

AN OLD HOUSE IN ONTARIO

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THE manse—or rather the house which at one time served the purpose of a manse—holds many associations with the past. One of a group of detached houses which form a pleasant hamlet, within sight of the blue waters of Lake Ontario, it is surrounded in early summer with vivid green of grassland, and in winter with the white of glistening snows. Country, rolling and productive, encircles the settlement, becoming flowery in spring with apple-blossom and aflame in autumn with the crimson glory of maples.

Settlers, mostly prosperous farmers, have chosen this place of beauty for their retirement and leisure; or have found it a good business centre for exporting fish from the lakes, and canned vegetables and fruit from the surrounding farms. Their names would indicate Scottish, Irish or Dutch ancestors, who probably settled in Canada a century or more ago, some of them seeking religious freedom; some, the wherewithal to give their children a better chance in life; and others—United Empire Loyalists—the right to live under the British flag, rather than to remain in luxurious homes, farther south, at the time of the Revolution.

An old minister built this manse at his own expense for his retirement. In it he and his wife Sarah lived, and became the centre of much of the social life of the community. He often preached in the Presbyterian church, without salary, receiving from time to time gifts of money from the elders in appreciation of his services. During the summer months each year a university student was appointed to take duty, living at the manse, and studying with the old minister. The salary he received paid his college fees for the following year. "The student's room" still retains its name, although it is many years since it was so used. A record of the students, and of the texts chosen for their sermons, is still on a shelf in the study. As roads were blocked with snow in winter, and the church closed, services such as those of marriage and baptism were often solemnized at the manse, so that happy memories in the minds of older residents centre round it. The condition of the porch is evidence of this. If it were an ordinary porch, it would have been pulled down and replaced, but it is instead a monument to romance, for it was in its seclusion that one of the minister's nephews, from Stornoway, Scotland, proposed to the lady of his choice. The couple, after their marriage, built a

house within sight of it. "If you ever take it down, you must sell it to me," the grey-haired wife laughingly reminds the present owner, knowing that as long as she lives it will be allowed to remain.

Old letters, belonging to Sarah's family, show that they were written by her grand-father Matthew to his sons Huger and George. Mellow with age, they bear the dates 1822, 1823, 1824, and were sent from Tyrone, Ireland, to the son who had left for "British America" in 1821. Envelopes were not then used, but the letters were folded and fastened with wafers, taking many weeks to reach their destination, the postage being paid not by the sender but by the recipient. The writing of the letters is good, the subject matter paragraphed, but not punctuated, and the spelling here and there quaint and phonetically betraying the Irish brogue. In one, bearing the date Aug. 8th, 1822, he writes:

The scarcity that you heard of in Ireland was the effects of bad behaviour in the upper part of this Kingdom—They destroyed the crop—the upper part of the Kingdom is in dissatisfaction with the government rebelling against tyth and catholic against protestant—I have at present David Campbell weaving he is prentis for three years.

Later, Oct. 27th, 1823, heads a long letter, and we read:

I am waiting for your direction and I hope if you think the country will fit me that you will let me know what articles to take with me or if money is the best—I have redusement to three half-guineas and from the year sixteen it would take good attention to pay it as the product of the ground of every kind is very low and little to be made by tread (weaving) provesions will rise—Audrew B- went out to that country and has returned he likes the country verry well and has purchased within nine miles of little York (now Toronto) where there is a deal of aquintenses and intends to return nixt Spring if you see a convenient pleas have it prepared as there is nothing that would give me so much pleasure as to be settled together.

On April 8th, 1824, he again refers to the disturbed State of Ireland and writes:

A—was killed—he was interred on Sunday last in great pomp by the Orangemen there were no less than seventeen flags there was no such funeral seen in D—before.

In the same letter we find:

I have received two letters the packet letter was 3s 4d the ship letter 2s 6d do not consider the cost but write every opportunity.

Much fatherly advice runs through all, such as "Be careful what company you keep."

From these extracts we can understand the father of nine children planning to join his sons Hugh and George in "British America," as a way out of his difficulties. In 1824 he started with his wife and other children, four boys and three girls. Unfortunately he died on the voyage, before reaching the land of his dreams.

