

THE STRANGE OFFICER AND THE SACRAMENT

A Story of the War as Told by Rev. H. S. Osborne, B. A., B. D., in Young People's Monthly.

"We were fairly fagged out, all of us, after a heavy day of it. One by one we scraped the thick, clinging mud off our boots as best we could, mounted the shaky stairs, and took our places at the mess-table. It was a door resting on biscuit boxes, but we ate what lay on it ready for us as thankfully as if it had been polished mahogany covered with the whitest damask cloth. The soup cheered us up a bit, but Geoffrey's death lay heavy on our hearts.

"Why is it, we said to ourselves, that the best are taken and we rotters left? The other day the General (Brightest and best of the sons of the morning) always sings away in my mind when I think of him, and now Geoffrey! We buried him in the little cemetery by the riverside, in a coffin I saw the Brigadier turn away as he blew his nose, with his handkerchief about his eyes. I know I sobbed, and wasn't ashamed of it. That was why we were so silent.

"The colored cartoons from La Vie Parisienne that decorated the walls irritated me. What had we to do with Demi-mondaines at a time like this—or indeed, as Britishers, at any time.

"The smashed windows were covered with some stuff or other that the orderly had picked out of the debris of the downstairs room. It flapped to and fro in the wind. The candles flamed unsteadily in their bottles on the table. The wine stood untouched before us, and the whiskey-bottle, though on the table too, had not been moved. The orderly was trying to get a

fire going in the grate; a fire of parquet floor blocks from the ruined school next door. It was frightfully draughty, and through a shell-hole in one wall came the shrill gleams of the Viceroy lights as they rose and fell over the trenches. There was an extraordinary silence, broken by nothing louder than the crack of a rifle now and then and the sibilant noises of the wind.

"The orderly had got the fire going and was clearing away our plates and things when a step upon the stairs turned my eyes to the door. It opened and an officer came in. We all stood up, I don't know why, and he held out his hand and told us to carry on. The orderly was just removing the bread and the wine bottle when he said: 'Just a minute, orderly!' The man put the bread and the claret back on the table. The officer took a box that was in the corner by the fire, and drawing it out, sat down upon it. He put his head in his hands, and although not one of us knew him, we asked no questions. We were all silent as the grave where Geoffrey lay. But the silence was inexpressibly sweet. Suddenly he stood up and looked at us.

"We must cheer up," he said. "After all, it's a day's sacrifice. It's a day of testing. He gave a faint gesture with his hands as he spoke, and I saw a great scar in the middle of each one of them. In the light I thought I saw blood, and started involuntarily. 'You're wounded, Sir!' I exclaimed. He put his hands behind his back as though to warm them. 'That was long ago,' he answered, 'but whenever one of them falls, I feel the pain.'

"When Geoffrey fell, he went on 'I knew how you fellows would all feel it. He got up, lifted the box, and drew it up to the table. 'Geoffrey's death,' he pursued, 'was a sacrifice. Geoffrey was the only child left to his parents. Yet they aren't repining. They are wondering why, but they are satisfied that it was right for him to die. After all, they are proving that they are the seed of Abraham.'

"We wondered what he meant, for our Scripture was rusty. Geoffrey gave up his job at G.H.Q. simply because his spirit wouldn't let him be away from the front, although he knew well that he was the only one of the original officers left, and that barring miracles his turn must come. The General too (how was it that he divined our thoughts, because he was not one of ours?), he has asked if he might come along and extricate things over there, though his division was resting at the time. It is a day of sacrifice, and the beginning of greater troubles. England, he added after a pause, 'doesn't really understand. She doesn't remember the lessons of the past. So many of her teachers have been blind. They have forgotten their history, and they worship they know not what. For them 'The Lord' is a term with none of the definite and militant meaning which it had to those of old.

"Christ," he pursued, and we were all listening with intentness, 'did not take the sword, because it was not the day or the time for it.

