
CHAPTER XXXIV

SCOTTISH SOCIETIES IN WESTERN CANADA

BECAUSE the Scotsman is eminently religious, holds strictly to his principles, and is in nature unyielding and hard to move, superficial observers are apt to misjudge and misunderstand him. He has humour, but very little wit. Even the Scoto-Irishman of Ulster differs greatly from the "witty Pat" of the Hibernian or Milesian type. But in the Scottish nature there is a gleeful and sunshiny side. No nation in the world has such a song literature as Scotland, and the lyric which appeals to the pleasurable and joyful on the one hand, or the pathetic and melancholy on the other, is the special quality of verse most Scottish. It is true Scottish music which accompanies the Scottish verse may not have the compass or complexity of the classical music of some of the European nations, but looked at from the standpoint of expression, either of the joyful or the pensive, it stands supreme. The nation that produced a Burns cannot be called of a cold or purely intellectual nature. To Scottish noble and to Scottish peasant alike the social side of life makes a strong appeal. To the Frenchmen the High-

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landers with their kilt and jaunty feathered cap, with dirk and philabeg, albeit clothed in the "garb of old Gaul," appear bizarre, if not barbaric. He speaks of them as "Sauvages Ecosais." The Frenchman is the gayest of men, the Highlander is the most passionate and deep-feeling of men. We may admit, as did Ian Maclaren, that the Lowlander is sardonic and logical to a degree, but has also in him depth of feeling and warmth of conviction. It is the love of society, the feeling of "Hae'in a frien'" and of having a "crack thegither" that has led Scotsmen all the world over to celebrate St. Andrew's Day. It is true that logical Scotland, while very tenacious about keeping "the Sabbath day," will not stand for the observance of Saints' days. The Scottish tradesmen who, compelled by law, had to keep "All Saints' Day," in the old days, and put up his shutters on that day, objected to do the same a month afterward on St. Andrew's Day (November 30th), asking the question, "Whaur was Saint Aundry when a' the rest were hae'in their day?" The Scottish merchants of Montreal carried their custom of keeping St. Andrew's Day away into the North-Western wilds of Canada before the end of the eighteenth century. Daniel Harmon, a trader of that time, relates that the flag was hoisted at the fort, and the Indians readily fell in with the custom as well as in keeping New Year's Day. Another old custom which was transplanted to Canada was "Hogmanay," which brought an element of pleasure.

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The establishment of St. Andrew's Societies in Western Canada dates from the time of the Canadian occupation, although some few years before Portage la Prairie Scotsmen observed the day. The Portage la Prairie bard, William Gerrond, thus discoursed :—

All hail to our forefathers,
The brave, the true, the bold,
Who left us an inheritance
More precious far than gold!

And may their sons in every land
Forever have to show
As good a record as was shown
A thousand years ago!

The writer arrived in Winnipeg near the end of October, 1871. It was in that year that the St. Andrew's Society was organised, and had its first public dinner. Donald A. Smith, now Lord Strathcona, was the first president. The dinner was held in a vacant building on Main Street, near the present Bannatyne Street. The hall served very well, and notwithstanding the severity of the cold, the warmth of Scottish hearts atoned for the weather of that evening. Though a reorganisation took place some eight years afterwards, yet the St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg has been from that day to this a feature of the city life. Its rooms are always open to receive the members—to any "lonely Scotsman"—its activities go toward assisting the new-comer or unfortunate Scotsman with

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sympathy and needed help. As its chaplain for many years, the writer recalls with pleasure presidents who have served it: Donald A. Smith, A. G. B. Bannatyne, Col. McMillan, Gilbert McMicken, John Emslie, Robert Strang, J. P. Robertson, John McKechnie, D. C. Cameron, Kenneth McKenzie, John Leslie, D. H. Telford, Henry Cameron, Andrew Strang. The installation of officers was always held with due formality, the chaplain on the nearest Sunday delivered in one of the churches of the city a suitable sermon which the Society attended in a body. At the dinner the addresses were always inspiring, and Scottish song and story poured forth "that night"; the enthusiasm of the occasion was all of the greatest.

