

## CHAPTER VI

*A Closeup on Squalor*

During the month of July Tom MacKay took me along on many a trip of adventure in the enforcement of the N.S.T.A. One such trip was to Gairloch in the heart and hills of Pictou County. "As big as the church at Gairloch" had been an expression of the old people when they wanted to describe anything of great size. There on a hill it stood, majestic though weather beaten. What tales could be told of its sacraments in Gaelic and English. Not far away is Gairloch Lake nestling by the roadside. Through emigration the surrounding farms had been largely deserted and the manse had fallen into neglect with grass and weeds growing in its walk. A new minister Rev. D. MacKinnon from Cape Breton, had taken charge. Being a carpenter before he became a preacher, he set about repairing his home.

He had complained to Tom about the selling of beer by two sisters with several illegitimate children. In their childhood these sisters had been orphaned and had grown up neglected and the object of the lust of men. They lived in an old unpainted farmhouse with most of the cellar wall having fallen in.

Sometimes dances were held in the bare parlour and sordid affairs they must have been. On the day previous to one of these dances we pulled the raid. About fifty bottles of homebrew were secured as the house was searched. As we broke it the smell of the stuff made me retch. It was little use bringing the girls to trial as they had no money to pay a fine and to send them to jail would be to have left that unhappy brood to the care of the overseers of the poor. Nobody wanted that to happen.

During the search of the second floor on the back of an unpainted bedroom door in lead pencil was written a list of men's names with X's in front of them. I called one of the sisters and asked her for the explanation.

Said she, "My sister, Mary, died of consumption in this very room. That is the list of men who loved her and how often".

One of the interesting trips I had that summer was with Tom and Walter Weir to the Dover Picnic in Guysboro County. The Parish priest had complained to the Attorney-General about hooligans spoiling the affair for his people and he wanted protection. In those days no permanent police force was required in municipalities so Tom was notified to police the picnic.

This was the first extensive drive I had ever had into remote corners of Nova Scotia and in those days when the roads were just beginning to be opened for motor traffic the outing had a spice of adventure. We had dinner at Mulgrave then started the long drive across the rocky barren hills

over-looking the Strait of Canso. On the other side lay Cape Breton the storied island of romance. It was on those long trips that we all learned from one another so many songs, Gaelic and English, that we sang to pass the time. Tom would stop his car at some remote farmhouse, saying, "that's where Captain So-and-So lives. He is quite the smuggler. Let's give him a raid". Beyond getting a bottle of Scotch at one house that trip was barren of catches.

In the low second-floor attic of one house at Pirate Cove in an old trunk I found an eight-day clock made in the States around 1870. These clocks had been peddled around Nova Scotia and a home without one was something the same as a home today without a car. I bought the clock for four dollars, spent thirty on it to be put in shape and still have a great time-keeper and a beautiful clock. Twenty-four hour clocks were common but eight-day clocks were and are scarce.

The poverty of the people in those little villages along the coast was pitiful. Not so much squalor as to be seen in the towns but the children seemed to be under-nourished and tubercular. We took our time going down that wild stretch of coast getting into Canso in time for supper. We looked up political friends who gave us the "low down" on the picnic and the Trade. Canso is a cable town built on a point jutting out into the Atlantic and leaves a memory of a strong smell of fish. Along the rocky coast the ocean seems to brood over its next spell of anger when it will hurl its might against the gigantic rocks studding those inhospitable shores.

Next morning we started for Dover. Going back four miles on the highway we branched off for a seven mile drive over the bare rock to the little village where the picnic was being held. What infinite variety of scenery has Nova Scotia. The pleasant farmlands of Antigonish and Pictou seemed to be thousands of miles away. Here all was stark naked barren and terrible. Rocks the size of houses had been tossed about by some upheaval of Nature millions of years ago.

A few weather-beaten houses, a fish house on a wharf with some boats, lobster traps, a store, these along with the little white chapel on the hill, — that was Dover. Some years later the extension department of St. Francis Xavier University took the adult education of the village in hand and transformed its character. But when we were there the community had a hung-dog look. On a big rock near the harbour's mouth a seal was disporting himself. With my revolver I fired at him but his hoarse bark might have been a laugh at my marksmanship as he plunged into the Atlantic.

If the surroundings were inhospitable the hearts of the kind folk of the parish opened to us. In the basement of the chapel a great feast was spread but we didn't sit down to eat until the village bootlegger was raided. He

had in his possession some rum and a quantity of beer in readiness to liven up the boys. It would probably have led to a lot of fights later on.

The dancing platform was outdoors; that night boats arrived with a great crowd. The fiddler scraped away, dancers hooted and yelled, lovers sauntered amongst the shrubs and rocks as a big full moon came up out of the ocean throwing a gossamer veil of mystery over the whole scene. Towards eleven o'clock there being no signs of trouble, Tom took the bootlegger in his car to have him locked up in Canso, then we carefully felt our way back to the main road. It was an unusual and weird experience made laughable next morning when the trial was held before an old magistrate, stone deaf, who used a huge ear trumpet when listening to the evidence.

## CHAPTER VII

### *A Touch of Glamour*

One day when I was scouting around in my car I caught sight of my old friend A.J. Bannerman tripping along in his usual sprightly manner. I called to him but he had a worried air and I had to call again . . . asking him to "jump in and and tell me your troubles while we drive over Fraser's Mountain". There is a grand view from the top of this Cobequid hill where Prince Edward Island, Pictou Island and all those green patches of land that are scattered in Merigomish Harbour seem to lie at one's feet. Like the psalmist of old I have always felt that to the hills will I lift mine eyes from whence shall come mine aid.

A.J. told me of a falling lumber market, of stagnation in the overseas trade. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away", said A.J. "But from all accounts in the newspapers and common gossip you are getting into a position of affluence through rum. I told you long ago that rum was one of our great industries and laid the foundation of many a Nova Scotia fortune."

"Not much affluence about it, A.J. I've got a tough hide and have learned by past experience how to fight with my wits and what's more important I've got friends. Without them one can't get far in this game. And I've got to thank you for your cheery advice. It helped to get my feet on the road to some of the good things of life."

It's seldom one hear's thanks for advice and we appreciate it. By the way, did you try to catch the Queen yet?"

"No I haven't. She doesn't retail any smuggled goods locally and I'm not going out of my way looking for trouble. I can find plenty on my own doorstep".