
CHAPTER X

THE SCOTTISH COLONISER, LORD SELKIRK

THE name of Selkirk is that of a man who after a hundred years is coming to his own. A century has vindicated the name, character, motives, and influence of a great Scotsman—a nobleman, a coloniser, a patriot, and wise Empire-builder.

Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, belonged to the noble family of Douglas, which appears in different branches and under different titles in Scottish history.

The fifth Earl of Selkirk belonged to St. Mary's Isle, at the mouth of the Dee, which enters Solway Firth at the old town of Kirkcudbright. He was the youngest of seven sons, and had as a lad no hope of ever becoming Earl of Selkirk; but his sickly brothers faded away so soon that at the age of twenty-eight he inherited the title. Thinking before this he should have to make his own way in the world, young Douglas went to the University of Edinburgh and gained the acquaintance of a large number of Scotland's leading young men. He was a cotemporary and intimate friend of Sir Walter Scott. His fame as a student in

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the class-room has not come down to us ; but his sympathy, independence of view, charitable disposition, restlessness of temperament, breadth of interest, and public spirit have caused him to be remembered. He became, along with others, interested in the condition of the poor in Edinburgh and he took a part in alleviating their sad condition. He was particularly fond of his own country-people. In the summer months he for several years visited the Highlands in his native Scotland for the purpose of learning the Gaelic language, and this that he might know better how to make himself useful as a benefactor to them. He wrote articles on the condition of the poor and on the subject of national defence ; while he published a plan for uniting the people in defence of their country against the French, who were then engaged in the terrible Napoleonic wars. Lord Selkirk was born in 1771, and was at the time of Napoleon's progress and world-destroying campaign at the age of thirty. It was at this time that he was drawn into schemes on behalf of the poor, the unfortunate, and the homeless.

As a young man he was much interested in the cause of liberty in France, and like many of the youth of his time, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, favoured the revolutionists. But later the cruelty and violence of the leaders and their indiscriminate slaughter alienated his sympathies and turned him, as it did many others, against the revolutionary party.

On succeeding to his title and estate in 1799,

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Lord Selkirk was in a position to do something for humanity. Naturally having spent much time in the Highlands, he was led to think of the miseries there, brought on by the world-shaking Napoleon in the utter prostration of trade which prevailed. Many people of Highland descent, in Canada to-day, have heard the sad tale from their grandfathers of the "Highland Clearances"—meaning the great movement by which landlords in the north of Scotland withdrew their small holdings from the Highland crofters to make large sheep farms, which would return higher rentals. Poverty had been bad enough, but now to be driven off from their crofts and houses added that of homelessness, the result of cruelty and heartlessness, to their other miseries. These were but additional exemplifications of Burns's lines written a few years before this time: "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." The quaint Highland saying, that "a hundred smokes went up one chimney," but expressively stated in Gaelic that only one house stood where formerly there were a hundred.

In 1802, three years after Lord Selkirk had come to his Earldom, he is found writing a letter to the Secretary of State making a request that he might take a number of the suffering Highlanders and Irish people to the centre of the North American continent on the banks of the Red River. His mind had been turned to this region by reading Sir Alexander Mackenzie's newly-published "Voyages" and also by reports from other fur traders.

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This project the British Government did not favour; but after an extended visit to America in 1802 he planned to take out a colony of his own countrymen to Prince Edward Island, and also to settle a portion of land in the western part of Upper Canada. The settlers were from the Scottish shires of Ross, Argyll, and Inverness, and a few from the Island of Uist. In 1803 Lord Selkirk visited his colony on the coast of Prince Edward Island and succeeded in getting the settlers organised and located. Some eight hundred souls, carried out in three ships, made up these settlements, and Lord Selkirk soon brought order out of confusion and gave them their allotments.

His other settlement at Baldoon, on the banks of the St. Clair River in Upper Canada, was most unfortunate. The region was swampy, and the fever and ague prevalent in that district cut off the leader of the colony and most of the settlers. The letters received by the founder in Britain from the colonists in Baldoon were of the most distressing kind. While the Prince Edward Island settlement was successful that of Baldoon was a dismal failure.

Truly the benevolent nobleman began, from the first, to realise that his days were those of "trouble and sorrow." Lord Selkirk's energy and courage were shown by his offer made to the Upper Canada Government to build a main road from Amherstburg to Toronto (300 miles) for £40,000. This was a liberal offer, but was refused by the

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Government of that day, much to the temporary disadvantage of that part of the province.

