

The Canadianizing of Sam MacPhail

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No.V.—Sam's Brush With the U. S. Customs.

It is true that Sam was quickly getting into the way of the country; but, every day, he was still running up against conditions that were new and puzzling to him. Jim, as had been his policy from the start, left him to work his way out of these, or round them, as he might consider best.

One evening we were sitting in our bedroom, lazily wiling away the time. I was tinkling on a mandoline; Jim was lying full length on top of his bed endeavoring to get underneath the allegorical 'clothes' of 'Sartor Resartus'; while Sam was dreamily whistling 'The Laird O' Cockpen.'

At last Jim tossed aside his book impatiently.

"Where are we going during the week-end holiday that is coming?" he asked.

My mandoline was laid aside and Sam stopped whistling.

After considerable discussion between Jim and me, we decided to take a trip to Seattle, Washington. At the mention of the name of that city, Sam perked up.

"Man," he asked, "is it a very expensive jaunt?"

Jim told him what it would probably cost.

"Do you ken—I think I'll gang wi' ye. There's a chap in Seattle o' the name o' Donald McTavish. He used to bide in Auchtertery. My mother's aunt's cousin was his grandfather . . ."

"Wait a minute, Sam," shouted Jim, sitting up and scratching his head, "wait till I dope out that relationship."

After an interval of deep thought, Jim lay back. "No," he exclaimed, "it's too much for me. Go on Sam."

"Weel—you see—we're kind o' distant relatives and it would be real nice to pay the chap an unexpected visit."

We made what little arrangements were necessary, then we started in to coach Sam on how to act when passing the American Customs Officer who would examine him on the Canadian side before he got aboard. But Sam treated our advice as more or less of a joke, having had his suspicions on previous occasions that we sometimes tried to poke fun at his expense.

"When a Britisher has been six months in Canada, Sam," said Jim, "he becomes a full-fledged Canadian. Now, U.S.A. Customs Officers are supposed to allow Canadians, with return tickets through on the nod. But they seem to be privileged to ask a bunch of tom-fool questions from people of any other nationality. So—don't forget—when he asks you, say you are a Canadian. Spit it out in the aggressive, determined way that a real, live, Western Canadian would; then, bite your tongue and remain dumb."

When our extended week-end holiday came round, we started out, cheerful and hilarious, with Sam tagging on as frisky as a young colt. At the city wharf we booked through tickets to Seattle, with stop-over privileges at Victoria.

The next afternoon, after a run round British Columbia's capital, when we presented ourselves at the gangway of the Seattle-bound steamer at the Victoria Wharf, we found ourselves among an unusually large number of intending passengers. Jim and I reached the U.S.A. official together. Sam, who had got separated from us in the crowd, was somewhere in the rear.

"Of what nationality are you?" was the question put to us.

"Canadian," we replied.

The officer glanced at our tickets, handed them back to us and passed us down the gangway.

"Let's wait for Sam," I said to Jim.

"Oh!—he'll be all right. He'll be down in a minute.

We went along the deck, checked our baggage with the baggage clerk below and were up on deck again ere we gave any serious thought to Sam.

By that time, it was too late. We searched everywhere but could find no trace of him, high and low on the boat, from gangway to engine-room, without success.

As time wore on, Jim began to call Sam, in the latter's absence, all the idiots and fools he could think of; but, for all that, I could see he was just a little anxious and had thoughts of going back ashore.

However, a few seconds before sailing time, we were greatly relieved to see Sam coming our way, but we were also astonished at his nervous and physical condition. He came shouldering along the alleyways, flushed, perspiring and speechless with a terrible rage. For a long time we could not get anything out of him. In fact, it was three or four weeks after the holiday was over that we managed to piece the whole story together.

When Sam was stopped at the gangway, the United States Customs Officer asked the usual question: "Of what nationality are you?"

"I'm a Canadian, of coorse," replied Sam in his most confident tones. The officer laughed. Sam looked at him indignantly.

"What! Canadian—with a brogue like that?" asked the officer.

"Ay—Canadian was what I said," answered Sam. And it says very little for your powers o' observation, when you don't ken the difference between a brogue and a guid Scotch accent."

"Where were you born?" asked the officer sourly.

"Where do you think?—Auchtertery, of coorse."

Sam, in his annoyance, had, for the moment, forgotten all Jim's instructions as to keeping as mum as possible.

"How long have you been in Canada?"

"Oh! a guid long while."

"How long?"

Six months come next Saturday," said Sam, getting more and more ruffled but scorning a lie.

"What is your name? What is your occupation? Why are you going to Seattle? How long do you intend remaining in the United States?" were the questions next showered on him.

"Look here, my mannie!" replied Sam angrily, "do you take me for an Autobiography or a Who's Who? You've no right to ask me such impudent questions. I'm a Scotch, Auchtertery-born Canadian subject, and I'm prood o' it. There's no a man on the boat there who can claim to be a truer Canadian than I am. I ha'e my return ticket for Seattle; and it's paid for. I'm workin' in Canada, and I wouldna bide awa' frae it for half-a-dozen United States. My twa frien's are on board. You passed them—and others forby—when they said they were Canadians. You got the same answer frae me and it's the truth I telt ye; yet you poke, poke at me wi' your questions as if you were takin' a census."

Sam, as he continued, began to remember part of Jim's coaching.

"That is a Canadian boat, and it is sittin' in Canadian waters. You are on Canadian land and you have no legal standing in this country. Seattle is the place for you and your questions, my mannie—no' here in Canada. Let me by!"