"He stopped and asked me for the bread. I passed it to him on the plate, and, feeling ashamed that I hadn't thought of it before, asked him if he were hungry, adding 'It's been so thoughtless.' He checked me with a glance. The Major stretched his hand out for the wine-bottle, but the strange officer turned and said in his wonderful voice: 'No, thanks, not for me, not yet.' Then he changed his tone a little and looking round on us all, he said: 'But I want you all to drink a little to cheer you up. After all where is the Faith today if it's not to be found among you? Come, let us all take a little bread together, and remember the day of agony when the Soldier Son died. Try to remember that He of Galilee was none other than the Lord of Hosts, the Lord strong and mighty in battle. Think upon the coming day when He shall come in power, when the graves that sprinkle all these plains shall

open and give up their ennobled and glorified dead, when the corrupt matter that made the shell of man shall at the great Call be made eternal and incorruptible.

"Come," and he took the bread, and in his strong but scarred hands broke it, passing it to each one of us. He got up himself to do it. Then he poured out the wine into a tumbler, and we took it one from the other and drank it silently. 'No need,' he said as he took the cup from the Major, 'for solemn feelings and suchlike is there? The thing is to go on to the end, however bitter it may be. The Major assented. 'By George, Sir,' he said, 'you've cheered me up no end. But won't you have a little wine yourself?' 'No,' he said, 'I'm under a vow on that head. Some day soon, however, we shall drink it together if'—and he paused—'if we endure to the end and overcome even as the Soldier Son overcame.'

"He got up and walked to the fire. He warmed his hands a minute, and then turned and walked round the room. He looked at the pictures on the wall, but didn't say a word or move a muscle of his face. Then the Major jumped up. 'I'm damn sorry, Sir,' he said, and he tore down all the Vie Parisienne cartoons. 'There's too much of this sort of thing, I know. And I know it's no good. He made a bundle of them and put it on the fire.

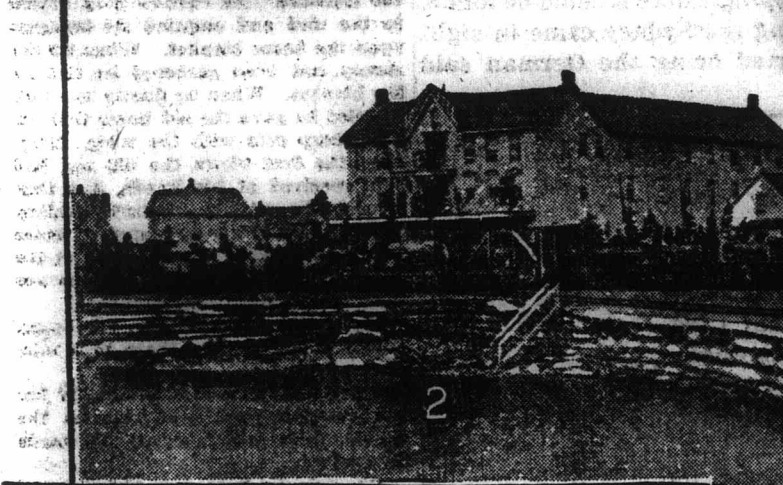
"The strange officer turned round, he said, 'and that is Duty,' as though he hadn't seen the Major's action at all. 'And if England does her duty she will purge out every offending thing and earn the meaning of the fellowship of saints.'

"His hand was reaching for the door-knob as he went on: 'And I'm sure that it will help you all to remember the death of the Son as you've done tonight, and that it will help you to follow His steps. Good-night to all of you.'

