

## Our Contributors.

### A Church Service of the Past.

BY GEO. MACARTHUR, B. A.

The passing away of Highland communion service is, to those who had the joy of being present at and taking a part in them, fraught with a melancholy interest. It was doubtless an old fashioned method of celebrating our Saviour's dying love. It meant time, trouble, and expense, and as might be expected was often a time of genuine revival when God's spirit operated mightily upon the hearts of his people. They were in fact great events in Highland parishes, events I looked forward to with unmingled pleasure both by the young and the old, the good and the bad. It was a time when a "spell" had fallen upon the community and when the devout were more upon their knees in prayer, the children more subdued and when the ungodly's mouth was held as by a bridle. How often I wish myself back again at one of those sweet communion seasons to hear old St. Paul's sung as described by Ralph Connor in "The Man from Glengarry" and to listen to those grand old sermons, delivered on those occasions with so much unction that the hearer was often moved to tears. But the wish is a vain one. These are scenes of the past. We will never see their like again. The congregational singing is gone; the divine unction of which the moderator of the Assembly spoke is no longer felt, and the rich experimental testimony of the "question day" is no longer heard.

It was on one of those blessed occasions I heard the story, I am about to relate. I was then a missionary in one of the Eastern townships in the Province of Quebec. In accordance with the prevailing custom I, with the surrounding ministers, was invited to the communion at L——, a Highland congregation about thirty miles from my own. The late Rev. Jno. Fraser of Indian Lands was "the minister from a distance." I knew him years before. It was he who baptized me. He was once my pastor. I admired him more than any minister I had ever heard. When but a lad I used to sit and watch him with the greatest interest toss his flaxen hair, twist his handkerchief almost to pieces, put his triumphant interrogatories, and when the climax was reached, emphasize the point, with a stamp of his foot upon the pulpit floor. During the week I often found myself imitating those gestures. To be able to sway an audience as he did ought to satisfy the loftiest ambition, so I then thought, and I am not sure but the thought tended to incline me to the ministry.

On Saturday morning of the communion at L——, I rose early and went for a walk. The day was charming. On both sides of the winding road that led down to the old bridge that spanned the seething waters of the Chaudiere were ever-greens of many a kind. Rabbits crossed the road here and there. Birds sang their merry songs. The air was fragrant with the June flower and the clover on the sloping meadow "gave forth a goodly smell." I soon stood on the bridge. A wild scene was photographed upon my mind at that moment that can never be erased. Details to that picture are gone, but the bold, wild, rocky rushing, watery scene is still before my

mind as clearly as it if it were but yesterday, I worshiped the God of nature. My heart went forth in prayer to him who made the rough and the plain and who watched over the "forget-me-not" that found a foot-hold in the crevice of the rock by the side of the foaming river. I was really being prepared in the temple of the wild woods for serving him that day in his holy sanctuary. How much we lose by refusing to mingle with or failing to find nature in her primeval grandeur. I was entranced. All else was for the time being, forgotten. Suddenly my attention was diverted by the sound of human foot-steps. I turned in the direction from which the sounds emanated. It was my old friend and pastor Mr. Fraser. He too was taking a walk. His ruddy countenance wore an expression of sadness that made me wonder. I knew he was a botanist and geologist of no mean order and a great lover of such scenes as stood in full view at that moment. Whence the sadness, then? I drew the cause from him.

"Which way have you been this morning?" I said to him, not knowing exactly what to say for the feeling of awe and reverence which I always had in his presence in boyhood days remained with me even after I was years in the ministry.

"I was in the grave yard" he replied after a slight pause. "Yes; I was taking a look into God's acre." His voice trembled as he spoke. I saw a tender chord was touched and made to vibrate in a minor key. I knew a story was to be told but what it was I had not yet the remotest idea.

To break the silence that followed and to draw from him what I felt he had to say I asked if he had been alone in his walk.