Some twenty years ago there was organised in Winnipeg a branch of the Royal Order of Scottish Clans—an international organisation more strongly developed in the United States than in Canada. This is a benevolent and co-operative benefit society. The branch in Winnipeg is called "Clan Stewart, No. 92." It has a Chief, Tanist, Chaplain, Secretary, Treasurer, Henchman, Seneschal, and other subordinate officers. The order has a beautiful ritual, and a cap and plaid of Stuart tartan with a badge. The Clan has grown to be a powerful society, meeting fortnightly, and aiming at keeping up by papers, lectures, and concerts the customs, literature, music, and influence of Scotland. The Clan has by its insurance fund been of service to the widows and orphans of deceased clansmen. There is also a Scottish

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Woman's Auxiliary Society. As having been chaplain from the beginning of the Clan till the present time, the writer can speak of the value of receiving and directing young Scotsmen coming from the Northern land to Western Canada.

Another organisation in Canada, called "The Sons of Scotland," has for a number of years existed in Winnipeg as well as in certain other centres of Western Canada. While the Royal Order of Scottish Clans has not more than six or eight clans in Canada, the Sons of Scotland have had many. The two organisations are based on very much the same principles, both being benefit societies for the members.

The Caledonian Societies in Western Canada, of which the most important are those of Winnipeg and Vancouver, are largely devoted to cultivating athletics. They usually have a great meet in the summertime, when local members and also a number of distinguished athletes from a distance take a part in the Scottish sports. Great crowds turn out to these events, and the opportunity is given on the open field for the display of cap and feather, plaid and kilt, and philabeg and sporran moloch, as well as cairn-gorm dagger, of stockings and neatly made "shoon," all of which display to advantage the muscle and brawn of the contestants and members. Of course the chief events are Scottish: throwing the caber and "stane," the tug-of-war, races, jumping, vaulting, and the like make up the hardy sports. In later years prizes have been given for the best dressed

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girls of different ages, and for the best dressed man in Highland costume. Dancing the Highland fling still keeps up the highly vigorous exercise for which the ancient Caledonians were celebrated. Without the "skirl of the bagpipes," however, any Scottish entertainment would be incomplete. While six pipers abreast cannot always be obtained as in the dinner parties in Holyrood Palace hall during the Assembly meetings in Edinburgh, yet Winnipeg has a pipe band of eight or more pipers maintained by Clan Stewart, and this gives spirit to any large Scottish gathering or meet, where it is regarded as a necessity.

It is true the Philistine, and the Englishman, who had occasion to remember the pipes at Bannockburn, may make sport of the bagpipes after the manner of an announcement made some time ago by a Vancouver newspaper. It said, "We announce that the pipe band will start at 11 o'clock tomorrow from Hastings Street for the Caledonian gathering at the park; we make this announcement in order that ordinary citizens who are not Scotch may take to the woods." Notwithstanding all such criticisms the Scottish heart warms to the plaid and thrills at the slogan of the pipes.

In the city of Victoria there exists a most notable and successful society known as "The Sir William Wallace Society." For years this society has been a rallying-point for the many retired officers and men of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Pacific Coast, for the Scottish merchants, who as usual take a prominent place in the city, and for all sons

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of the heather. This society has by literary means and by a high standard of membership and skilful management advanced the "name and fame of Scotland."

Winnipeg and other parts of Western Canada have during late years celebrated the birthday of Robert Burns by holding a banquet.

Our Monarch's hindmost year but one
Was five-and-twenty days begun ;
'Twas then a blast of Januar' win'
Blew hansel in on Robin.

