

RELIGION IN OLD CAPE BRETON

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IN no part of Canada have the customs, habits, and practices of the people who occupied the Highlands of Scotland one hundred and fifty years ago been more conserved than by the descendants of those people who emigrated to Cape Breton at the commencement of the 19th century. Not the least interesting of these marked features were the Presbyterian religious observances and ceremonies. A genuine belief in the existence, omniscience, and onnipotence of God; in His providential care of, and personal interest in, the individual—a vivid realization of these theological fundamentals served to chart a course for men and women on the voyage of life that was well calculated to ensure a propitious breeze towards the ultimate destination of all mortals.

These ideas found definite expression, first, in the erection of the "family altar" in nearly every house in the community. This meant the gathering of the family, morning and evening, "round the ingle", while the father, and in his absence the mother, conducted family worship. Four or five stanzas of a favorite psalm, transcribed in the Gaelic tongue, were first sung to old mournful Scottish tunes now no longer heard; a chapter from the New Testament was read with grave intonation; and then all knelt while the leader poured out his or her soul in urgent communion with the Invisible Lord of the Universe in whom all lived, moved, and had their being. It was a moment of great solemnity for the young people as, sitting primly on their chairs, they earnestly endeavoured to comprehend the reverential attitude and the holy invocation of the heads of the household. The only exception to the universal observance of formality, while "the Books were being taken," was furnished by the toddling baby who often diabolically persisted, at such times, in the performance of ludicrous antics, thus attracting the attention of the other children, to the immense satisfaction, occasionally, of the latter and to the intense annoyance of the parents.

The next significant acknowledgment of their religious belief, to which I would direct attention, was the offering of "Grace before and after meat." This was not the incoherent, galloping mutter that so frequently goes by the name of Grace now at the commencement of a meal; it was rather an address

to the Giver of all Good, delivered in a tone of voice and in a spirit of thankfulness that ordinarily was truly worthy of the occasion. I say *ordinarily*, because instances have been recorded where the Grace was so lengthy that the irresponsibles at the feast entered upon the repast before the ceremony of thanks had been completed. Then, at the close of the meal, no person retired from the table until Grace was again offered.

Thirdly, I would refer to the manner of Sabbath observance. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" was an injunction that was heartily accepted by the early Scottish settlers of Cape Breton. So scrupulous were they in this respect that all culinary preparations for the sanctified morrow were adjusted the night before. Thus, all the water required on Sunday, for drinking or other purposes, was stored up on Saturday night; all the food was arranged in the same way, so that little more than its conveyance to the mouth was permitted or sanctioned; nearly the whole day, apart from attendance on public worship, was spent by the older members of the family in reading the Bible and other religious books, and by the little folk in the study of the Catechism and the singing of hymns. Separated by a considerable distance—20 or 30 miles—churches were erected in which religious service was held on the Sabbath. The building was, usually, large and commodious, as it had to serve an extensive territory which, though somewhat sparsely settled, yet furnished a quota of church-going people approaching seventy-five per cent. If the weather was favorable, some of these people—those in the remoter sections of the congregation—left home at 8 o'clock in the morning so as to be in church at 11 a.m. They mostly travelled on foot in the summer season, or in row boats when living near the water; in winter they permitted themselves to be drawn in sleighs by long-haired horses. Those living nearer the church did not set forth so early as the people farther away; but everybody was within the church precincts about half an hour before the service commenced. By the less thoughtful and the wordly-minded this half-hour was spent, outside the church building, in gossip; but by the "faithful" it was occupied in the vocal exchange of religious experience, in sympathetic expression of condolence with known cases of misfortune and distress; while the ultra-religious immediately sought the sanctity of their pews and there indulged in quiet meditation upon the mysteries of the Christian religion and general theological abstractions, contemplation of which brought exquisite joy to some hearts and unspeakable terror to others. But, in either case, the exercise

was good in preparation for the sermon which followed and continued for 1½ or 2 hours in some cases, in course of which all the sins commonly known, or generally recognized, were fearlessly exposed, analyzed, and prescribed for. Nor was there hesitation in referring to particular moral faults in special districts within the jurisdiction of the ministerial charge! The occurrence of such misdemeanours in any particular division of the congregation as called for public correction from the pulpit was regarded as a great reflection on the elder in that section, and invariably led to intensive efforts on his part in subsequent moral supervision.

