of population from Scotland to Canada which, though sadly interrupted by the war of the American Revolution, was immediately resumed at its close and continued with unabated and even growing force for more than two score years. The *Hector* was Canada's *Mayflower*.

Settlement of Pictou had already begun. In 1762 the Surveyor-General of Nova Scotia reported to his Government as follows:—

From Tatamagouche to the Gut of Canso there is no Harbour, but a good road, under the Isle of Pictou. No inhabitant has ever settled in this part of the country, and consequently there is no kind of improvement.

But at the end of the war between England and France in 1763 a great desire to colonize Nova Scotia manifested itself, especially in the New England States. In 1765, fourteen gentlemen of Philadelphia—the so-called "Philadelphia Company"—including in their number Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Witherspoon (afterwards President of Princeton University)—received a grant of two hundred thousand acres in what is now Pictou County. This has since been known as "The Philadelphia Grant." Two years later this Company sent a little brig, the *Hope*, Hull, Master, to Pictou with six families. Pictou's Natal Day is thus not September 15th, but June 10th, the day this brig entered the Harbour. Of these six families only four remained, but in the six years that intervened between the coming of the *Hope* and that of the *Hector* the four families had increased to sixteen, of whom ten afterwards moved away.

In course of time, John Pagan—a merchant of Greenock—became the owner of three undivided shares in the Philadelphia Company. He was the owner, too, of an old ship called *Hector*, which in 1770 had carried Scottish immigrants to Boston. One John Ross had been employed by the Company to visit Scotland, with authority to offer to each settler free passage, a farm lot, and a year's provisions. Ross painted a glowing picture of a land so rich and varied that soap, sugar, and fuel could be got from the same tree. Above everything else, he spoke of a country where everyone could own his land. A shipload of passengers was quickly secured. Pagan's ship, the *Hector*, John Spears, Master, James Orr, First Mate, John

Anderson, Second Mate, was ready and soon chartered. She was an old Dutch ship and a dull sailer. She cleared at Greenock with three families and five unmarried men, and beat her slow way north to Loch Broom, Rosshire, where she received the remainder of her passengers,—thirty families and twenty unmarried men. Thence she sailed for Pictou.

The exact date of her sailing has long been a matter of dispute. That it was before July 1st can, I think, be conclusively proved. One child, who afterwards became Mrs. Page, of Truro, great-grandmother of the Hon. Mr. Justice Rogers of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, was born on the voyage. On this lady's tombstone in the old cemetery near the Courthouse, Truro, it is stated that she was born "at sea on the *Hector* on July 1st." Even Byron, who warned us against believing a woman or an epitaph, would accept as true so plain and so matter-of-fact an inscription as that. Accounts differ about the number of persons on board; one says, two hundred; another, one hundred and eighty-nine; a third, one hundred and seventy-nine. My own opinion is that the ship started with about two hundred, and that only one hundred and seventy-nine arrived. We know that eighteen died on the way over. One of the number had not engaged a passage. He was a piper, and the captain ordered him off the ship, but the passengers offered to supply him from their own rations, and begged that he be allowed to come with them. The captain relented, and the piper came. It is an illuminating incident. These immigrants were bringing their school-teacher with them, and they now made sure that they would have music. This passion for learning—sweetened and brightened and enlivened by music—to the present day characterizes the descendants of these settlers, and not only of these, but of all the Scottish immigrants of that period.

None of those on board had ever crossed the Atlantic before, and only one of them ever saw the dear homeland again. They went out in faith, like Abraham of old, not knowing whither they went. Gilfillan's *Emigrant's Lament* had not then been written, but its sentiments must often have been in their hearts as the weary days passed:—

Oh, why left I my hame?
 Why did I cross the deep?
 Oh, why left I the land
 Where my forefathers sleep?
 I sigh for Scotia's shore
 And gaze across the sea,
 But I cannot get a blink
 Of my ain countree.

The voyage lasted eleven weeks. Near Newfoundland the travellers met a severe storm which drove them back so far that it took a fortnight to recover the lost distance. Food and water ran low; small-pox and dysentery broke out. Who can describe their joy when on September 15, 1773, the *Hector* entered the Harbour of Pictou? The forests around would be glowing in their autumnal glory. Perhaps the sun would be setting over Greenhill. At any rate, their eyes rested on a scene more fair and goodly than could be found even in the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood."

One incident of the landing deserves to be mentioned. The Indians had been giving trouble to the immigrants from the *Hope*, but when news was received of the *Hector* these settlers announced in triumph that the Highlanders were coming—the same men whom they had seen fighting in petticoats at the taking of Quebec! The Indians gathered on the shore, prepared to dispute their landing by force and arms. But the Highlanders, who in honour of the occasion had dug out from ancient trunks the kilts they were forbidden by law to wear, and the dirks that were by law confiscated, were not to be denied. Preceded by the piper, they started shoreward. One skirl of the pipes and the Indians fled in terror to the woods, and never gave trouble again. The biologist may describe the emotions we Scotsmen feel when we hear the strains of the bagpipes as "waves of molecular disturbance propagated through the nerve centres by vague emotional combinations organized in the early experiences of the race." But how will he account for their effect on the Indian? Who ever heard of an Indian being afraid of a molecular disturbance?