This is the bard whom all Scotsmen honour. It is found very convenient in most communities, as winter is getting through, to have a national festival. Burns is everybody's hero. His countryman, Carlyle, has shown in its peerless essay the grounds for Burns having such a grip on the minds of his countrymen. He was a true poet, for he spoke the universal voice of humanity. Lord Rosebery, in 1896, at the great commemoration of the death of Burns, both in Dumfries and Glasgow, was able, as a man of culture and a scion of an old nobility, to signify the claim of Burns to the world's respect and admiration. And it is this common feeling of humanity and of essential oneness expressed by such representative Scottish peers as Lord Rosebery, the Earl of Aberdeen, and the Duke of Argyll that makes peer and peasant one, in speaking of themselves, not according to the accident of birth, but by the common feeling of equality, on the roster of "sense and worth"

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simply as Scottish men. These are radical days, and this is the reign of the common people both in the British Isles and Canada ; but respect for character, attainments, and deserved influence is the only just criterion by which a man in public or private life may be judged. It is accordingly a good sign of the times when, while not defending Burns in all particulars, but doing as Lord Rosebery did, claiming for him consideration as a brilliant genius of the race and as an honest man, we unite as Scotsmen are doing, not for mere hilarity, but to inspire lofty aspirations after human freedom and manly equality, in Burns Clubs throughout Western Canada. Burns Clubs now forgather at many points on January 25th from year to year.

Perhaps the crowning success of Scottish nationality in Western Canada is the spread of the great Scottish game of curling. As a former skip of the Winnipeg Granite Curling Club, the writer has peculiar pleasure in recording the remarkable influence exercised by the game of curling in the West. We are, of course, aware of the vast interest taken in the "roarin' game" in Scotland, as illustrated by the Parish Minister in Barrie's "Little Minister," where in the case of one of his important ministerial duties coming into collision with the curling match he feared he would have to give the preference to the game. Parallels to this may perhaps be found in Canada. The Royal Caledonian Curling Club of Scotland has been the nursing-mother of many auxiliaries.

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Among the greatest of these is said to be that of Western Canada. The long winter and the continuous supply of ice makes the game of curling one splendidly suited for the Canadian Middle West. The writer remembers thirty years ago spending the winter in Britain, and there was only one day's curling in Scotland in that whole season. It is surely difficult to cultivate skill in a game where there is at times so little opportunity for practice. Almost every railway town in Western Canada early in its history erects a commodious building, which is flooded on the interior ground floor and forms an ice sheet which lasts, with some addition, for three or four months. But the club is furnished with good Kilmarnock "stones," and so the game is still Scottish. In later years the societies and the competitors have become so numerous, that in order to meet the competitions districts have to play off certain primaries, and the winners at these are entitled to go to the great Winnipeg meet. The Winnipeg Bonspiel comes off in the second week of February of each year. At it there are said to be one thousand competitors, who represent a large number who have been played with and been beaten at home. Some seven large buildings, each with from four to eight sheets of ice, are in fine working order for the beginning of the "Spiel." Arrangements have been progressing for months before, and the general officers of the Manitoba branch of the Caledonian have everything prepared. Reduced half-fare rates are given to the curlers from their homes to Winnipeg

and return, and not only so, but in the middle of the Bonspiel half-rates are also allowed to all who choose to buy them, and these are good for a number of days. Thus thousands come to this great annual event as to a winter fair to see the games, and incidentally do business in Winnipeg. The whole city is ablaze with light by night and decorated with flags and bunting. Since the beginning of the annual Bonspiel the central figure, as has been mentioned already, is Mr. John P. Robertson, Librarian of the Parliamentary Library of Manitoba. Of a large staff he is the moving spirit, and lots are cast and competitions carried on in a methodical and orderly way. Curling is a game from which the evils of betting have been rigorously excluded. While other games by their excessive effort, by their element of chance and sporting, arouse the passions and draw down upon themselves denunciation from all moral and social leaders, curling is free from these—a barrel of oatmeal for the hospital or some trifle being all that is played for, and that quite seldom. For the encouragement of this true sport a number of very valuable trophies—cups and medals—are awarded. The game in Canada is not carried on in so vociferous a manner as is the custom in Scotland, although the competition is just as keen and the general interest of the spectators is quite as great as on Linlithgow Loch or other places in the Northern Country. An oath is rarely heard upon the ice, and in such cases it is the duty of the chaplain to see that a fine is imposed and paid.

