

LOCH LOMOND

By R. S. BOND



SHOULD you ask an Old Country Scotchman where Loch Lomond was located he would gaze at you in amazement. Even the youngest of his clan could answer that question and he could hardly comprehend a full grown man whose ignorance was so great as to necessitate this inquiry.

But after he had given a reply and turned away in disgust, were you to tap him on the shoulder and whisper in his ear that down in Nova Scotia, far back in the pines and hemlocks lay a glittering Loch Lomond of the New World, he would no doubt lose his equanimity at once. For a Highlander there can be but one Loch Lomond. To name another piece of water after that famed pool would be sacrilege.

Still, far down among those rustling pines Loch Lomond lays. The County map will show it, and for fifty years at least it has borne its honoured name. Probably not a dozen persons in the Province outside of the little villages nestling along its shores and snuggling in the neighbouring valleys, could tell you of its whereabouts. But the dwellers of these little villages know it and honour it as their forefathers honoured its Scottish namesake.

The villagers are all of Scotch decent. Some patriotic grandfather evidently gave the name of Loch Lomond to the sheet of water nestling at the foot of his farm, the same, perhaps, as gave their names to the villages of Cameron and Douglas. But there it lies.

On still moonlight evenings the light canoes of the lovers glide gracefully up and down its shores, while ever and anon a larger craft darts by driven forward by muscular arms, while from the stern where sits the piper of Douglas or of Cameron, the swirl of the pipes reechoes and rebeverates from the neighbouring hills. Even the lovers cease their cooings and listen with open mouths and sparkling eyes to the battle tunes of their forefathers.

Why is it that a Scotchman or Scotchwoman, old or young, wherever he or she may be, is magnetised by the shriek and wail of the pipes? To representatives of any other race there is no music in it, nor is there anything to appeal. But the eye of the Scot will sparkle, and his heart throb at the first uncanny howl from the air-filled sacks.

Douglas and Cameron, McPherson's Hill and Roderick Centre, pursued the even tenor of their way, practically unmolested. At times a Cameronite married a Douglasite, or a more adventurous wooer drove a full twenty miles once a week until he had won the heart and hand of a lassie from Roderick Centre. From time to time the news of a birth or of a death was carried from mouth to mouth, and once a commercial traveler, lost in a blinding storm while driving from Antigonish to Manley's store on the Everdale Road, in mistake took the grass-grown road leading between the pines, and four hours later drove down the rambling street of Douglas. Old women shut the doors and peeped from behind cambric curtains with staring eyes. Lassies in their 'teens and early twenties, with courage borne of youth and vigour ran to the fences and gazed rapturously at the modern equipment and the stylish clothing of the stranger, while the youth and strength of the village stood at their ploughs and frowned savagely at Annie's and Ethel's glances at the interloper became in their estimation more admiring than was called for.

It was the first time in the history of the youth of the village that a real city man had visited them. Visitors of any description from outside the valley were few. A logger or two in the winter, a hunter or two in the fall, and twice a year the village storekeeper from Putney were about all. The latter brought a stock of goods fitted to the requirements of the villagers.

The valley had two stores of its own. One at Douglas and one at Roderick Centre, the proprietors of which paid monthly visits to Antigonish and thus kept up their stock. Incidentally they furnished news from the outside world, and on each trip a few newspapers, perhaps not more than a week old, would be brought back.

Not over fifty miles from a thriving town, and not over thirty from a railroad it is hardly possible to imagine a place so antiquated. None but a Scotch settlement could have existed without more common connection with the outside world. But Douglas and Cameron, and Roderick Centre and

McPherson's Hill existed happily and were perfectly satisfied with their lot. What mattered it to them if their children grew up without a knowledge of algebra or geography? From father to son a gradually lessening education had been handed down, embracing enough reading and writing to suit their needs, and enough arithmetic to estimate how much money Willie must take to the store to procure two pounds of tea at 25 cents a pound. That was all they needed and that was all they got.

The day Carl Wagner lost himself in the blizzard was a memorable one for Douglas as well as for himself. He it was who caused the lassies to run to the gates, and the youths to gaze moodily at their favourites' too evident admiration. He it was who held the honour of being the first city bred man who had visited Douglas for a score of years, and he it was who was driven out of that self same quiet little village scarce twelve hours later, despised and feared by all but one of the villagers, and that one, snuggled closely in his arms, the belle of the Loch Lomond region.

Tired and wet Carl entered Douglas, and drawing up before the small general store, asked wearily to be directed to a hotel.

The tall, raw-boned yokel in the doorway looked at him in amazement.

"Hoot mon!" he replied. "There's no hotel in Douglas. We live at home here and ta'e our drap o' wuskey at the store in the evenings. But Alex. McLaughlin nae doubt can make room for you. He takes in Jim Boles from the village yonder," and he waved his great hand toward the distant Putney.

"Where does Mr. McLaughlin reside?" queried Carl.

"Where does he what?" gasped the countryman. "Reside."

"He don't reside stranger. He don't do nothing like that. He's a simple farmer like me. Be you a city chap after our wuskey?"

"No," returned Carl more cheerily, as the humour of the situation began to thrust itself upon his tired brain. "I am not a moon-shine inspector. I mean where does he live?"

The countryman breathed more easily. "Oh!" he replied. "He lives over yonder."

He pointed to a white painted cottage larger than its neighbours, with green shutters on its windows, and a broad green lawn studded with flower beds reaching to the road.

