

“BLUMINE” OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

ADA MACLEOD

Without doubt the title “Blumine,” whereby she is here designated and which means simply Goddess of Flowers, must be fictitious. Was her real name Flora, then? But what was her surname, or had she none? Of what station in life was she? Of what parentage, fortune, aspect? Specially, by what Pre-established Harmony of occurrences did the Lover and the Loved meet one another in so wide a world? How did they behave in such meeting? We seem to gather that she was young, hazel-eyed, beautiful, and someone’s Cousin; high-born and of high spirit; but unhappily dependent and insolvent; living, perhaps, on the not too gracious bounty of moneyed relatives. But how came the “Wanderer” into her circle?—CARLYLE.

THE little province by the sea has given to the world many notable sons and daughters. But of them all none perhaps excels in romantic interest the maiden who in a manner links Prince Edward Island to the great sage of Chelsea. She was Margaret Gordon, of Charlottetown, the first love of Carlyle, and (according to Froude) the original of “Blumine” in *Sartor Resartus*—she who “in such many-tinted radiant Aurora, and by this fairest of Orient Light-bringers unrolled to him the new Apocalypse of Nature.”

In order to get the setting of this coruscating gem of woman-kind, one must go back to the beginning of British rule in this province, then known as St. John’s Island. Captain Samuel Holland with the aid of his new-fangled plane-table and tall chronometer-clock (still to be seen in all its beauty of glistening brass and mellow mahogany in the hallway of his great-great-grand-daughter’s house in Summerside) had just completed his survey. He had divided the Island into three counties, with a shire town in each—loyally named after George III., Queen Charlotte, and the Crown Prince. These were sub-divided into sixty-seven townships of 20,000 acres each, and then began the struggle for ownership of this Delectable Land. Many and in some cases farcical were the claims submitted by would-be proprietors, but the British authorities solved the problem by summoning to London on a certain day in July, 1767, all claimants who had rendered real service to the Crown, and per-

mitting each to pick from a hat a slip of paper with a number representing one of the townships. Thus are they termed "Lots" on P. E. Island. Lot Nineteen was drawn by two brothers, Captain Walter and John Patterson of County Donegal, who had served in America in the 80th Regiment. Three years later they crossed the Atlantic to St. John's Island, Walter having been appointed its first governor, and John acting as his secretary. At the same time, probably in the same ship, there came to West River from County Clare in Ireland a family by the name of Hyde. These settlers are of special interest in this story because Governor Patterson and Margaret Hyde, the youngest daughter, became the parents of Margaret Patterson who in her turn was the mother of Margaret Gordon. Patterson during his term of office lived in the old wooden building with high stone foundations that had been the residence of the French governors, built on historic Point La Flamme (now Rocky Point at the entrance to Charlottetown Harbour) just by the spot where had stood the great black cross under whose shadow the young and beautiful Marie Grandcourt had, according to tradition, met a fiery death for the crime of witchcraft. Still in this picturesque spot can be traced the old foundations and the road leading from the landing-place to the establishment of the king. Governor Patterson was a man of great energy, with a vision of a prosperous future for the Island, referring to it in one of his reports as "destined to be called the garden of America." As a first step in its progress he began the construction of roads, even devoting some of his own slender means to this purpose when other funds failed. But with all his disinterestedness he had a singular knack of making enemies, and his closing years on the Island were marred by futile strife with his successor, Governor Fanning. He died in poverty in 1798 "at his lodgings in Castle Street, Oxford Market, in London."

In 1785 there had come to Charlottetown from "Logie o' Buchan" in Aberdeenshire a young medical officer, Alexander Gordon, who was attached to two companies of the "Black Watch" then stationed in the capital. In an old account-book of that time there appear in connection with his name many entries such as these:

- July 10, 1787— $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. prs. stockings 3/8.
- July 15, 1787—1 pair large best-plated buckles, 9/0.
- July 30, 1787—1 pott pomatum, 1/0.
- Aug. 2, 1787—1 pr. garters, /9

With his glittering buckles and his dashing ways he won the heart of the governor's daughter Margaret, and on March 5th, 1791,

a license was issued for their marriage. The registers of St. Paul's Church, Charlottetown, contain the record of the baptisms of their four children—the youngest, Margaret, having been “born August 24, 1798; baptized September 23, 1799.” For loyal service during the American War, Gordon had received from Governor Fanning a grant of three lots of 12 acres each, on one of which near Government House in Charlottetown he built a modest house of brick, and here—by the sunny shores of the North River—Margaret Gordon built her first sand-houses. But her father proved to be of the “feckless” sort, and we find the family, after a few years, compelled to leave for Halifax, with all their property seized for debt. In a short time the hospital forces there were reduced, and Gordon was put on half-pay. Then in desperation he sailed for Scotland, in the hope of disposing of some small property and also of placing his two young daughters in the care of his sister, Mrs. Usher, of Kirkcaldy. But he died on the voyage, leaving his widow and four young children in “very distressing circumstances.” Through the influence of friends a small annual sum was obtained for the children from the “Compassionate Fund,” and it is said that Mrs. Gordon while in Halifax worked as a dressmaker. Three years after her husband's death she married a Dr. Guthrie, surgeon to the forces in that city, and the family was never again united. Mrs. Usher, the childless widow of a Presbyterian clergyman, carefully brought up the two sisters, Margaret and Mary, although the pinch of poverty was often felt by aunt and nieces, their combined annual incomes for sixteen years not exceeding £45. Margaret was tall, fair, and graceful, and was a favourite pupil in Kirkcaldy of Edward Irving under whose tuition she became proficient in mathematics, French and Latin.