In addition to the sermon, which was delivered without notes or memoranda of any kind, but was accentuated by much vociferation and pulpit thumpings, the service of praise occupied much time and was conducted with much form and glory. Seated within an enclosure at the foot of the elevated pulpit were the precentors—the leaders of the music. No pipe organs or gowned choirs were to be heard or seen in the days of which I write: the only approach to anything spectacular was furnished by the precentors. They were selected for their honorable calling by the Session, and were always regarded as men of exemplary conduct in their daily walk and conversation, besides being the possessors of melodious voices. A special pre-requisite for popularity and commendation in a precentor was his ability to “put out the line” with a saving unction—that is, to chant previously the line of the psalm that the congregation was to sing. To see one of the leaders, on a special occasion, smartly dressed in his frock coat, his bushy head tossed to one side and eyes heavenward bent, and to hear his sonorous voice rolling out the words with as many twists and twirls as are given today by a base-ball pitcher, was indeed capable of creating a thrill in the feelings of all the unsophisticated. When the last word of the line was uttered with more than usual quavering, the whole assemblage joined together in the singing, and the effect was certainly enrapturing. To the uninitiated, who did not understand the Gaelic language and who did not comprehend the genius of the simple Scottish folk, this musical performance suggested the wailings of departed spirits; but to the participants no more inspired music or inspirational melody ever emanated from human throats. And the same sentiment was engendered by the exercise of prayer. Many of the old people found it difficult to believe that the Supreme Being could be sufficiently addressed with becoming respect in any other language than

their adored Gaelic. Indeed, it has been actually asserted by scholars, whose knowledge of the Gaelic tongue has been equal to their proficiency in other languages, that in none of the latter was there such capacity and adaptability for the expression of profound and sublime sentiments as in the mother tongue of the Scottish Highlanders. Be that as it may, the fact remains that those who engaged in public prayer—and only the elect were so favored or permitted—often succeeded in raising their responsive audience into the realms of ecstatic mysticism.

But the great event in their religious life was the Open Air Communion, held once a year, and known in the vernacular as “the Sacrament.” The place of meeting, in the three or four localities where such events were solemnized, was invariably on the gentle slope of a rising piece of ground, at the foot of which was a plain where were erected the communicants’ “tables” and the ministers’ “tent,” somewhat resembling a large military sentry box. Near by, also, was to be found a rippling brook of clear cold water, shaded by over-arching trees; and thither old and young repaired frequently, always presumably to slake the thirst that was sure to occur between 11 o’clock in the forenoon and 3 o’clock in the afternoon when the services closed for the day.

This religious gathering occupied five days, commencing on Thursday and closing on Monday. But attendance necessitated, for some people, absence from home for over a week, as for such it meant a journey of forty or fifty miles. During the months of July and August, each year, there would be five or six of these gatherings held in Cape Breton; and as the leaders in each congregation were supposed to attend all of them, their presence indicated much sacrifice of time and energy. These leaders were men of sterling character and marked natural ability: their names have been very suitably enshrined in a small pamphlet issued some years ago by Rev. Malcolm Campbell, latterly of Halifax, but for many years an ardent preacher of the Gospel in Cape Breton, under the aegis of the Presbyterian Church.

Besides these leaders a great many of the “faithful” made the complete tour of “the Sacraments;” while all classes from the neighboring parishes were in evidence, almost to the full extent of the adult population. People coming from a distance beyond six or seven miles had to be accommodated within two or three miles of the meeting place; the stress and strain attending the efforts and the anxiety to provide such accommodation would, in these days, be considered preposterous. The amount of food

consumed, without money and without price, was remarkable; while the ingenuity employed to devise sleeping conditions was equally remarkable. As uncomfortable as they were original, all such inconveniences were overlooked and disregarded in the exhilaration of the occasion. At the same time the labors of those ministering were tendered with the highest grace in the assurance that they were engaged in a holy cause, and also the further assurance that, on a future occasion, they would be recompensed by similar courtesies to be rendered by those to whom they were now catering.

Types of the manner in which the old time Sacrament was celebrated continued to be observed in Cape Breton until about forty years ago, but latterly they were little more than miniature types. As a young boy, led by my father's hand, I am pleased to confess that I was an ardent observer of this great ceremony on more than one occasion, probably in the days of its beginning declension, though it was still capable of much religious radio-activity. Among many and decisive episodes in my experience that of the open air Communion occupies a prime position in my memory, and the impression made thereby, on my plastic imagination, has contributed as much as, or more than, anything else in shaping my realization of the philosophy of life.

