
CHAPTER XVII

THE ZORRA SETTLEMENT AND THE MACKAYS

*A homely folk,
They filled one glen,
With Highland dream and glee;
But now they're George's fighting men,
To win across the sea,
And find their graves where none may ken,
In a far countrie.*

THE Scottish settlers of Western Ontario were, for the most part, folk who had dared to come out from the Old Land because they willed to do so. They were, some of them, evicted tenants from strath and glen. They were, however, not, like the people of other Highland settlements, driven forth, or led by some Moses of colonisation, into a new and strange country, depending on a leader to bring them into their promised land of milk and honey. There were in all the counties sturdy Lowland settlers from Glasgow and the Clyde borders or other Lowland county places. Then there were Highlanders in groups, or mingled with Lowlanders and other folk not of the land-o'-cakes, southern men and women, who knew not the heather and loved not Robbie Burns.

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Chief among this great body of Scottish folk was the noted Highland settlement of the township of Zorra, in the county of Perth, in Western Ontario.

As early as 1820 two Scotsmen, brothers, named Angus and William Mackay, came there into the dense, uncleared wilderness, and started to make it their home. They were sturdy Highlanders from the far north of Scotland, and belonged to the great clan Mackay, whose land is historic Sutherlandshire. They cleared a bit of the forest and planted the ground, and fought the fight of the early pioneer with brave hearts and a faith in the future of their adopted land. Nearly ten years later one of the brothers, Angus, returned to Scotland and bore favourable witness concerning the new land in the northern Scottish shire of his fathers; and the following year returned to Canada, accompanied by his aged parents and a whole shipload of his fellow-shiremen.

Many of these were the former tenants of glens made over into sheep-walks by the middle farmers or better-class tenants, who were willing to rent the land from the landlord for a fair rental. Much has been written on this subject, and writers have waxed eloquent over what they have considered the brutal treatment of the evicted glensmen. But the truth was that the glens were overcrowded with a well-meaning, but often impracticable, people, who had for centuries depended on their lord or chief for livelihood. They had all been fighters or deerstalkers or cattle-drovers or

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fisher-folk. For farms there were none, seeing that nine-tenths of those regions were mountains and lochs, and the glens deep and narrow and only fit for a covert for deer or a place of ambush when besieged by an invading foe. They had been for centuries the children of a feudal system of clan-fealty and clan-service, where chief made war on chief, and his men followed at their leaders' beck and robbed their enemies and harried their lands. It was an age of fighting and open robbery, where now, under a democratic system, men steal and dispossess others of their worldly gear in a more subtle and crafty, though less noble, manner. It was an age when life itself was the price of failure, and the leader and his followers went down together to the last man. But after the first half of the eighteenth century, with the ending of the Jacobite wars, all of this was changed. The old order of clan foray against clan and Highland raids of the Lowlands was put down with an iron hand, and the great chiefs became civilised, or were in hiding or driven abroad, and the great mass of the Highlanders were left without any leaders or without any means of subsistence beyond deer-stealing or the making of illicit spirits. Then was the one great cure for all this found in the formation of the Highland Fencible regiments, whereby thousands of idle glensmen were made to perform great martial service for the Empire. But a great many more there were who were at a loss what to do. In the old days they were retainers on great chiefs or lords, who fed

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and clothed them in return for services performed. But when left to their own resources they knew not what to do; the men especially were impractical, not loving to cultivate the land, and with no knowledge of the art if they had cared to. To this great surplus population of Northern and Western Scotland the idea of emigration to the New World came as a godsend, and was, though at the time considered as a terrible hardship, a real blessing. Serious as was the pioneer life of the New World, they were thrown on their own resources, and it was a case of struggle or perish. They had no landlords to house and feed them, no factors to blame for their ills; they had to get up and put their own shoulders to the wheel and literally do or die.

Too much has been written in a prejudiced manner of the cruelty of the landlords by writers who have not made a complete study of the subject. It has been falsely represented that these people were driven off lands that they had owned or had tilled for centuries.

The truth is that in Scotland in those days the people no more owned the land than the people of Canada do to-day. Then, as now, the land belonged to the man who had the wealth to keep it up or own it. How much of the land of Canada to-day belongs to the people? Scotland was a small country with a dense population in places; but we are a small population in a vast territory, and yet how little, if any, of our millions on millions of acres of land is owned by the bulk of

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our people. The very descendants of those who were said to have left Scotland to become landowners in the New World own less of the land, and get less off it than their ancestors did in Scotland.

On the other hand, there was then, and is now, little good tillage land in many of the Scottish shires.

There was probably, in cases, cruelty on the part of landowners and factors ; but such cruelty and injustice exists in some form in Canada and the United States to-day. In the vicinity of the capital of Canada there are now large tracts of land held by speculators and others who refuse to sell it unless extravagant prices are paid, and which literally places the privilege of owning a portion of the soil of this country out of the power of many of our Canadian citizens.

But, be the reasons for their leaving Scotland what they may, those hardy Highlanders bade farewell to their straths and glens, and sailed to the westward, feeling that if their position was to be improved at all, they must seek homes abroad.