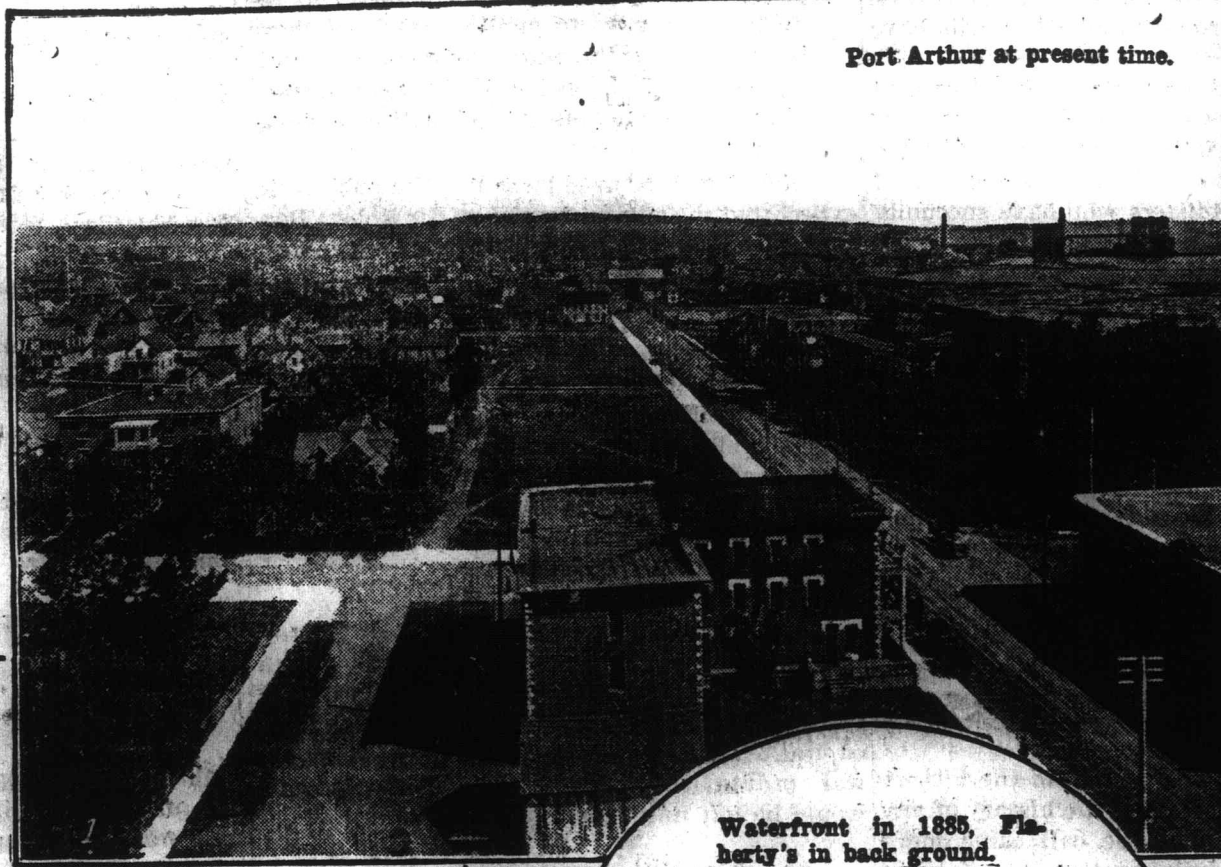
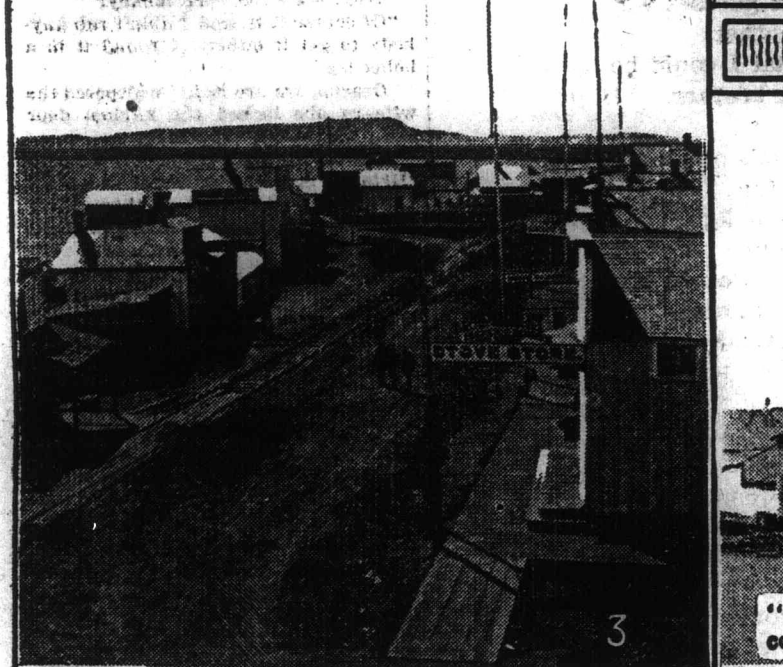
"And with this farewell he was gone, out into the wet and windy night."