As I have already stated, preparations were being made, for weeks before the meeting, to accommodate the expected crowd. The people came from far and near, some (only a very few) in carriages, some on horseback, but most of them on foot. The universally recognized church people arrived at their destination on Wednesday, the day preceeding the commencement of the services; but the crush was not consummated until Saturday afternoon and evening, when the younger folk appeared in their best bib and tucker to make their presence felt on Sunday. For instance, the young maiden who had been absent for a year or so at service in Boston, and had lately arrived on a visit to the old home, never put in an appearance before Saturday. Contrary to usual and necessary custom now-a-days on special occasions, no application for reservations was made: every fresh arrival presented himself and herself at any home, either at the solicitation of a companion or joining the crowd moving in the direction of a certain household known far and wide for its hospitality. If accommodation for the night could not be secured, at least a meal was provided, and kindly directions given respecting further convenience at a farther distance. These central depots, when taxed beyond further endurance, had at

disposal subsidiary centres that, like the former, exerted themselves to the point of exhaustion; and there they in turn directed the stream still farther onwards. It was always a point of honor that the limit of capacity was reached before any applicant was turned away; and this fact was well understood and appreciated by the other.

To return to the principal theme: The meetings were held in the open air, as there was no church building large enough to hold the crowd; also the practice of the open air service was in consonance with that of the old Covenanters, who believed that under the canopy of Heaven they got into closer touch with the Father of their spirits. At the outskirts of the consecrated space a picket of elders was stationed to superintend the collection. Often the little wooden boxes, set on the end of stakes driven into the ground, would present a full harvest of coppers. Everybody was supposed to contribute on his or her way to a position on the hillside: poor indeed must have been the servant girl if she did not throw her mite into the treasury. And if she forgot it, she would be followed by such a threatening glower from the elders as would scare her from repeating the offence.

From Thursday until Monday afternoon the religious exercises continued without intermission—the evenings, far into night, 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 in slight refreshment only. Friday was known as the “Question Day,” “La Ceist.” After the preliminary singing and the invocation of the Divine Blessing, the minister called for the “Question.” Immediately some old Christian enquirer stood up, read or quoted a Bible verse, and asked for its interpretation: the discussion following virtually involved a differential diagnosis between saints and sinners, and was so intended. The minister invariably led off in this discussion: and then, from a list of names, called upon those who were to address the assemblage. Let it be understood that no information concerning the special topic under consideration could possibly be acquired previously to its announcement by the propounder; therefore, ample evidence of the mental ability of the speakers, as well as of their familiarity with the Bible and with Christian experience, was given in the eloquent extemporaneous presentation of argument,

fortified by quotation and authority from Scripture in abundance, in which these men expressed their most profound thoughts and ideas.

On Saturday afternoon, at the conclusion of the preaching service, the candidates for Sacramental admission presented themselves for examination as to their knowledge of the Church doctrines, as to their personal experience of the saving power of the Gospel of Christ, and as to their performance of religious duties. Many and trying were the questions put and answered, and sorrowful indeed was the mental condition of the poor person "sent back" for another year. Those who were considered satisfactory became the happy recipients of the "token," which they were allowed to retain in their possession until the following day, when it was given up to one of the attending elders as the communicant took his or her place at the Lord's Table.

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 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 the conviction that their experience was a blessed reality and not a vanishing dream. It was one of the grandest and most 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.

In this connection I desire to supply an extract from a report made on the Sabbath Day exercises of the Open Air Communion in Cape Breton as observed in 1872, by Rev. Prof. McKerras, of Queen's College, Kingston, Ontario:—

Here we witnessed a genuine Highland Sacrament of the olden time... What a crowd was there drawn together from all directions by the time-hallowed associations of the sacred ordinance! Hundreds on hundreds eagerly bent over to catch the tones of the several speakers, as if listening to the utterances of an oracle. Many had come thirty, several forty, some fifty and one seventy-five miles in order to enjoy the occasion.

The diets of worship were well attended on Saturday, but the Sabbath was the great day of the feast. On this day the interest and solemnity culminated. But alas! the weather had changed and become unpropitious in the last degree. On Saturday, the sky began to assume an ominous appearance, and by night-fall a "down-pour" set in. Morning dawned, but with it

came no abatement of the storm, and everything betokened a day of rain.

