

The Canadianizing of Sam MacPhail

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No. 4—Sam Dabbles in Real Estate.

Sometimes, just before retiring to bed, when he wearied of reading Old Country newspapers, looking over old correspondence and photographs, and writing letters, Sam would knock timidly at our door and come in.

Though he seldom took part, he liked to listen to our arguments and discussions, apparently enjoying the words of profound wisdom regarding Canada and things Canadian that fell from the lips of old-timers such as Jim and I were.

Of course, at that particular period, we were talking, thinking, imbibing and dreaming,—Real Estate.

It was all Chinese to Sam for a while, but it was wonderful how quickly he assimilated the main idea:—"Buy at a price and sell quickly for a little more."

"It looks tae me just as bad and sinfu' as playin' cards for money," he ventured one night. "It's gamblin'."

We tried to explain to him that, if he drew such a hard and fast line everything under the sun could be condemned in the same way: eating and drinking on the chance that he would live for a few hours longer, would be gambling: working in a sewer at the risk of his life and limbs for the sake of making more money than he actually required for his immediate needs would be gambling: going to church and being good on chance of escaping eternal punishment: writing letters to Maggie despite the fact that steamers that carry mails sometimes go down, would be gambling. Everything was a gamble.

Sam drew back into himself thoughtfully and listened.

Soon after this Jim and I caught him figuring and figuring in a little notebook, leaning his head on his hand and looking speculatively into space. He began to make mysterious journeys to the outlying districts of the city.

We tried quietly to probe his secret, but he was the proverbial oyster; and, as it was really none of our business, we did not make further attempts to force his confidence.

One night, however, about eleven o'clock, he burst in on us and planted himself on the edge of my bed. He was flushed. His hands were everywhere at once and he seemed ill-at-ease. Once or twice he wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

"What's the mat—Sam?" shouted Jim. "You look as if Maggie had thrown you over?"

Sam rose and walked nervously up and down the room.

"My!—do you ken,—I've done it. It's the truth I'm tellin' you. I've done it,—I've done it," he repeated, with a very solemn face.

"Murder, robbery, marriage or suicide,—which?" I asked, laughing.

"I don't ken if I've done richt or wrang. I'm feart it's wrang, but I've done it and I'll ha'e tae abide by the consequences."

"Spit it out then, and you'll feel better," shouted Jim impatiently.

"I've bought a piece o' land:—a lot."

Jim and I yelled uproariously, causing Mrs. Sands to shout from her room below: "It's time all decent folks were in bed."

"Where is the lot, Sam?" we asked.

"In Tobermory Heights," he replied. "I bocht it there because the name sounded hame-like. At least, that was one o' the reasons. I thoct it micht bring me guid luck."

"But I'm no' just pleased I let that Real-estate Agent drag me intae the thing the way he did. He talked aboot his wife and bairns and hoo he would lose his job if he didna sell a

Tobermory Heights before the end o' the week. I just couldna refuse him."

"What did you pay for it?" asked the business-like Jim.

"A hundred dollars."

"And the terms?"

"Twenty-five dollars doon and the balance in six, twelve and eighteen months. I think hooever, I'll pay it richt oot noo and be done wi' it, for I hate owin' a man, even if it is in six twelve and eighteen months. It's ower long tae look ahead: a body micht be deid and buried."

"Pay fiddlesticks! Don't be a simp— Sam!" cried Jim. "Pay when you have to and keep the rest of your money in the bank until it's needed."

"Do you think I got a bargain?" asked Sam, his Scotch instinct for bargains getting the better of his conscience for a moment. "It looks real nice. There are fine trees on it, and ferns, and dockens, and yellow flo'ers."

"We'll tell you better about that when we see it," I said.

"Man!—it's terribly excitin' though," complained Sam. "I'm hot a' ower. My he'rt hasna stopped beatin' since I payed that Agent my twenty-five guid dollars and signed my name tae the Agreement for Sale,—or whatever they ca' that dagont document."

He started to walk the floor again.

"I hope I'll no' be up against it before the end o' the eighteen months."

Jim and I laughed at Sam's first Canadian expression.

He blushed. "You see, wi' buying real estate, I'm gettin' quite a Canadian," he remarked.

Nothing would please him but that we should go out the next evening, straight from business, and inspect his buy.

We found it an ordinary thirty-three feet by one hundred and twenty feet lot, sitting high and dry, and quite good value, as values went, for the hundred dollars Sam had contracted to pay for it.

While we were there, Sam seemed pleased as a kitten. He walked about his property and over it, pulling off dead ferns and brackens, picking up loose stones and throwing them aside.

"If you keep on doing that," said Jim, "You'll soon have no lot left."

"I like tae see things lookin' nice and tidy," answered Sam.

"You ought to bring out some soap and a pail of water,—and wash it," concluded Jim in sarcasm.

For weeks, in his spare time, Sam was hardly away from that property. One would almost have imagined that he was afraid it was going to run away or that someone was waiting a favorable opportunity to squat on it.

Sam used to go out and sit on it by the hour.

One evening, he brought home a pick and shovel.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Jim. "What are you up to now?"

"Oh!—I'm just goin' to clear the trees and things off that bit land o' mine."

"You're fond of work," said Jim. "You will be building a house on it next and bringing Maggie out from Auchtertery to live in it."

Sam blushed. "Hang the fear," he replied. "Maggie kens whaur she's weel off. But clearin' up the place will make it look better."

"Yes!—and someone else will reap the benefit when you sell," said Jim.