AT FLAHERTY'S

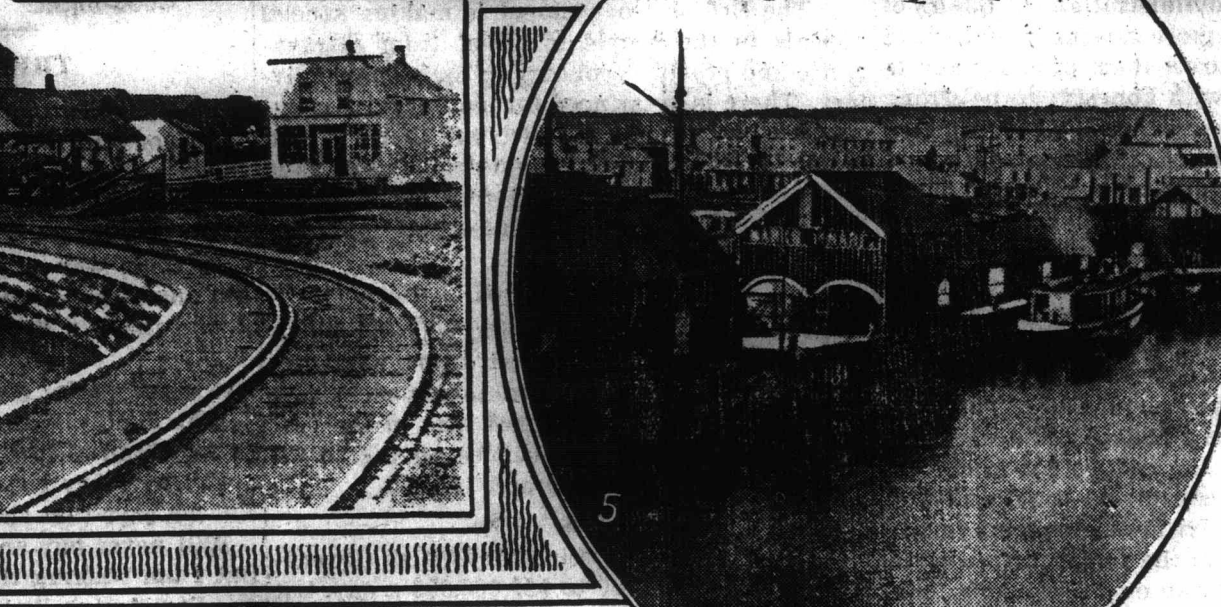
Lieut. Gov. MacDonald starting from Port Arthur for Winnipeg in 1879.



