

## AN OLDEN TIME HIGHLAND SUNDAY.

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IT was in an autumn of the early sixties of last century that I was on a visit to a Highland farm occupied by a relative whom, for convenience, I will call my uncle. It was a sheep farm up among the hills, though distant only about three miles from the king's highway. The house which was quite a substantial one stood on a small plateau or hillock at the foot of which began the level bottom of the glen. This level ground consisted in all of perhaps not more than about ten acres of arable land, bounded on the further side by a river which made its way from a lake, a corner of which could be seen some distance up the glen. Down the side of the hillock and quite close to the house flowed a noisy brook which supplied the household with water. On the slope of the hillock in front of the house there was a plot or garden in which grew cabbages, leeks, and onions, and close by there were some farm outbuildings and a fank or sheep-fold—quite a typical Highland farmstead.

There were hills on every side, and in the far distance, peeping up from the horizon, there were mountain peaks in sight which were already covered with snow. In one place not far from the house there were a few very old fir trees growing on the hillside, perhaps the survivals of an ancient forest, and a small birchwood near by was fast shedding its pale yellow leaves. There were signs of the approach of winter everywhere visible. A good roadway branching from the king's highway ran past the farm and on to a shooting lodge about two miles farther up the glen. There were cattle and horned black-faced sheep grazing here and there on the hillside. Such then, is the picture of my uncle's Highland farm that rises up before me, as the mind's eye gazes backwards across the lapse of many years.

On the small fields by the riverside grew some turnips and potatoes, and a scanty but precious harvest of oats, which had not yet been all secured. It was very true in this case that "he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." Harvest work was a fight with the weather, and sheaf after sheaf had to be carefully and laboriously secured as favouring gleams of sunshine and puffs of dry breezes made them ready for the stackyard. It was a very anxious work, this Highland harvest work, but on a bright and sunny day—and there were such days—it was a joy and delight, and six days of such honest toil made Sunday a beautiful and blessed day of rest.

Sunday morning had about it a delightful stillness and peace : none of the talk and noise of the ordinary week day morning. On waking and looking out at the windows, I saw the sun on the sky-line

struggling to shine through a thick haze. By then the maidservant and one of my girl cousins were quietly milking the cows, and my uncle himself was attending to various things that had to be done about horses and cattle in order to let his boys and the "lad," as the young labourer was called, have as long a rest in bed as possible. In due time, however, the whole household was astir, and the young people were out with towel and soap to perform their ablutions in the burn. There was a certain amount of etiquette observed about these ablutions, and I being a guest, was told to wash higher up the stream than the others, so that there might be no risk of my having to wash in water that had already been used by someone else. But there was no scarcity of clean, clear water for all of us, and our ablutions were performed with leisurely care and a good deal of lively and gladsome talk, although we knew quite well that there ought to be no such thing as frivolous talk and merry laughter on the Lord's Day. Meantime, the haze was gradually vanishing away, and the sun already high above the horizon was shining with all the promise of a perfect day. When we got back into the house there was a minute inspection from top to toe, from ears to finger nails, to see that we were clean enough to get into our Sunday clothes, though, by the way, I, being a visitor, had already been wearing my best clothes, and when the final inspection had been successfully passed, and we had got into our Sunday attire, I have no doubt we all felt duly impressed by a sense of the smartness of our appearance.

The next event was the breakfast, not in the kitchen with the maid servant, the lad and the shepherd as on ordinary week days, but in semi-state in the "room" as it was called—the state apartment of the house, crowded with furniture, with pictures on the wall, ornaments on the mantelpiece, two or three deer skins on the floor for rugs, and in the middle of it a substantial table. There was of course, the porridge and milk which was the ordinary everyday breakfast, but on Sunday it was followed by a cup of tea and delicious home baked scones and butter. The servant, the shepherd and the lad had a similar breakfast in the kitchen. On week days my uncle had family prayers only in the evening, but on Sunday he had prayers or "took the Book," as they used to say, in the morning as well, and after breakfast the whole household assembled in the "room" for that purpose. All very homely and very beautiful. The exclusive breakfast helped to cultivate a sense and feeling of family unity, while the simple and reverent act of worship duly impressed everyone with a sense of the sanctity of the day and the duty of keeping it holy unto the Lord.

After the "Book" came the final preparation for church. This, in the case of the young people was done with minute care; from the parting and brushing of hair to the knotting of shoe laces, for though the young people were often barefoot on week days, footwear was always necessary for church. In those days women still adorned themselves with crinolines, not so far as I can remember at their ordinary weekday work, but always on Sunday, and so it was necessary to practise the art of getting a wide crinoline gracefully into a narrow pew. To walk carelessly and thoughtlessly into a pew was to make the crinoline spring out and up behind in a way which might and sometimes

did cause a titter among the less serious of those who happened to notice it—naturally to the great annoyance of the poor blushing victim. And so the plan was to place two chairs back to back, at the width of a pew apart, and to walk between them with the crinoline pressed forward in front so as to leave none of it to rise or stand out behind. This exercise was carefully gone through over and over again so as to make it possible of performance in church as gracefully and as imperceptibly as possible.