"Alone?" said he, "yes, alone; I wanted no one with me when visiting the grave that holds the sacred dust of my old and saintly father in Christ, John Mack. He was a wonderful man," he went on to say—"a man who could not read the Bible but who was nevertheless capable of teaching Theology in any of our colleges. He could discuss every character in the book of Job and every point set forth by those characters from end to end of the book with the intelligence of a learned professor, yet he could not read the book; others read for him and his massive intellect seemed capable of retaining all that he heard of God's word. His faith was great in its simplicity; child-like trust was his."

"On one occasion his bread and money alike failed him, provisions were scarce. He spent hours laying the poverty stricken condition of his family before the Lord. For a time all was dark. At length it occurred to him that he should see the government land agent who would probably advance him a loan. This he thought was from the Lord. He told his wife so. She thought him a veritable simpleton. The Land Agent advanced you a loan indeed! By no means. John replied that the Lord never deceived him yet and that he was going to trust him still. No time was to be lost. The famine was sorely felt. Like Jacob's sons he must go and buy food but unlike them he had no beast of burden, neither had he any money. At the break of day he is on his way, as he thought in obedience to the divine will. He prays as he walks. He claims God's protection on the ground of filial relationship.

"I am thy child," he would say Thy Providence cannot fail if thou shouldest rain bread from heaven. God brought him from his native hills in Scotland—the land where his forefathers sleep—and made him to sojourn in this new land. He would not forsake him now. Then he sang to the plaintive notes of Coleshill.

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes  
From whence doth come mine aid;  
My safety cometh from the Lord  
Who heaven and earth hath made."

A walk of twelve miles over curoduroy roads, stoney paths, boggy swamps and rocky hills brought him to the nearest village in which was a store where the Post Office was kept. Here he sat down to rest. The postmaster kindly enquired of him whence he came and whither he went, and did he know one John MacKay at that place. "That is my name" said he, Ian Og MacKay is what they call me at home. "Then," said the postmaster, "there is a registered letter here for you." "Is there?" said he, "then be good enough to read it for me." The postmaster opened the letter and read as follows:

TO MR. JOHN MACKAY:

Dear Sir: Enclosed you will please find an extract minute of the Records of the Presbytery of Edinburgh setting forth that you have been appointed catechist for the district at L——, at a salary of £25 per annum which amount you will also find enclosed.

JOHN SMITH, Pres. Clk.

John's countenance fell. A feeling of shame and unworthiness crept over him. Appointed a poor ignorant man like me to such a sacred duty! It cannot be. There must be a mistake somewhere. Are you sure you are reading it correctly? And may there not be some other John MacKay in L——. He was assured that the letter was for him, that there was no other man of that name getting letters from this office. Then arousing himself he said, "It is the Lord's doing and I must not flee from it and be like Jonah." He took the money, bought several barrels of flour, engaged a team to bring them home; called his neighbors together for prayer and afterwards divided a large portion of the flour among the needy ones. This was the beginning of a very important revival at L——. John went to work in earnest. He entered upon the work of catechizing and holding prayer-meetings with great zeal. He associated with him two eminent elders, Murdock Mackenzie and Alexander Macleod. To each of these districts were assigned. The latter of these elders I had the pleasure of hearing on the "question" on Friday preceding the communion Sabbath. His language was classic and his exposition of the subject under discussion masterly. These men would be offended if they were called preachers yet they really did preach Christ and him crucified and as a result thereof there was a widespread revival among the people and as might be expected these elders were regarded with greater veneration than ministers of the gospel are among us. MacKay always had the largest meeting wherever he went and when any one called his attention to this his reply was, "If I were as faithful to their souls as the other elders are they would not flock to my meetings as they do." These elders had an excellent habit of meeting in the school-house every Wednesday afternoon. It was the time of their retreat. They shut the world out and went alone with God—met for prayer and conference and the mutual study of the word. A practise our Presbyters and sessions might adopt with profit.

It was during the progress of this revival