Though I could not hope to be edified by hearing, as the exercises were conducted in a tongue unknown to me, I certainly was by the sight which then presented itself. To reach the place I had to cross the public highway. Far as the eye could reach were vehicles of every description. Beyond the billow-shaped graveyard, and up into a retired glen, I found myself at the outskirts of a mass of people hanging on the lips of the speaker. The ministers, being in a tent constructed like a large sentry-box, alone were protected from the weather. Before them extended a row of supported planks improvised into a Communion Table. On the slopes rising around in the shape of an amphitheatre sat at least 1000 persons, from the grandsire of eighty winters to the youth of twelve summers! Men in their prime and girls in their teens; here a line of aged women, eye glassy with the tear of emotion, much covered with dark silk handkerchief, the black shawl held up by one corner to the mouth with one hand; there a clump of old men with head bare of bonnet or protecting locks, leaning each on his staff and devouring that preached word.

For five hours and twenty minutes that multitude sat upon the soaking sward as if glued to it. During the first two hours of that time, the rain came down incessantly. Comparatively few had umbrellas to raise, and every male had his head uncovered. As I cast my eye over the scene, my first thought was "Does not God love mercy rather than sacrifice?" But as I continued to gaze, and saw that every look, every gesture, every shade of expression betokened intense earnestness, high-wrought interest and soul-wrought devotion, other thoughts suggested themselves, and I was led to pay the tribute of admiration to the robustness of their religion. While the preacher was serving the last table from the text "Behold the Lamb of God", the feelings of many seemed to master them, and a swell of agitation heaved the bosoms of the communicants. Awe crept over me as I looked from face to face and took in the impress of the whole scene.

They did not stir from that spot until nearly half-past four o'clock, and yet two prayer meetings (the one conducted in Gaelic in the church, and the other in English in a neighboring school house) held at six o'clock were numerously attended. Greedier hearers of Gospel truth it has never been my privilege to witness. The more they got, the more thirstily desirous were they to receive more preaching. Who can doubt that the Holy Spirit was working mightily in many an anxious heart then present? As I looked out from the tent upon that congregation, I could not help contrasting with these noble Highlanders of Broadcove, who will rise up in the judgment and condemn us, many of those wretched apologies for Christians found in so many of our congregations, who seated on crimson cushions yawn and frown and count the passage of time by the second hand of their watches, if the preacher exceeds by five minutes the fashionable half hour, no matter how fraught with the fire of scripture truth or how well delivered the sermon may be.

But I must not forget to mention 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 wooing swain with his oiled hair, white paper collar, and grain leather boots—his pockets full of conversation candy, and his umbrella enticingly open to shelter from the burning rays of the sun, or from the pelting rain, the object of his devotion. Very many of the marriages could be traced to affections first aroused at these great meetings: so the announcement of the Sacrament season was the signal for the introduction of fashion and the donning of style. No Easter hat or bonnet in those days: everything new appeared at the Sacrament. Needless to say, the display of this variegated plumage was not conducive to the firm establishment of the great objects of the occasion. And then it was natural to expect that the majority of the younger people would be attracted more by a desire for conviviality than for the exercise of sobriety and solemnity.

The young men sometimes caused disturbances, and made inroads on the sanctity 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. The brock was a favorite rendezvous at which it is feared that sometimes more than water was drunk; and here also frequently coquette and flirt innocently met for a common purpose. But the vigilance of the elders was always a sufficient safeguard against improper conduct.

I have already made a passing reference to the religious leaders whom Rev. Malcolm Campbell has denominated the "Cape Breton Worthies". As individuals they were men who would attract attention in any gathering of people, being physically well-proportioned, with an intelligent and benignant cast of countenance that won confidence and favor on the instant. They were all born orators, of a pedagogical turn of mind, and deeply impregnated with the seed of spirituality. With seemingly prophetic vision they peered into the Unseen, and in glowing language declared their findings. From my early boyhood I have a vivid recollection of one or two of these men as seen at the great religious festivals mentioned above, and of the sense of adoration that overwhelmed me as one succeeded the other in throwing the multitude into ecstatic raptures. Old ladies occupying the space of honor in close

proximity to the "Tabernacle" or "Tent" swayed rhythmically backwards and forwards, their hands clasped tightly over the white handkerchief that was frequently used to wipe away the ever-recurring tears which betokened the strong emotions roused by the telling recital of the great Sacrifice on Calvary. Old grey-headed men, with their silver locks occasionally streaming to the gentle summer breeze, fixed their eyes steadfastly on the ground and occasionally gave vent to their mental perturbation in loud ejaculations signifying assent to, and satisfaction with, the sentiments expressed.