After all these troubles and failures we find the persevering Scottish nobleman in 1805 writing a considerable volume of nearly three hundred pages on the subject of "Emigration," and giving in the appendix an account of his Prince Edward Island experiment. From a visit to the United States he gained a greater interest in the fortunes of the new settler. He saw how great an effort was necessary to induce British settlers to go to the British colonies instead of the United States. His ardent zeal indeed led him to strive to repatriate in Canada some of those who had gone to the States, and among his Baldoon settlers were some who had returned from that country.

In carrying out his projects Lord Selkirk was for a time in Montreal, where he came into touch with the fur traders and fur trade magnates of Canada. His rank led to much attention being paid him by these "Lords of the North," as Washington Irving called them. The picturesque departure of the voyageurs from Lachine, the festive gatherings of the partners, the glamour of the Beaver Club, whose members wore gold medals at their banquets bearing the manly motto, "Fortitude in distress," and the enthusiasm and success in their trade, appealed to his imagination.

On his return from America Lord Selkirk turned his active mind from colonising to the dangers of his country at the hands of the threatening Napoleon. The simile of Tennyson in representing

Napoleon as a bird of prey with "Europe-shadowing wings," though yet unmade, represented the shadow on the mind of Lord Selkirk from which he could not escape, even in this matter. His lordship was so constituted that he could not mope in a gloomy and helpless mood. His active and constructive mind worked out in 1807 a plan of defence for the British Isles. This plan involved the very principle which in an exaggerated form is the army system of Germany and France, and in a more modified form gives us the citizen-soldiery of Canada and Great Britain of to-day. Lord Selkirk first brought up his plan of defence in his place in the House of Lords and then in a brochure of some eighty pages, published in the following year. It was as follows : "Every young man between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five throughout Great Britain should be enrolled and completely trained to military discipline." He estimated that in the population of Great Britain and Ireland, then put down at eleven millions, upwards of six hundred thousand were between these ages and eligible for this purpose. The training would proceed in succession. For three months officers would train one-fourth of these within their districts, and so on with the second quarter, till all would have secured twelve weeks' drill in the year. Once a year a general assemblage would take place at a fixed time and the trained men be kept in form by the drill required. With due regard to the interests of the agriculturists, the beginning

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of summer would be selected as the time of general assemblage." This remarkable proposal, which was published again by his friends in 1857, was regarded as marvellously suited to the conditions of the time. On the publication of this scheme of National Defence Lord Selkirk was made a Fellow of the Royal Society.

The first decade of the nineteenth century seemed to be a time of great intellectual activity. Not only did Lord Selkirk publish his work on "Emigration" and that on "National Defence," but in 1806 he prepared a "Sketch of the Fur Trade." Two anonymous works are also attributed to him, and these show his sympathy and constructive ability. One of these was "On the Civilisation of the Indian in British America." This work bears no date, but has all the marks of the opinions which Lord Selkirk had. The other book was entitled "Observations on a Proposal for Forming a Society for the Civilisation and Improvement of the North American Indians within the British Boundary" (1807).

A plan is suggested in these pamphlets for the setting apart of a district for the Indians alone, and of establishing schools among them to teach the industrial arts as well as ordinary subjects of education. The writer also advocated in these Indian settlements *the total suppression of the liquor traffic*, which was doing great damage to the Indians. The provisions stated, it will be observed, are the very features of our present system of Indian reservations, industrial schools,

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and law for penalising a trader for selling or giving liquor to an Indian, all of which have been in vogue for one-third of a century in Western Canada and which have changed the Indian into a peaceful, industrious, educated, and useful member of Western life.

Another interesting fact of a different kind comes out in the life of Lord Selkirk. He was a student and in harmony with the views of his own family, being a Whig or Liberal in his politics. "His visits to France and the United States," however, he informs us, "caused him to change his mind in regard to Parliamentary reform and the extension of the franchise." He states that it was with regret he withdrew from a movement which in his earlier life he had entirely favoured. While we may regret such a position on the part of this broad-minded and open-hearted peer, yet we cannot fail to respect him for his candour, his thoughtfulness, and his honesty.

We have thus before us the picture of a great and large-hearted Scotsman, who was ambitious to perform great exploits and was desirous of helping his poorer fellow-countrymen in their emigration to North America. But as we trace his history and that of those whom he sought to assist, we shall be led to see that—

Only those are crowned and sainted
Who with grief have been acquainted.

We shall follow Lord Selkirk in the great emigration projects to the district now making up

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Western Canada, which have made his name one of world-wide fame.

As we follow the Scottish emigration to the New World we shall call attention to his life, and show how nobly he played his part.