

THE QUEST OF THE BALLAD

will be remembered that old James Isaac Macdonald's home at the West River, which is one of the communities under discussion, literally teemed with ballads in the by-gone days of his youth. Many of the persons in this part of the country, seeing in me a brother Scot, were inclined to regard me with friendliness and confidence, and I had every opportunity of discovering ballads if there had been any to discover. I have just been speaking of the fact that the Scotch people nearer the sea-coast had given up ballad-singing when they found that they were sharing the pastime with a lower order of beings; but this explanation will not cover the case of the inland districts, where there are practically no people of French descent, or of any descent except Scotch.

The earlier settlers in these districts were not a very sober or God-fearing people. They had no ministers and no religious services during the first years of their settlement, and they were, on the whole, much more inclined to the pleasures of the fiddle and the rum-keg than to the more sober comforts of religion. An admirable account of these early settlers is given by the late Rev. George Patterson, in his "History of the County of Pictou," and I shall quote from his book a brief passage in which he himself is quoting from the diary of Dr. McGregor, the first minister who appeared in that part of the country. Dr. McGregor was sent out, in 1786, by the Synod of Scotland, and his first religious service, which was held "in Squire Patterson's barn," he thus describes:

The Squire gave orders to lay slabs and planks in his barn for seats to the congregation; and before eleven o'clock next morning I saw the people gathering to hear the Gospel from the lips of a stranger who felt few of its