

GLENGARRY VILLAGE

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I SIT down to take a look at this old Glengarry village which lies all around me. But, before they settle, my thoughts go wandering to other villages across in the Motherland—well loved spots. Some of these, indeed, I have visited only in imagination; yet I have learned to look on them with affectionate feelings. There is Three-Mile Cross in Berkshire, Miss Mitford's "Our Village", whose houses and dwellers the little hard-driven woman observed so closely, and into which she breathed a fresh spirit of life, charged with pathos and humour. There is no order of procedure, but Selbourne comes next. Sometimes, I confess, I walk or drive into this eighteenth century village. Down the rough road I come, beneath the Hanger, the long beech wood, and presently I am on the village green where young and old are enjoying themselves round the great oak. There is just a glimpse of Rev. Gilbert White in the vicarage shrubbery, taking pleasure this summer evening in the birds that are so much at home. Then there is a far call from Hampshire north to Strathmore, and the braes of Angus, and the dim wall of the Grampians. This village, with its solid grey houses and gables, is Thrums, Barrie's village. One house will not soon be forgotten, for Margaret Ogilvy and her boy's sake. From Thrums it is not so far to the Highlands, to the ancestral home of those who live around me to-day in this Glengarry village.

They have a proud, brave tradition behind them, these men and women. At Culloden in 1746 there was fought the fatal battle between the Highland army and the Government forces. The Highlanders made a brave but hopeless stand, and were broken in irretrievable ruin. Prince Charles escaped, but it would have been better for him if he had died on the field of battle. After the cause was lost, harsh measures were passed. The Highland chiefs lost their autocratic powers. The clan system began to disintegrate. The wild and roadless Highlands had been becoming more accessible since the '15 rising. Life was hard for the clansmen, and many looked across the sea for a new home. Led by men of Clan Donald, some settled in the Mohawk Valley, in New York State. A good beginning was made, and the future seemed bright. Then the Revolutionary War swept over the country. Those who fought in the war

loyal to the Motherland, and others, decided to leave all and to seek new homes where peace reigned. They crossed the St. Lawrence, receiving grants of land along and behind the river. This was the foundation of Glengarry County in the year 1783. There were other waves of emigration from time to time, of which the story has been told.

Of these United Empire Loyalists some followed the course of the Black River through the forest, and settled on the site of this village. In the face of the slow, dark, river they found something of friendliness, reminiscent of the streams of home. By its banks they built their first homes, and by its banks the ring of their axes was heard as they cleared the bush for their small holdings.

More than a century and a half has passed since these early days; yet just as in a palimpsest one can see behind the more recent characters the faded letters of an older script, so here in this Glengarry village one is carried back from traces and suggestions in the present to the older days. Here, for example, the Gaelic tongue still lingers. There passed away a short time ago a typical old Highland woman of more than ninety years. She was born in Inverness, a few miles from Culloden, and came to Glengarry when she was a child. She was small in stature, but strong and hardy. She had worked hard all her life. She was bright and cheerful to the very last, and when she died, one more link with the past life of the village was broken. There is no Gaelic voice to be heard now, save farther back towards Dunvegan.

The faces and features of some of the people still betray their Highland ancestry. I have heard some of the old people recall with feelings of pride the fine build of the men who were to be seen in the village streets a generation and more ago. One I have in my mind at this moment, a huge figure of a man, tall and broad like the hammer throwers and sabre tossers one sees at the Highland gatherings in Scotland, yet softer, I am sure, than the old fighting pioneer stock through living in softer days.

One is struck, too, by the number of elderly bachelors and spinsters in the village and round it. For some reason or other, the men have had no inclination to marry, and the women no opportunity. The latter passed their youth in times when the young men went forth to push their fortunes in the West or in the States. Several families, it seems, have simply come to an end. There are few children compared with the numbers half a century ago, and the young men and women still go forth and away.

In general, farming is not popular with many of the young people. They have seen too much of the hard, discouraging side of it. They have experienced some of the drudgery there often is on the farm, and the poor prices, and they would rather try some other kind of work. Everyone will tell you, too, that when a farm is sold it passes to a French-Canadian family, for here close to the province of Quebec there is still the racial trail of attachment to the land. The French-Canadian is industrious, thrifty, contented; and, what is of much importance, he has sons and daughters for help. The life of the village reflects the change that is slowly taking place. The baker, the shoemaker are French, as is the dentist who has recently set up. The broom factory, a thriving little place which seems to meet a demand near and far, is also worked by French-Canadians. Such social changes are taking place before one's eyes.

With the spirit of change busy in the village, it is natural to recall the days of old. The pulse of village life was beating most strongly sixty or seventy years ago. The village by the side of the river was within a few miles of the St. Lawrence. It stood at a point that was central for the wide hinterland. Besides, the grist mill was the magnet which attracted many for miles around, to bring their grain and have it made into meal. In the cold clear winter mornings, steaming teams of horses and wagons waiting for their turn must have been a cheerful sight. Everything went briskly in the village then. A short distance beyond the mill there was a tannery. Its ruined walls can still be seen. The tannery had its own characteristic smell, and since the sense of smell seems to endure when much else has faded and been forgotten, the old, who were boys then, must have vivid memories of this spot. On the other side of the river was an ashery. There is an old-fashioned ring about the name. Here ashes were manufactured into potash for fertilizing the land. There was a large saw-mill too, close to the river, and one of the sights of the year was when the logs came down the river in the spring.