1773 was the fateful year when the East India tea was dumped into Boston Harbour. There were men on the *Hector* who had been "out" with Prince Charlie. The great majority of them were not allowed to speak their native tongue or wear their native garb. Yet while during the American War there was dissatisfaction in Halifax, sedition in Lunenburg, open rebellion in Cumberland, and not enough men in Colchester willing to take the oath of allegiance to constitute a Grand Jury, the Highlanders of Pictou never wavered. They were loyal to a man:

True as the dial to the sun
Although it be not shined upon.

In 1774, the year after the coming of the *Hector*, fifteen families of the best blood of the Lowlands came to Pictou. They had gone first to Prince Edward Island, but found conditions there not to their liking. In one of these families *The Dalhousie Review* should

have a special interest, for one of its descendants is the accomplished and brilliant writer of "Topics of the Day."

During the war of the American Revolution there was no actual addition to the Scots in Nova Scotia, though attempts were made to send out other settlers. These efforts were frustrated by the action of the home Government. At the close of the war, however, a Scottish regiment—the 82nd or "Hamilton"—then on garrison duty at Halifax, was there disbanded. The soldiers insisted on joining their kinsmen in Pictou. To accommodate them, land previously granted was escheated, in spite of strenuous efforts by the Governor of Nova Scotia to prevent this, and more than one hundred and fifty came to Pictou or Antigonish. There, next year, they were joined by sixty odd members of the second battalion of the 84th, or Royal Highland Regiment, with their families. The remainder of this battalion went to Douglas in Hants County, where a few of the *Hector* passengers had previously settled. In this regiment the men of the *Alexander* under Glenaladale, who was given the rank of Major, had enlisted and had done yeoman service on various fronts, returning to Prince Edward Island when peace was declared.

Direct immigration was resumed in 1784, and continued in '85, '86, '87. It was not until the last of these years that any large body came. Until then most of the immigrants had been from the Highlands, and they had been induced to come by the representations of their compatriots about land "rent-free." In the *Hector*, however, there were three families and five unmarried men from the Lowlands. These too had been making representations to their friends which resulted in bringing to Nova Scotia through Pictou a large number of immigrants from Kirkcudbright and Dumfries in 1788 and 1789. By 1791 the population of Pictou was estimated at thirteen hundred. In that year two vessels arrived loaded with settlers from the western islands of Scotland, Roman Catholics who after a winter in Pictou eventually took up their land in Antigonish and Cape Breton. Every year thereafter saw at least two vessels come, filled to overflowing. One writer says "Only the bed-ridden were left behind." For instance, in 1801 no fewer than thirteen hundred souls were landed in Pictou, many of whom went to Cape Breton or to Antigonish. In 1802 one vessel brought three hundred and seventy, all from the Island of Barra,—the ancestral home of the McNeils. They went to Cape Breton, and there are more McNeils to-day in one polling section of Victoria County than there are in the whole Island of Barra. Of this clan it may be said, more emphatically than of any other, that it was neither religious persecution nor "Highland clearances" which sent them out. On the contrary,

their chief followed them to the shore at their embarkation, imploring them not to leave him. But the lure of the land they could own triumphed even over their devotion to the head of the clan.

In 1803 it was stated that there were five thousand inhabitants in Pictou. One thousand more were expected in that year, and it is certain that eight hundred and forty-five arrived. Nor were the numbers smaller in the years that followed. So long as the stream continued, it poured through Pictou, following in the wake of the *Hector*. The most desirable lands around Pictou had long since been granted, and most of these later immigrants made their way to Prince Edward Island, Antigonish, Cape Breton, Guysboro and Colchester counties, and other parts of Nova Scotia. For example, all or nearly all of the passengers on one of the vessels coming in 1804 went to Wallace, Cumberland county, N. S. So careful an historian as Brown estimates that between 1802 and 1807 twenty-five thousand went to Cape Breton alone. A number far from negligible stood not upon the order of their going until they reached north-eastern New Brunswick, and many went even to Ontario. It would be rash to say that none of these would have come to Canada had not the *Hector* led the way, but certainly very many of them would not have come, and the coming of others would have been greatly delayed.

The present year is the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the coming of that pioneer ship, and we are now within two weeks of the day when Pictou will be ablaze with the glow of celebration. Without disparaging the immigrants of other nationalities, a Scotsman may be pardoned at such a time if he boasts that no other has contributed so much as the Scottish to the upbuilding of the Maritime Provinces of Canada. Consider the educational feature alone. The passengers on the *Hector* brought their school-teacher with them. Their kith and kin, coming later, followed this example. And these teachers were not ordinary men; one was a graduate of Aberdeen University, another of Edinburgh, a third was grandfather of Simon Newcombe—the greatest astronomer America has so far produced. Nor were the settlers satisfied with primary education alone. They started a College, which—to avoid jealousy—they called an "Academy." This was to be "open to all youths, no matter to what mode of faith they are attached." It was in the fights over that College that the reformers bared their arms and fleshed their swords for the battle for Responsible Government. We do not exaggerate if we say that Free Schools and Responsible Government came to Nova Scotia with the coming of the Scottish immigrants.