The church was by the king's highway and the walk thither on this particular day was very delightful. The cloudless sky, the hills bathed in a flood of sunshine, the autumnal tints of the straggling trees on the hillside and along the banks of the river, the russet brown of the brackens, and the flow of the river which was the only sound that could be heard besides our own voices—all this together with the thought of the smartness of our own get-up, gave us, especially the younger members of our party, a sense of boundless delight. Needless to say that all Sundays on a Highland farm were not fine like this, but we are justified in enjoying the fine day whenever we can, and my uncle's delight was none the less, as he reflected that next morning the stooks of oats would probably be in a fit condition to be carted into the stack-yard. We arrived at the church in time for a good deal of talk and gossip with the friends who were gathering there before going into the church. As the time for the service to begin was drawing near, my uncle walked into the church and we all followed. Taking his stand at the end of the pew, he saw us all into our places in due order, a good, long pew-full, and then took his seat himself at the out end of it. The service began, I think, at 11 o'clock, first a Gaelic service, followed after an interval of about ten minutes by an English one, for which nearly the whole of the Gaelic congregation remained.

During the interval a good many more worshippers arrived, including a party from the shooting lodge and most of the shooting lodge servants, for His Lordship was a strict observer of Sunday, and liked to see as many as possible of his people at church. It was customary in those days for English worshippers, instead of kneeling down to repeat a brief silent prayer on entering church, to remain standing, hold their hat before their face and repeat a prayer into it before sitting down. This ceremony by the shooting lodge gentlemen was watched by us with great interest. I remember thinking the smart dresses and the white faces of the shooting lodge servants more beautiful than the homelier dresses and sunburnt faces of the native girls, some of whom, however, were dressed smartly enough.

Though my recollections of this, and other Highland services are entirely pleasant, yet I can remember that, from where I sat, I could look out through the open door on to a sunny hillside, and when my attention wandered away from the sermon, as it sometimes did, I could watch some sheep grazing on the hillside, and when there chanced to be a lull in the minister's voice I could hear the drowsy, monotonous sound of the river flowing past not very far from the church. Some of the women had sweets and smelling salts which they passed along their pew, while the men had snuff boxes which they handed round. This

was presumably to help them to keep awake during the sermon, for it was only natural that after walking in some cases from a distance of five or six miles on a warm day some of them should feel drowsy before the end of a long sermon, however interesting it might be.

When we got out we found that there was a carriage and pair waiting for the shooting lodge party and a brake for the servants. One or two farmers from a distance had come in gigs. My uncle received the last issue of the *Inverness Courier* from a neighbour with whom he shared it, and who always received it first because it was delivered at his house from the mail. On the way home we were joined the greater part of the way by a man, who was spending a holiday at the neighbouring inn, and who talked a great deal with my uncle. He was well and smartly groomed and sported a fine grey moustache which greatly took my fancy, as a moustache, especially by itself, was not often seen there in those days. We arrived home about four o'clock with a keen appetite to enjoy an excellent dinner of broth, venison, and fresh potatoes. Whether there was anything else or not I cannot now remember.

After dinner my uncle appeared to have settled down at all events for a time to the *Inverness Courier*, and whether the dinner things were washed and put away just then or not, I do not know. In any case my aunt soon assembled her family, including myself and also the maid-servant, for her Sunday school, which was held in the kitchen. There we all seated ourselves mostly on stools, silently and reverently, to be put through the Gaelic Shorter Catechism, which was not at all a trifling undertaking. Some of us could do no more than to repeat the answers after her, but she persevered Sunday after Sunday and year after year until all the 107 answers were known off by heart. The older members of the family were at school and were there taught the Catechism in English, and on Sunday they had to learn a portion of a psalm to be repeated at school the first thing on Monday morning. While the schoolchildren were busy with the preparation of this task, my aunt told the younger children a Bible story. After quite an hour of this valuable discipline and instruction, we were once more free, but being Sunday we had to keep quiet and to refrain from all ordinary play. The afternoon was very fine, but it was now getting late, and there was not much daylight left. However, we got together for a time in a quiet corner outside, and enjoyed ourselves by singing some of the hymns which, in those days, were usually taught at school.

Later in the day a party of servants, men and girls, arrived from the shooting lodge. They were taken into the "room" and there entertained to tea, a creamy cup of tea with buttered scones and crisp oat cakes. They came really to say good-bye; because the deer-stalking was now at an end and they were returning to London in the course of the week. His Lordship's servants, both male and female, were very nice and respectable people, and their visits were always welcome. My uncle talked with the men about the war in America, while we youngsters crowded round the girls and plied them vigorously with questions about London. One of the men was the French chef whose English we thought very funny. We were sorry when the time arrived for their departure. It was dark and the candles had long been lit for it was

well on in October, but there was a bright moon to lighten them on their way, and their walk of about two miles or so would probably be a pleasant one.

I don't know why people so often think that a Highland Sunday in former times was a dismal and miserable day. It was usually a very happy day. True, there were family restraints and discipline, and there were little puritan taboos which checked noisy and frivolous amusements, but how salutary for young people, and how beautiful and praiseworthy the efforts of parents, especially of the mother to bring up her children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and what hallowed memories and influences were often thus stored up for their moral and religious strengthening and guidance in after life. How restful and refreshing such a day was sure to prove for the coming toils and duties of the week.

A supper of creamy junket, followed by prayers, brought a delightful day to an end.

**DEVOTEES OF CHRIST.** By D. S. Batley. *C.E.Z.M.S.* 2s.

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Some of these have passed to their rest, others are still labouring for their Lord. Miss Batley has given us a delightful, well-illustrated volume. Out of his personal knowledge, Lord Halifax has written a charming and appreciative foreword. The book should stir many souls in devotion to the Lord. It deserves a wide circulation.

E. H.

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E. H.