"Looks good enough for me" thought Carl as he strode up the path. "Far better than I ever imagined would be in this lost paradise. I wonder where I am, anyway. Never heard of this place in all my travels through the Province."

With true Scotch hospitality Alex. McLaughlin took the traveller into his home.

"You've got here in good time, stranger" he said, when greetings were over. "The young folks of the valley are coming in to-night for a dance."

"Good" ejaculated Carl.

His host looked him over doubtfully. "Tain't possible you could play a mouth organ or help Jennie entertain the crowd, be it?" he inquired. "Our Jennie is a singer" he added proudly "and if you could give us music on a mouth organ we'd cut a real swell to-night. Hughie Cameron'll bring the pipes and so'll Roderick McLeod, but they're too noisy for Jennie's voice."

Carl smiled as he endeavoured to imagine just what Jennie's voice would sound like to his cultured ears. "Raw, rough and riley, I suppose" he muttered, "and Jennie herself is, no doubt, a freckled, muscular gem of the farm."

"Ye ain't answered me about the mouth organ" said the farmer, breaking in on Carl's reverie. "Ha'e ye got one?"

"No, I have none," he replied, "and if I had I'm afraid I would make a poor showing. But I can do a few tricks to help entertain the company," he added as an afterthought.

"Tricks," replied McLaughlin. "That sounds good. What kind?" but just then the call to supper came and with a thankful sigh Carl followed his host into a room where bacon and hot scones filled the air with odours that immediately took away thoughts of mouth organs or tricks of any kind.

Across the table sat Jennie—but not the raw-boned, freckled Jennie he had framed up in his imagination. Tanned she was to be sure, but a healthy red showed through the clear, smooth cheeks, demonstrating the benefits of pure air and a healthy life. The dark, inquisitive, sparkling eyes that looked at Carl from time to time, seemed

brighter far than any he had ever looked into. She smiled and laughed at his witticisms, and he excelled himself in his efforts to have the laugh repeated as frequently as possible.

"She is far above my expectations," he thought, long before the meal was over, and after supper he was delighted at the opportunity offered to help her crack the nuts and do the thousand and one little things necessary before the company came.

"They'll all be here from Douglas, and from Roderick Centre and Cameron too, you know," she confided, as she deftly fixed a centrepiece on the table, "and I've just got to have the best dance of the year."

"And it's going to be my best dance too, if you'll let me have the first waltz," replied Carl. "I can, can't I?" he pleaded, and she laughed as she gave consent.

"It will make Rod Douglas jealous," she said naively, "but we don't get a chance to dance with city men often, and I am going to act just terribly mean and do it. I wish I lived in the city, Mr. Wagner," she added. "What is it like, anyway?"

"It was a broad question and needed a lengthy reply, so that Carl deemed it advisable to seek the open air. And half an hour later the first guest, Rod Douglas by the way, came across them on the lawn, Carl laying at full length on the ground and Jennie listening to his wondrous tales with eager ears, as she sat in the old swing idly swaying to and fro. His eyes flashed fire almost as much as they did an hour later when he saw them lead the first march, but with true hospitality he greeted the intruder and joined the group where he served to throw a damper over the conversation.

It was almost midnight when supper was called, during which time Jennie sang. It was something to which Carl was not accustomed, this singing at meal-time, and it worried him for a moment, devising a plan whereby he could do justice both to the meal and to the entertainment. But when Jennie's throat gave forth the first chords, he forgot the tempting meal before him, forgot everything except that here in this forest primeval lived a songstress such as he had never heard.

He was still in the seventh heaven when his host touched him on the shoulder and told him the meal was over and if he would come in the other room they were ready to see him perform.

"I have told the boys all about your promise," he said, "so you can't back out. I don't know just what tricks you can do but we'll clear away a space big enough for you to jump or turn handsprings if you wish."

Carl looked at him in amazement at first, then broke into a laugh as he grasped the meaning.

"No, no, I am not an acrobat," he remonstrated. "I mean sleight-of-hand—this, you know"—and he deftly plucked a coin from McLaughlin's whisker.

"Hoot, mon," gasped that astonished individual as he backed away a step. "I didna' know I'd money there." He held out his hand for the coin, which he looked at curiously before putting in his pocket. "It'll be some of yon Jennie's capers, I'll warrant," he muttered, but nevertheless he stepped away a little farther from Carl.

"Mr. Wagner here has some tricks to show us," he said proudly. "I don't know just what they are, but no doubt ye'll like to see them."

Carl had been amazed that McLaughlin was so dubious about keeping near him after his innocent little pass, and it was several minutes before it finally dawned on him that in all probability these farmers had never seen or heard of sleight-of-hand. He did not realise the superstitious natures he had to deal with but laughed gleefully to himself as he thought of how he would wake up the Campbells, and Howards, the McLaughlins and the McLeods.

"I am not a wizard, gentlemen," he began, and wondered at the look of dread that came over the bronzed faces before him at the sound of the word. "I am just a common ordinary traveller," he continued, ignorant of the storm that he was raising, and showing his empty hands he stooped to the floor, gave a few passes, and arose with an egg between his fingers—a thin rubber one, for a matter of fact, whose interior contained a silk flag—but they did not know that.

Half a hundred necks craned forward, and gasps of astonishment came from every part of the room. Some of the women moved behind the men with a smile and even a few of the men furtively edged a little closer to the back of the room.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21.