Those good Zorra pioneers were a fine and superior stock. They were, as has been said of the Pilgrim Fathers of New England, the sifted wheat, chosen men. They had a good education, or in its place a proper estimate of its value in the preparation of a life career. Wherever they settled there rose the walls of a schoolhouse ; and the few books brought into the wilderness were of a high standard and deeply valued. The names

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most common in this prominent Scottish settlement were those of Mackay, Sutherland, Morrison, Gordon, Murray, Bruce, Ross, McLean, McDonald, Gilchrist, Matheson, Fraser, Gunn, McKenzie, and Munro. Many bearing these names have gone forth from the pioneer community and made themselves prominent places in the life of our country and in that outside its borders. There has been a great group of distinguished Churchmen, scholars, financiers, and others who have made the Zorra community noted in the history of Canada.

Probably no Canadian community has made its influence felt over a wider sphere of action and effort than has the Zorra settlement and its adjoining groups of Scottish families.

It has been especially noted in the missionary world ; so much so, that it might be called a nesting-ground for preachers of the gospel. This has been owing largely to the fact that the men and women of Sutherland were, in the pioneer days of Canada, and before then in the Old Land, the most earnest, God-fearing element in the north of Scotland.

But scholarship, and literature, and the more worldly interests of life have had worthy followers in the sons of this the most distinctive Scottish settlement of Western Ontario. In connection with the history of such a settlement as this of Zorra a great lesson is taught Canadians ; and it is this, that we are liable to forget the great influence which heredity and the social influences of the Old Land have

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had on our whole community. It is true that the Scottish race has been a peculiarly strong, hard-headed, careful, cautious, and deep-thinking people. But much of this is the result of their peculiarly strong, deep nature, which has been influenced as perhaps that of no other people by a long-continued conservative training in a severely spiritual school. Religiously speaking, to know God inwardly and to keep His commandments has been the great impulse and national intent of the Scottish people; and grave as are their weaknesses, no people on earth have developed so deep and self-punishing, self-searching a conscience as have this people. This is true of both Highlanders and Lowlanders, and of that large community of Scottish folk who are a mixture of both.

The Rev. W. A. Mackay, in his interesting little work "Pioneer Life in Zorra, says: "No Zorra boy to-day is ashamed of either the porridge or the Catechism on which he was reared." He also adds: "The motto of the typical boy is 'Don't sleep when you ought to be awake; don't stay awake with eyes closed and hands folded; work with your hands; think with your head; and love with your heart; and never forget that character is capital.'" The best result of this creed of life has been such noted men as Arch-deacon Gody; the late Hon. James Sutherland; Rev. C. W. Gordon ("Ralph Connor"); and the distinguished Eastern missionary, "Formosa Mackay."

Like the Glengarry settlement, the Zorra community was, in its day, a little Highland Scotland

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in itself. But, as in the other, the Macdonell clan, the great Roman Catholic Highlander of the Western Isles predominated; so, in Zorra and its surrounding settlements, it was the great northern, Protestant, Presbyterian clan Mackay that formed the bulk of the population. It is remarkable, after all, how alike Highlanders are. Though separated in creed, both of these were fighting clans; and both produced great soldiers and "saints of God."

Strange to say, these two clans contributed the two most famous of the Scottish Fencible regiments. The first Lord Reay, the chief of the Clan Mackay, was the commander who made the Reay Regiment famous in the fighting annals of Europe. Lord Reay was one of the first baronets of New Scotland, and his uncle, Sir Robert Gordon, was Premier or First Baronet of Nova Scotia.

General Hugh Mackay of Scourie was William the Third's Captain-General of his Scottish forces, and met Claverhouse at Killiecrankie. A ballad of that day ran:—

Valiant Jockey's marched away
To fight the foe with brave Mackay.

Mackay of Scourie was a great Christian soldier; and without doubt he saved Scotland for William. He died afterwards in the action at Steenkirk fighting the French. The King attended his funeral, and when the body was laid in the grave said, "There he lies; and an honest man the world cannot produce." Comparing Mackay with another general who was also killed in the same action, William said: "Mackay served a

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higher Master, but the other served me with his soul."

In 1798 the Glengarry Fencibles and the Reay Fencibles were both ordered to Ireland to quell the rebellion there; which they did in a short time. It may not be known that a granddaughter of the commander of the Reay Regiment which went to Ireland, lived and died in Woodstock, and is buried in the Scottish graveyard there in the heart of the Zorra settlement of "fighting Mackays." She was a descendant of the great Lord Reay and of the family of Hugh of Scourie, his famous cousin. Her father-in-law and cousin was the last Mackay of the family who owned lands in Scourie.

Thus is the Zorra Mackay settlement, as is the Glengarry settlement with the great Macdonald chiefs, closely associated with the great Mackay names in Scotland's history and that of the Empire.

The Glengarry settlement was, as has been pointed out, closely associated with the Macdonald settlements in Prince Edward Island.

The Zorra settlement was also linked to the great Pictou settlement of Mackays, many of the latter of whom removed to Zorra from Nova Scotia on the decline of the shipbuilding trade.

The men of Zorra are now to be found scattered all over the Dominion, in the far west and middle west, and some in the republic to the south. But all are bearing witness to the splendid ideals and fighting qualities of the great race to which they belong.