Besides discharging this impressive duty as special speakers at the renowned religious feasts, another important work, with far-reaching effects, was performed by them in their capacity as "Catechists". As such they visited every school district, and minutely examined the children in the "Shorter Catechism" in English while, at night, the parents were subjected to a like scrutiny in Gaelic. This examination, conducted *viva voce* twice a year in the schoolhouse of the community, was always regarded as a notable event, and one that demanded, as a prerequisite, an assiduous attention to the exact language of the text; for to receive encomiums from the Catechist for a letter-perfect recital of the Catechism was something that every boy and girl looked forward to with much anxiety, and when bestowed it was received with much pride.

These godly men have gone to their rest: but before doing so they left their impress on men and women in Cape Breton who are now alas! rapidly passing away themselves to the Great Beyond. Both by precept and by example they steadfastly inculcated the principles of correct living throughout the communities that recognized their authority. They began to work shortly after the arrival of the immigrants in the early part of the 19th century, many years before ordained ministers were settled in the country. The first Presbyterian clergymen to assume pastoral duties in the Island hailed with unspeakable joy the benefit of association in church work with these men. Always modestly assuming, as they were bound to do, secondary position in all spiritual affairs, they were of incalculable value to the minister in helping to discharge the onerous duties of his calling over immense stretches of country, and under circumstances that made his work a tremendous burden. Yes, these remarkable men have taken their journey to that country from whose bourne no traveller returns, and for half a century Cape Breton has not seen any representative of their class. The

especial need for them has been removed by increase in the number of regular clergy; by the general knowledge of religious truth and doctrine disseminated in literature and taught in the various church organizations; and by the absence, it is feared, of equally profound interest now in the matters of faith and religion.

At the head of this effective moral and religious organization was the minister. It is impossible for the present generation to realize the exact ecclesiastical position of the old-time Presbyterian clergyman in Cape Breton—ninety, seventy-five years ago. He was the supreme authority in affairs pertaining to Christian doctrine and practice, and a mighty arbiter in matters relating to morality. There is no doubt that many sins languished and perished of inanition for fear that the fact of commission might reach the ears of the minister. However, as individuals, these Ambassadors of the Cross were far from being cruel tyrants or domineering autocrats. Each was, as Thackeray said of Dr. Samuel Johnson, “a fierce foe to all sin, but a gentle enemy to all sinners”. Their names are held to-day in the greatest reverence by the descendants of those who enjoyed their ministry, and lived in close contact with them. They were all highly educated men, graduates in Arts of Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Aberdeen University, and were selected in the Old Country by a society of Christian ladies called the “Edinburgh Ladies’ Association”, headed by the celebrated Mrs. John McKay of Edinburgh. About the time that the “Clearances”, as they are called, commenced in the north of Scotland (1810 A.D.), a great number of her fellow Highlanders emigrated to Cape Breton where, for many years after their landing upon its shores, there was not one Presbyterian minister, and where indeed, except in a very few spots, there was no such thing as the dispensation of religious ordinances by any denomination of professing Christians. Mrs. McKay, with that Highland patriotism for which she was so notable, kept up a correspondence with many of her fellow countrymen in Cape Breton, listened to the cry sent across the Atlantic by some of the Christian patriarchs relative to the destitution of religious observances there, awakened the attention of the Christian public of Edinburgh to the condition, and formed the Association referred to above, which was instrumental in raising considerable sums of money that were sent to Cape Breton and expended there in supporting Divine ordinances and in promoting the cause of education. It was through the means of this Mission that several of the leading school teachers in Scotland,

male and female, were sent out to help in dispelling the clouds of intellectual darkness that enveloped the scattered and struggling settlements in the destitute country. Besides all this, the Society supported several Catechists in Cape Breton, and sent out large donations of Bibles and religious books to the different parishes. For upwards of thirty years Mrs. McKay was identified with this land, far away from her home in the capital city of Scotland where she died in 1850.