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The reason for the dropping out of many of the famous old catch-words in Canada, such as "soop 'er up," "Haud off," "Tee high," "be up," and the like, is accounted for by the fact that the game has become a Canadian national game, and now includes many who are not of Scottish descent and who do not know the meaning of "besom," as do those of Scottish blood. Often the young Scottish Canadian is unfamiliar with the Scottish tongue, although his speech may have a "sough" of the dialect of the "land o' cakes." The close of the Bonspiel about the middle of February is most suitable. It is the end, to a great extent, of the curling season, for soon after this date the heat of the sun grows stronger and the ice is poor. For farmers, those working in building trades, and others, the Canadian winter is their resting-time; and it is a great matter to have so absorbing and suitable a game as curling to keep the young or the unemployed from frequenting the bar-room or the gambling-house. In the year 1896 the writer was present at the annual meeting of the Royal Caledonian Club, held that year in the Royal City of Perth, Scotland. As representing the Canadian branch, the writer in speaking issued a challenge to a number of Scottish curlers to make a playing trip through Canada, suggesting also that the Canadians might be able to set an example as to how the game should be played, even in the presence of those who were adepts at the Scottish sport. In the year 1902 a fine party came out, led by the

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Rev. John Kerr, of Dirleton, Scotland. The visitors played in the leading cities from Halifax to Winnipeg, and while they were not successful, added much interest in the public mind to the good Scottish game of the "besom and stanes." Then in 1909 a band of Canadian curlers, under the genial leadership of the late Lieutenant-Governor Fraser, who in 1910 passed away in Nova Scotia, went to Scotland and played a complete series of games, gaining, as was expected, a victory on the score of the whole tour. A subgroup of the Canadian curlers went on to visit Switzerland, where they also carried off the honours even against competitors from all Europe. Here also, rather than under the head of Scottish Literature, reference may be made to the co-operation in Canada of Scotsmen in maintaining Scottish journals for the cultivation of a spirit of acquaintanceship and interest in things Scottish. The veteran journal, the *Scottish American*, which circulates largely in Canada as well as in the United States, has been a most notable and interesting paper in its long history. The industrious editor has carefully collected from Old Country sources items of news of every shire and locality, to present them weekly to his fellow-countrymen outside of Scotland. The editorials and literary selections have made a most dignified and thoroughly respectable journal.

As regards Canada we may speak plainly, as is our duty, of Scottish failures as well as of Scottish successes. In Canada there is no representative

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Scottish journal, though in Winnipeg there are two struggling ones. Scottish failure and lack of reason is represented in the literary world by two unfortunate books, the one "The House of the Green Gables," and the other "The Unspeakable Scot." They may not be worthy of extended notice, but they illustrate the "seamy" side of Scottish life and may be useful as a warning to us. Competition is not always a good thing. Two shops, or two churches, or two National Improvement Societies, in a population which can only support one of each is a bad thing. We do not say that Winnipeg and the Canadian West cannot support two Scottish newspapers, but we maintain that two weak and insufficiently supported Scottish journals in Winnipeg will simply bring discredit to the Scottish name, and end in loss and no glory to the individual proprietors. So also with regard to Scottish societies as co-operative bodies, we should strongly support those organisations which stand for separate phases of Scottish life—St. Andrew's, Scottish Benefit Societies, Caledonian and Burns Clubs—but we must look with disfavour upon organisations which strive to maintain themselves on the Western prairie in such a form as is found in the Caithness, Aberdeen, Inverness, or other county organisations. We object to these as being ephemeral instead of representing the full force and dignity of our world-wide Scottish nationality.