It is well known, however, that his wife after arriving bought land and proved to be a woman with the right pioneering spirit. Her six sons afterwards settled on lands of their own, and her daughters made good wives. Today, this generation of her descendants, hold responsible positions from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, not only in agriculture, but in commerce and in the professions.

Hugh, Sarah's father, to whom the letters from Ireland were written, settled near the shore of Lake Ontario, on part of the land formerly belonging to one John Stinson. An old deed preserved in the house begins, "George the Third, by the grace of God," and continues, "do give and grant unto John Stinson, late Captain of the King's Rangers...two thousand and fifty acres." At the end we find "entered with the auditors June 9th 1803." From the deed hangs a ponderous seal with the Royal Arms. This land, some of which Hugh bought, was mostly primeval forest, the haunt of wolves and other wild animals. Yet family tradition says that Hugh's wife, in her old age, looked back upon the time when she lived in a shack by Lake Ontario as a happy one, declaring that she liked the life in it better than in the larger and more modern home which she afterwards occupied.

The hand-weaving, to which Matthew had referred in his letters, was a useful craft among the early settlers. Carpets with multi-coloured stripes running through, and at present used in the old manse, were hand-woven in more recent years from the wool of sheep on surrounding farms.

The book-shelves in the study hold books such as a scholar of a century ago would gather round him; many in Greek, Latin and Hebrew. One, *The Practical Expositor* by John Guyse D.D., was printed in Edinburgh 1818, and *Dr. Reid's Hebrew Psalter* in Glasgow 1821. Others show dates between 1840 and 1870.

The copy of the *Shorter Catechism*, printed nearly a century ago in Glasgow, uses its cover space upon which to print the multiplication table, in this way giving attention to the mind, and incidentally revealing a spirit of economy.

Two volumes, *The Statutes of Canada*, published in Ottawa in 1860 and 1867, make, in the later volume, more entertaining

reading. Not in any way because of the statutes in ponderous legal phraseology, but because Sarah had successfully covered the *Statutes* by using it as a scrap book for useful cuttings from magazines and newspapers, carefully pasting them along the upper edge.

Instead of the reader being faced with page after page of "The British North America Act," he is refreshed by recipes some of which show Red Indian and French influence. 'Succotash' proves to be a dish of Indian corn and beans; 'Pamble-tot', a custard with which spices and grated potato are combined. Then follow, among others, recipes for the following:—French mode of Making Apple Butter; Cranberry Culture; Florida Lemon Pie; Tea-cakes; The Famous St. Charles Indian Bread. For ailments she kept remedies such as:—For a violent colic pain in the side; For a consumptive cough.

The work of pioneer women was varied and her collection included hints under the following headings:—House-painting; How to make Soap; French polish; How to clean carpets; Save the Rose-leaves; and How to do up shirt-bosoms. In these and in the hand-made quilts and hooked rugs about the house we have evidence of her practical mind. Many winter days must have been made more pleasant when two or three women met to work at the quilting, or at rugs for which they made their own designs and in which the maple leaf and rose were most favoured.

But as well as being domesticated we find in the Statute Book, cuttings of poems and prose which reveal a more sentimental side. She had kept,

Marriage is the chief end of women and only an incident for men. Ambitious parents scheme to make brilliant matches for their daughters as they scheme to gain civic honors for their sons. "Old maid," is dreadful; "Old bachelor," jolly—Marriage is much more necessary for men than for women—without women society rushes down-hill. Did you ever see an old maid who could not take care of herself, or an old bachelor who could? (American paper).

Another cutting carries us away from the legal matter of the Statute book to a pleasing scene:—

The Parsonage. We noticed with delight in Great Britain that among the warmest devotees of horticulture and rural taste generally are the country clergymen. Their homes are always pictures of comfort, snugness and beauty, and these exercise a more powerful influence in disseminating a love of rural life among the agricultural population than the castles and mansions of the great proprietors. (Downing in Horticulturist.)

She had kept, too, one which seems in keeping with the old manse, its letters, deeds, and books.

The Charm of an Old House. I love old houses best (says Southey) for the sake of odd closets and cupboards and good thick walls that don't let the wind blow in—and chimney-pieces with the date of the year carved above them—The most delightful associations that ever made me feel, and think and fall dreaming, are elicited by old buildings—not absolute ruins, but in a state of decline.

We echo back from the old house by a Canadian Lake, “I love old houses best.”