It can be readily perceived that the ministers selected by such a devout individual would be persons of exceptional qualifications. So they were, and emphatic was the Commission with which they were charged! They were to be fearless in denouncing sin and in exposing iniquity in the high places as well as on the lower levels. On their arrival, how precious to their soul-thirsty hearers were the two-hour sermons, and how especially delicious was the presentation of the tenderness of the Gospel in contradistinction with the terrors of the Law! On the way home from church—a distance of six or seven miles in some cases—the conversation among the groups who were travelling on foot often dealt with the subject matter of the minister's discourse, and there would be thus an interchange of views that drove home, in no uncertain way, the great religious thoughts uttered from the pulpit. Then on arriving home, and after partaking of the long postponed second meal of the day, the children are gathered together and there is related to them the substance of all that the parents had heard in church and on the journey homewards. This undoubtedly made a lasting impression on the formative minds of the juvenile hearers: in this simple and unostentatious way great moral and religious truths were instilled into the minds of the youth of that day, that were bound to have some future influence on the public institutions and moral welfare of the country.

The first of these remarkable pioneers to arrive, under the auspices of Mrs. McKay and her associates, was Rev. Alexander Farquharson, who made his headquarters at Middle River, in 1833. Shortly after, he was followed by Rev. James Fraser in 1836; Rev. Peter McLean in 1837; Rev. John Gunn in 1838; Rev. Matthew Wilson in 1842; Rev. Murdoch Stewart (father of Dr. John Stewart of Halifax) in 1843; Rev. Dr. Hugh McLeod in 1850. The hardships endured by these sky-pilots, as narrated by themselves in their reports to the home land, make painful reading. Compelled to go on long and dangerous journeys, especially in winter, and subjected to undue privation

and discomfort in the destitute homes where, for a time, they were obliged to seek shelter and sustenance, they gave, in the performance of their work, indisputable evidence of Christian fortitude as well as of physical endurance. Like some of our own missionaries of the present time, they were given instruction in the principles of Medicine before leaving home, and so were frequently called upon to render medical advice to their parishioners on occasions when the services of medical doctors were not available. At the regular seasons of systematic visitation the physical condition of their flock was enquired into with almost as much eagerness and anxiety as the moral and spiritual. This was a decidedly wholesome practice, as it is a fact well known to scientists that the dependence on our lower physical substratum for the full development and fruitage of our higher powers—mental, moral, and spiritual—is well worthy of wide and deep recognition.

These clergymen were especially interested in the establishment of educational schools throughout their respective parishes, and were instrumental in having what was known as a Grammar School established on the island of Boulardarie, presided over by Mr. Alexander Munro, M.A., grandfather of the late Rev. Kenneth Munro of Montreal. Mr. Munro arrived in Cape Breton in 1839, having been sent out from Scotland by Mrs. McKay, already alluded to. To accommodate the students, who in the winter term numbered 100 to 125, small huts were built in the neighbourhood. From this school, where Latin, Greek, Algebra, Geometry, Navigation and other subjects were taught, teachers were sent out all over the island, so that within a dozen years the advantages of education were brought within the reach of most of the children. Not to the same extent, however, as later when the Free School Act of 1864 placed educational facilities at the disposal of all. Mrs. Munro, and her assistant, Miss Gordon, gave special attention to the girls and taught them sewing, cooking and so forth. At this juncture mention must also be made of the excellent school opened at St. Anns in 1825 by Rev. Norman McLeod, and conducted by him for a quarter of a century, up to the time of his departure for Australia in 1851. It will be noticed that I have not dealt, in this paper, with the work in Cape Breton of this extraordinary clergyman. I have not done so for two reasons: firstly, because I gave a somewhat extensive *resumé* of his activities, religious and otherwise, to the Nova Scotia Historical Society in 1925; secondly, because he refused, ab-

solutely, to co-operate with the Presbyterian ministers who toiled in this portion of the Lord's vineyard from 1830 onwards. It is worthy of historical record that during all the years of his residence in St. Anns he never dispensed, or took part in the dispensation of, the Lord's Supper, and very rarely administered the Sacrament of Baptism to either child or adult. So he never participated in the religious services that we have described under the head of "the Open Air Sacrament", but rather denounced this in unmeasured terms. Moreover, he referred in the most vituperative language to his clerical brethren, as in the following extract from a communication he sent the Presbytery on October 6, 1840:—

In consideration of your dangerous and wilful extravagance . . . together with your openly profane and indiscriminate administration of the most solemn and sacred ordinances, exclusive of many similar means of conviction in the obvious tenor and tendency of your conversation and conduct, I cannot but infer, without contradicting all scriptural reasoning on the point, that the Church that gives place and support to the like of your characters, in her highest office, must in fact be anything other than a living Church of Jesus Christ. This has been my most serious and deliberate view of the subject for the long space of forty years together, and every day confirms me more in this grievous though unavoidable determination.