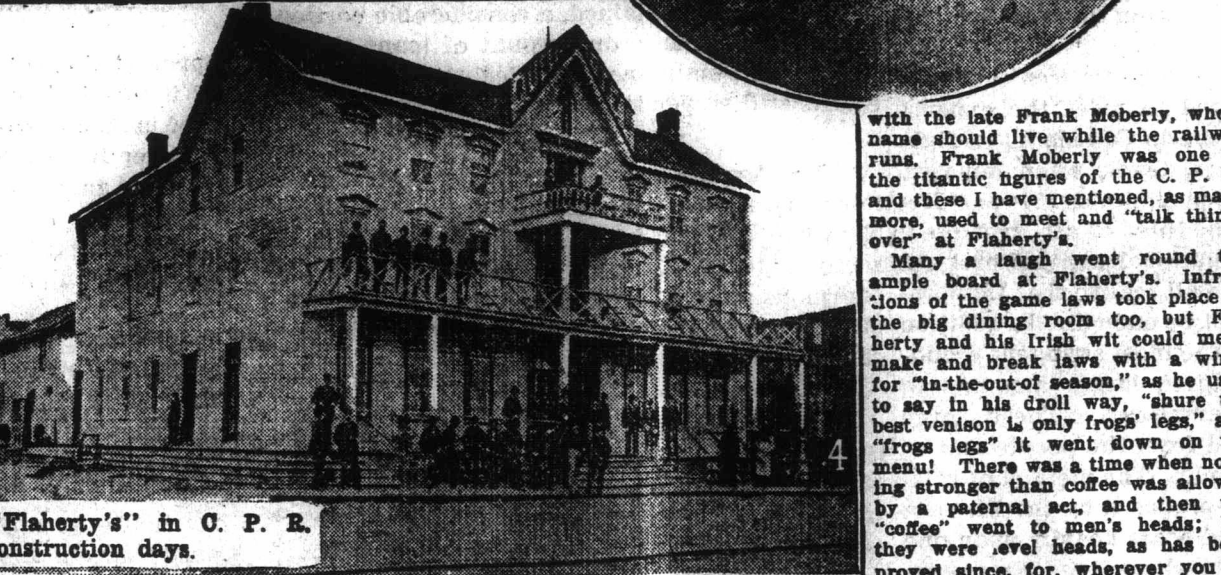
C. P. R. Port Arthur in its early days.



Waterfront in 1885, Flaherty's in back ground.



"Flaherty's" in C. P. R. construction days.



WHEN the Canadian Pacific Railway was but a promise unfulfilled, and at the time when "Section Fifteen" and "Section B" were live spots, and the Big Men of the early seventies gathered to Port Arthur, it was at "Flaherty's," Port Arthur, they met. Flaherty's door was big and wide and hospitably open at all times and seasons. Flaherty himself, big bodied, big minded, and big hearted, standing in the doorway of his popular hotel, used to wag his head and say: "They say the C. P. R. is going to make the town, but Flaherty is going to make the railway!" He did, he made the railway builders comfortable.

Flaherty's may not be mentioned without naming its popular mistress, a lady from Belfast, "one of the Bognies!" Flaherty used to say, proudly, for she it was who gave to "Prince Arthur's Landing" its first social stamp. The times were rough (as railway times ever are), but nothing was ever said or done at Fla-

herly's which wouldn't "pass" in any drawing room on the continent. Mrs. Flaherty was an exacting hostess; many a big fellow came into the house roaring like a lion—it being sheer exuberance of life—but in two seconds the biggest and roughest of them was reduced to a lamb-like bleat! What a "mother" the gentle voiced lady was to all the down-and-outs in those early days! They were "unattracted," under Mrs. Flaherty's smile, for no request was ever refused and empty pockets were housed as were the "sure pays" in those pioneer days.

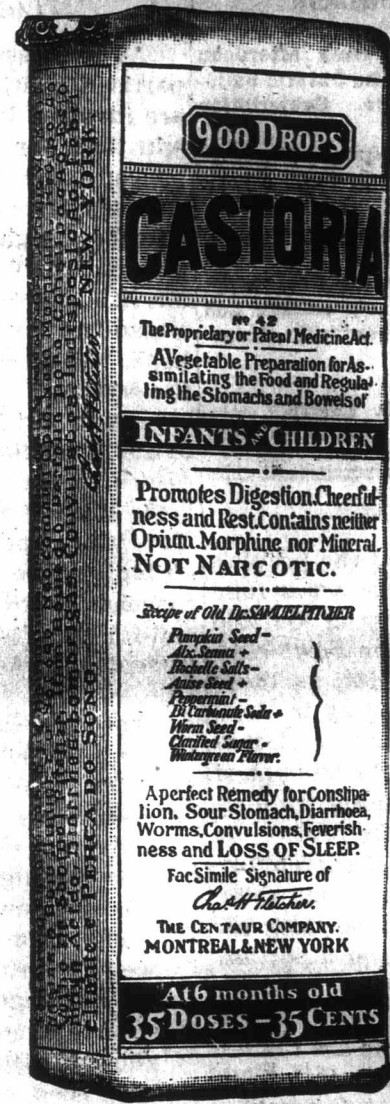
The town itself was a one-street, right down to the water's edge. "Jim Connors' mail" made the overland run to and from Duluth by dog, and I hope someone has kept a photograph of the old "Ontario Bank," which blocked the highway, and like the Catholic Church, was "banked" on a rock! D. F. Burk and "young Ray," now a distinguished citizen,