Thither, in 1816, came also as teacher Thomas Carlyle, and to the end of his life the memories of the “lang toon” were treasured by him. “The beach of Kirkcaldy in summer twilights, a mile of the smoothest sand, with one long wave coming on gently, steadily, and breaking into harmless melodious white at your hand all the way; the break of it rushing along like a mane of foam, beautifully sounding and advancing ran from south to north, from the West Burn to Kirkcaldy Harbour, through the whole mile's distance. This was a favourite scene, beautiful to me still, in the far away.” Beautiful also was his reception by Irving “cheerily flinging out his arms” as he ushered him into the room where were his treasured books—“Upon all these you have will and way gate”—a welcome which Carlyle failed not in making use of, reading Gibbon at the rate of a volume a day. But not alone in Irving's books and Irving's

friendship did Carlyle find pleasure. He found it, too, in the society of the "Rose-maiden" whom after some delay he "met at the outskirts of aesthetic tea." Half-a-century afterwards he thus describes her in his *Reminiscences*:

By far the cleverest and brightest, however, an ex-pupil of Irving's, and genealogically and otherwise (being poorish, proud, and well-bred) a kind of alien in the place, I did at last make acquaintance with and it might easily have been more, had she and her aunt and our economics and other circumstances liked. She was of the fair-complexioned, softly elegant, softly grave, witty and comely type, and had a good deal of gracefulness, intelligence and other talent. . . . Her accent was prettily English, and her voice very fine. An aunt (widow in Fife, childless, with limited resources, but of frugal cultivated turn, a lean, proud, elderly dame, once a "Miss Gordon" herself, sang Scotch songs beautifully, and talked shrewd **Aberdeenish** in accent and otherwise) had adopted her and brought her hither over seas; and here as Irving's ex-pupil, she now, cheery though with dim outlooks, was.

This elderly relative, grim and firm as her own Aberdeen granite, stood as an immovable obstacle in the way of the penniless schoolmaster as he ventured to pay his addresses to the charming niece. But his failure sprang not alone from his inability to supply the "brass-bound gig, or even a simple iron-spring one." The real explanation is that Margaret was already bound to another. Mrs. Usher, noting with alarm her growing interest in Carlyle, and her appreciation of his genius and character, insisted that she should make her position clear. Carlyle at once withdrew, but begged that she should write to him often. Two of her letters to him are still extant. In the first she writes as a friend, and says in part:

Your coming to see me at Fife appeared not only a proof of the noble triumph you had obtained over your weakness (forgive the expression) but seemed to be an intimation that I was still worthy of that esteem with which you formerly honoured me.

Of the second letter Professor Masson says that "nothing finer or nobler has come to light in all Carlyle's correspondence." The closing paragraph is as follows:—

And now, my dear friend, a long, long adieu. One advice, and as a parting one consider, value it:—cultivate the milder dispositions of your heart, subdue the more extravagant visions of the brain. In time your abilities must be known; among your acquaintances they are already beheld with wonder and delight; by those whose opinion will be valuable, they hereafter will be

appreciated. *Genius* will render you *great*. May *virtue* render you *beloved*! Remove the awful distance between yourself and ordinary men by kind and gentle manners. . . . Again, adieu. Pardon the freedom I have used, and when you think of me be it as a kind sister, to whom your happiness will always yield delight, and your griefs sorrow.

I give you not my address, because I dare not promise to see you.

Immediately after the writing of this letter she went to reside in London with the Guthries, and about two years later she married a distant relative of her own, Alexander Bannerman, a banker and merchant of Aberdeen.

Carlyle is said to have made no secret of his first love affair, talked freely of it to Professor Masson and others, and evidently confided it to Jane Welsh, for in one of her letters she wrote:—"Moreover, you will continue to love me very dearly, more dearly than you ever loved Margaret Gordon, for with all my faults I do deserve it of you." In the *Reminiscences* he tells of seeing her twice about the year 1840—the first time "with her maid in Piccadilly, promenading, little altered", and then that dramatic meeting "on horseback both of us, in the gate of Hyde Park, when her eyes (but that was all) said to me almost touchingly, 'Yes, yes, that you.'"