These days were the prosperous days of the village trades. There was a cooperage for the making of churns and pails, and a wheelwright who repaired the farm wagons, and more than one blacksmith who did a big business, and the harness maker, and the shoemaker, and the tinsmith, and the tailor who went round to the farms and made up the cloth. There were the general merchants who carried large stocks and who sold generous quantities of goods to last perhaps for six months.

As far back as the year eighteen hundred and eleven, there was a church in the village. The deed can still be read, signed and sealed by McDermids, McArthurs, McGregors, McKenzies, McMartins, in the presence of a notable pioneer minister, Rev. John Bethune, who exercised an apostolic ministry over a wide district, with his headquarters farther down the river at Williamstown. And with the Kirk, there was, true to the Scottish tradition, a school.

It is fascinating to picture the village passing through its period of growth to what was, it seems, the apex of its prosperity, before other places more favorably situated began to develop and to outstrip it, borne onwards by the tide of fortune. Rural depopulation began, and for many years now it has been going on. The goal of many seems to be the city. The result is that many villages are declining, and becoming little more than the centres and focus of a shrinking country area. The old self-contained community life has broken down. The automobile has brought the once distant towns near for shopping and amusement.

That such and such a place is not what it once was, may seem a melancholy confession to make; yet that can be said of many a place in these days of change. I notice among the people not a few *laudatores temporis acti* who flush with pride as they contemplate the brave days of old. That is natural, but they need not view with a kind of sad fatalism the workings of change in the village in the spirit of Ossian's "I have seen the walls of Baldutha, but they were desolate—desolate is the dwelling of Moina; silence is in the house of her fathers." As I stand by the river, I remember that it has slowly flowed on its way for centuries with little or no change, even though the life and the activities which kept close to it have altered through the years, ever taking on new forms and faces. And the land all around, some of the best and fairest in the country, is permanent. From it the village draws its life, as it has done ever since its first houses rose, and so it will be in the years to come, even though another pattern of life is laid over the old Highland one.

For the village has its life in the present too, in spite of the tendency, especially among the old, to dwell in its past. Let me give you a picture of the village in winter. It is fortunate in its wealth of trees, and one can look into a beautiful scene, transformed from its autumn bareness into a dazzling white world. The evergreens are pleasant to the eye, and even those trees which stand dark and bare receive some softening lines of beauty

from the snow that lies all around them. Fortunate too is the village in its river. It is frozen hard, and has become a white silent way, away round the wooded bend.

How do the hours pass, these winter days? Early this morning the mail man was just turning out the village street with his sleigh and pair of horses. A little later the boys and girls were passing on their way to the old school at the head of the village. Teams were waiting, as in the old days, at the mill, and the stores were open and the little French-Canadian girl who lives a stone's throw away had her sled out on the sidewalk.

Ten o'clock: it is a bright, crisp morning. The road in the centre is beaten hard already by the trucks and teams. A mile along it, and I must turn aside and go pushing along the farm lane where the snow is patterned in soft folds, and the walking is harder. But it is not long before I reach the farm house. The farmer I have come to see (really a little outside the village, but I interpret the name generously) has made his farm one of the best in the countryside. He could never have done what he has done unless he had come from a hardy, industrious, prudent, thrifty stock and had well employed the talent entrusted to him. The years have taken their toll. He looks tired, yet he has been used to working steadily all his life, and he craves the glory of going on to the end of the furrow.

Twelve o'clock: the mail has come in. As Christmas comes in sight, it is growing heavier. The post-office is the gathering place in the middle of the day for many. What heaps of papers and periodicals!

Three o'clock: the sun is bright. The afternoon is going fast. Shoppers are busy in the stores. One or two travelling agents are busy on their rounds. Soon the voices of the children will be heard coming down the street. The bright lights of the service stations will be turned on, sending their reflection across the pale snow.

Six o'clock: all is dark and all is quiet for a time.

So much for the exterior of village life. It seems very slight and insignificant, but there is much more. There is a good deal of hard work going on behind. The old mill is busy as of old. Perhaps it is the scene of the most continued activity in the village. The stores, too, keep long hours, for those on the farms do their errands late in the evening. The saw mill is never idle, and the blacksmiths, though they complain of changed times, have always work in a district noted for its

horses. Winter is the busiest time for the garage men, for the automobile tires do keep going, the year round. I have already noted the dwindling population of children. The school seems small for the size of the village, but there are several schools in the concessions. The church situation is rather sad, as it is in very many places. One longs for religious statesmen to arise, who will have the large vision and the desire to educate the people in the great things of the Kingdom of God, and to bring them together in the unity of the Spirit. *Exoriare aliquis*. One of the most recent advances is the establishment of a Community Club to foster the decadent community spirit. One cannot help wishing it success. Its influence may well be far reaching, even as the Women's Institute has brought new interests and brightness into village homes.

There is a deep emotion which attaches us to places. I have met those who have spent some years in this old village, who could not help expressing what they felt. Other places might be good to live in, but there was a unique feeling in the heart when one was on the road that ran into the village street and home:

And whether here or there, or east or west,
That place you dwelt in first was holy ground;
Its shelter was the kindest you have found,
Its pathways were the best.