

The Canadianizing of Sam MacPhail

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NO. 2—SAM ARRIVES IN THE WEST

Sam MacPhail arrived here in the west early one summer. Sam is a forty-second cousin to Jim, my companion, and he hails from Caithness.

Sam had been writing to Jim from the Old Country for about a year, with the final result that he landed among us.

We met him at the railway station. What an enormous size of a fellow we found him! We spotted him at once. It was impossible to miss him. He was wearing a Harris tweed suit. On top of the suit he had a heavy overcoat with a sprig of heather in the buttonhole.

We discovered later than Sam's underclothing was of the same heat-retaining qualities as his outer garments. In the matter of clothing, he seemed fully equipped for a Polar expedition.

It was a sweltering Saturday afternoon and he was in a positive lather of perspiration as he stood there, forlorn, on the platform, with stoutly-roped wooden box on one side of him and a heavy leather travelling bag on the other. An umbrella, and a walking-stick like a shepherd's crook, were stuck through the straps of his travelling bag.

Jim nudged me. "Bet you a dollar that's him!"

"Nothing doing," says I. "It looks too easy."

We went up to this big fellow and Jim accosted him.

"Is your name Sam MacPhail?"

Jim, of course, had never clapped eyes on his forty-second cousin before.

The poor, travel-tired individual jumped nervously and his left arm tightened as if his hand were closing over something in his overcoat pocket. It was, too, for we found, when we got him to our rooms, that he had a fully-loaded, five-chambered revolver there, for purposes of self-defence.

A moment later the stranger's eyes brightened. But back, once more, came that cautious look into them.

"Tell me first what they ca' you, and then I'll tell you my name," he said determinedly.

Jim laughed. "I'm Jim McDougall."

Still the big fellow seemed uncertain.

"If you're Jim McDougall, as you say you are,—then where does Sam McPhail come frae?"

"Auchtertory, Caithness," said Jim, still laughing.

"I'm Sam McPhail, a' richt," replied the satisfied Scot, as if he were repeating the Lord Prayer before the minister, at the Bible examination in Auchter-what-you-may-call-it.

Jim introduced me, and, as the big, honest chap gripped our hands, his eyes became moist. That queered Jim and me at once from poking any fun out of him.

"My,—I'm richt glad to meet ye. I was feart ye hadna gotten my telegram. Eh! but it's a warm day. I'm hot as bleezes.

"A chap that came back frae Canada telt my faither that Canada was a gey cauld place to leeve in. That chap was leein',—and that's a' about it."

After this speech, Sam drew back into himself, shyly.

When we got him to our rooms, we saw to his bodily comforts. He then informed us that he had some money on him that he would like to get rid of, if there happened to be a bank handy.

As the banks in Western Canada opened then for a few hours on Saturday evenings, we volunteered to escort him down to the city to one of them.

What a time we had with him! He had to go into a corner of that great institution and take off half his clothing before he got at his hoard, which amounted to ten pounds in gold. Every sovereign was by itself,—stitched in a flannel bandage sewn tightly round his middle. We had to rip up the sewing of the bandage with a pen-knife, then pick out the stitches and extract the sovereigns, one by one.

On the Monday morning after his arrival, Sam was up and out of the house at six o'clock, to look for work. He came back at night, dirty and tired, but as happy as a king. He had been working all day on the city sewers and had the promise of regular employment at three dollars a day.

"It's gey hard work," he commented, "but it's three times as muckle pay as I ever got in my life, so I'm going to stick to it till I get something better."

Sam never would come out with us at nights. He would write letters and read Old Country newspapers instead.

We tried hard to find out where he got his meals, for the place we lodged at did not furnish board, and all our meals had to be partaken of outside at some restaurant or another. Sam always put off our questioning.

One night I came home a bit earlier than usual, and, for a change, I took the path up the lane, intending to get into the house by the back door. When in the lane, who should I stumble on, but Sam, sitting on an empty box and doing his best to get outside of half-a-dozen dry buns which he had purchased for ten cents. He blushed when he saw he was discovered, but he was not a bit ashamed. He acknowledged quite openly that since his first meal at our expense on his arrival, he had eaten nothing else but a plate of porridge in the mornings and dry buns in the evenings.

He explained that he was anxious to save as much as he could when there was plenty of work going, as a body never knew what was before him.

That night we gave Sam a heart to heart talk on the false economy of being unkind to one's stomach, and Sam promised, then and there, that he would dine with us in future so long as we did not insist on him indulging in the little extravagances we sometimes felt like having.

Just a week later we overheard Mrs. Sands, our landlady, giving Sam a piece of her mind in the bathroom.

Like the most of Canadian landladies, Mrs. Sands hails from the same country as Sam does.

"It's no' the thing, and I'm no' goin' to have it," she was exclaiming. "I stand a lot, and I'm no' an interferin' woman,—nor a fault-finder. I give my roomers a lot o' liberty in the hoose, but I'm goin' to draw the line at lettin' them wash their dirty sox in the bathroom."

"But where am I to wash them?" asked Sam, innocently.

She looked at him as if she were ashamed of him for his ignorance.

"You hav'na been here long an' I ken you're no' up to the ways o' this country. Chinamen do the washin' here—no' young Christian men."

We peeped round the doorway and enjoyed the scene. There was Sam, standing looking down sheepishly, while she laid down the law, with her head wagging at him in great fashion.

Poor Mrs. Sands would have had a number of different kinds of fits had she gone into Sam's room. When she found him in the bathroom he had just reached the end of his washing. He had four strings rigged up, from one end of his room to the other, with streamers of wet shirts, drawers,