It would unduly prolong the length of this essay were I to attempt even a slight sketch of each of these historical ministerial personalities; but I feel that I should incorporate in my story a short account of the Rev. Peter McLean, as he was probably unique among them and, perhaps, the most famous of the noble band. He was the son of a Scottish crofter, and was born in 1800. Becoming converted at a revival meeting, he left his home immediately, and spent a week in the wilds. On his return he made the following public announcement:

I hereby earnestly purpose, in the strength and grace of God, before the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, before God's angels in Heaven, the saints on Earth, the wicked in the world and the devils in Hell, to dedicate my soul, my body, and my talents to the Lord and his service for time and for eternity.

At the age of 32 he had finished his Arts and Divinity studies, and a year or two later was invited to go to Cape Breton. He responded with great readiness, arriving at Whycomagh in 1836. Two years later a deep religious movement became ap-

parent in his congregation. People were so overwhelmed under his preaching that they fell down and had to be carried out of church. Like a gale this movement spread throughout the whole island, and from every quarter people thronged to Whycomagh. Those Sabbath days witnessed devout and eager multitudes, as if they were travelling to the Passover at Jerusalem. On the occasions of his attendance at the Open Air Communion he would make a dashing appeal to the emotional side of the entrapped sinners, and a moral convulsive seizure would soon become apparent on the hillside. He early came into conflict with the celebrated St. Anns prophet, Rev. Norman McLeod, and felt the force of the opposition keenly. Mr. McLeod hated revivals, and fiercely denounced them and Rev. Peter McLean with a vehement vocabulary. But Peter McLean was not a man to be silenced, or to be wiped off the map; he had seen the heavenly vision, and could not be disobedient to it. On he continued with all the flames of life burning white and red until 1842, when his strenuous labors reduced him to a physical wreck, and he was obliged to return to Scotland. By the following year, however, he had recovered his wonted energy, as we find him then taking a leading part in the memorable Disruption in the Church of Scotland, and later accepting a ministerial charge in the Free Church—as the new organization was called—in one of the Western Isles. In 1853, as the representative of the General Assembly of the Free Church, he revisited Cape Breton, and once more preached in his former sphere of consecrated memories. Again crowds pressed in from every side to hear him, and wherever he appeared he had triumphal processions. What cheered him most now was not, however, the present crowds; but rather the good news that the converts of the great revival under his previous ministry still stood true and sure. On his return to Scotland he was transferred to the parish of Stornoway in the Hebrides, where he continued to labor, with his old time intensity, until he died in 1868.

Mr. McLean was by far the most noted of these early divines, principally because of his evangelistic fervour, his remarkable personality, his dramatic actions on the public platform, his wonderful voice which, on such occasions, vibrated with emotion. If he had lived in St. Paul's time, he would have been one of the Apostle's most trusted lieutenants, and he would have been mentioned in the Epistles. The other ministers of his time were fully his equal in piety, pastoral ministrations,

spiritual devotion; while they excelled him in scholarship, business instinct, and talent for organization. While he used to be compared with John the Baptist, there was one respect in which the comparison failed. In the matter of clothing he differed much from the Baptist's camel-hair raiment and leathern girdle. Mr. McLean was always faultlessly attired with high collar and white stock, with snow-like shirt that shone out from his black vest and morning coat, and with shining cuffs and tall silk hat.

My task is completed. I have endeavoured to describe conditions and to present circumstances in the early days of Presbyterianism in Cape Breton, when the hearing of a preached Gospel was desired with as much avidity as the craving of a starved man for food. At that time these various conditions and circumstances made the people realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest thing in the world, and made them willing to suffer, toil, and sacrifice for it, yea lay down their lives, if necessary, in the cause. Does not the converse now 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 host, without proper and adequate exertion on our part to earn our spiritual living? Are we satisfied to build beautiful churches with stained-glass windows and, from cushioned or at least from exceedingly comfortable, pews to listen with dull ears and passive minds to a sermon that may not succeed in touching up, to a point of ignition, a single sin peculiar to the community? The questions are worthy the serious consideration of us all.