and financier of the new town, Port Arthur, were bursters of the bank, which was "the size of a minute," in those historic days. But "Flaherty's" hotel, "The Queens," it was called, was then the rendezvous of the Big Men who were building the Big Road. Not one of them, no matter where he be today, but will remember the "little room" of the hall where these gigantic minds met to discuss way and means of the work. That little room with its horse-hair covered seats was a sort of "House-of-Parliament" there some of the big deals undertaken were laid out, planned and shaped in that little room off the hall at Flaherty's, and during the solemn convalescence, no one could get past Mrs. Flaherty herself, who like a bird feeding a nest of her young, would keep off all and sundry, sending them to right and left, while the "millions" for the great work were "raised" in that little room facing the bay.

Outside in the hall, dressed in his Sunday best, "Thomas O'Hagan" was waiting for "news." Thomas O'Hagan being the editor of "The Sentinel," whose voice filled all the spaces between Toronto and Winnipeg in those early days. Gentlemen, do you recollect Thomas O'Hagan, who ran what he called "The biggest weekly in all Navvies America!" Well, if some were to uproot old files of "The Sentinel," I feel sure pickings for "Forty Years Ago" to-day might be found. It was at Flaherty's I first met the late Mr. Van Horne, even then a colossus of the day. Mr. Collingwood Schrieber too haunted Flaherty's. Marcus Smith and Jas. Mingay were large factors in the engineering work undertaken and "Big Roy" McLennan, with "Sam" Hazelwood, "Paddy" Purcell, Hugh Ryan and Alex. Livingston, the bridge specialist, and B. A. Stewart were also striking forms in the early seventies and the C. P. R. I remember seeing Mr. George Middleton coming in

with the late Frank Moberly, whose name should live while the railway man. Frank Moberly was one of the titanic figures of the C. P. R., and these I have mentioned, as many more, used to meet and "talk things over" at Flaherty's. Many a laugh went round the ample board at Flaherty's. Intrusions of the game laws took place in the big dining room too, but Flaherty and his Irish wit could meet, make and break laws with a wink, for "in-the-out-of-season," as he used to say in his droll way, "shure the best venison is only frogs' legs," and "frogs legs" it went down on the menu! There was a time when nothing stronger than coffee was allowed by a paternal act, and then the "coffee" went to men's heads; but they were level heads, as has been proved since, for, wherever you go and find men at the head of affairs generally, question them and you'll find they "worked on the C. P. R. in the seventies!"

Flaherty is no more. Its genial owner and master and host has been gathered to his forefathers, whom he used to boast "were kings in Ireland!" and who that has partaken of the hospitality at Flaherty's will deny that royalty descended with the line. Not you, nor I, who met at Flaherty's. Now-a-days when I go to Port Arthur, once Prince Arthur's Landing, and "Flaherty's," I find a grander, gayest hostel risen upon the old site. The eye is charged by changes, great changes, for the C. P. R. fulfilled its every promise and made a great city there, but memory brings back to mind the warm-hearted Flaherty himself and his smiling wife who to-day sleeps in the little cemetery beyond the town, where, if you go to a pretty green spot, you will find "Sacred to the memory of James and Elizabeth Flaherty, and a bunch of lately left blooms."



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Fac-Simile Signature of J. C. F. Flaherty

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