Just fifty years from the time when Margaret Gordon and her family had left Prince Edward Island in penury, she returned to it in state as Governor's lady, with cannon booming and all the town illuminated in her honour. Bannerman was knighted in 1851, and immediately after sailed for Halifax to succeed Sir Donald Campbell as Governor of P. E. Island, reaching Cape Tormentine, where he was to cross by the iceboats, in February of that year. Tom Allen, at whose inn he stayed while in that place, had been requested by the authorities to invite the leading men of the locality to greet him; but Tom, an inveterate joker, went out into the highways and hedges and literally compelled all and sundry to come in, until a company of over one hundred was gathered. "Sandy" Bannerman, as he was affectionately called, had in his own day played many a trick; so he took the affair in good part, and treated the motley assemblage with as much courtesy as if they were to the manor born. Lady Bannerman herself arrived in the following spring, and her first visits in Charlottetown were paid to the modest house where her early childhood had been spent, and to the beautiful spot where her mother was born and her grandfather, the governor, had farmed his five hundred acres.

During that summer Governor and Lady Bannerman made a

tour of the island and were received with much enthusiasm. A newspaper of the time thus describes the scene at Grand River; "Whilst the music of the pipes was diffusing that enthusiasm which none but the children of the Gael can adequately feel, many an elderly matron and blithe *John Anderson My Jo* as well as coy lassies and braw laddies hurried their steps through the mazes of the Scottish reel, to the infinite delight of Lady Bannerman who witnessed the performance."

But her chief interest was in religious matters, and to the end of her life she took a deep concern in the welfare of the "Bog School" in Charlottetown—a charity school for coloured children, supported by St. Paul's Church and the Colonial Church Society, and taught for fifty-six years by Miss Sarah Harvie. Raymond Clare Archibald, in his interesting sketch of "Carlyle's First Love", quotes the following from a letter written by a Charlottetown friend of hers:—"It was my privilege to be frequently a guest at Government House—sometimes for weeks at a time—and I have ever esteemed it one of the greatest blessings of my life that I came under her influence in my youth, and enjoyed Lady Bannerman's friendship and correspondence until within a few years of her death. . . . A fair, handsome, gracious woman with high-bred, charming manners, reigning as queen of society at Government House, her husband's right hand in all his official life—giving sympathy and help in times of difficulty, and tiding over many a social emergency by her graceful tact and amiability. Few women of her century possessed such true and wide culture or grasp of intellect, and with all she was one of the most humble and sincere Christians I have ever met. Had Carlyle only the courage to go in and win when they were both young, his career would have had a different development and his influence for good might have been immeasurably increased. Still, knowing his *Blumine* as I did, and also her manly, excellent husband—simple and guileless as a schoolboy in many things, but far-seeing and firm as a rock on matters of principle—I cannot help thinking she was far happier than if the might-have-been had become a reality."

In June, 1854, Lady Bannerman left her native land for the last time. Her husband had been appointed Governor of the Bahamas, but she was forbidden to go south until cooler weather, and she spent the summer in a watering-place near Boston, where she became the friend of Longfellow, Agassiz, Prescott the historian, and Felton, afterwards President of Harvard. To her niece these men more than once remarked, "We have no such woman in the States as Lady Bannerman." In 1857 Sir Alexander was appointed

Governor of Newfoundland, and while there he entertained the Prince of Wales. In the room occupied by the Prince at Government House on that occasion may still be seen a large Bible with the following inscription in Lady Bannerman's handwriting: "This Bible was placed here for the Prince of Wales. It is hoped it may be allowed to remain."

Bannerman's death occurred shortly after the expiry of his term; and when they had returned to London, his wife finding the loneliness oppressive, and her income insufficient for the upkeep of a London house, they retired to a small house near Greenwich where were intimate friends—Mrs. Haliburton, the widow of "Sam Slick"; Mrs. Prowse, mother of the historian of Newfoundland; two friends of the old Prince Edward Island days—daughters of Lemuel Cambridge; and General Gordon, who was in command of the Royal Engineers at Gravesend. The last mentioned especially was a co-adjutor with her in religious and philanthropic work; and while Gordon "sent some of his medals to the melting-pot in the cause of charity", it is a fact that Lady Bannerman sold all of her jewels for the benefit of the poor—with one exception, a miniature of her aunt, Mrs. Usher, set in forget-me-nots of diamonds.

Here after twelve years of self-effacing service she died in 1878, in her eighty-first year, and two years later Carlyle passed away. With these words Raymond Clare Archibald ends his book:—

It is not a little remarkable that of the scores of people whom I have met, or with whom I have corresponded, who knew Lady Bannerman well, and of the few, including her relatives, who knew her intimately, *not one ever heard her mention her acquaintance with Carlyle.* Carlyle tells us in *Sartor*, his autobiography, "The First Love which is Infinite can be followed by no second like unto it." Was this true in Carlyle's experience? and was Carlyle Margaret Gordon's First Love? Did her reticence and reserve indicate unforgettable memories? From what has gone before, each reader must draw his own conclusions.