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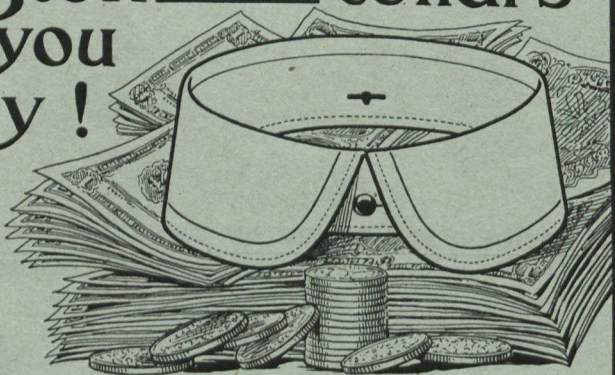
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THE ALPINE PATH

(Continued from page 5)

Story Girl" was Donald Montgomery, and Neil Campbell was David Murray, of Bedeque. The only embroidery I permitted myself in the telling of the tale was to give Donald a horse and cutter. In reality, what he had was a half-broken steer, hitched to a rude, old wood-sled, and it was with this romantic equipage that he hid him over to Richmond Bay to propose to Nancy!

My grandfather, Senator Montgomery, was the son of Donald and Nancy, and inherited his stately presence and handsome face from his mother. He married his first cousin, Annie Murray, of Bedeque, the daughter of David and Betsy. So that Nancy and Betsy were both my great-grandmothers. If Betsy were alive today, I have no doubt, she would be an ardent suffragette. The most advanced feminist could hardly spurn old conventions more effectually than she did when she proposed to David. I may add that I was always told that she and David were the happiest couple in the world.

It was from my mother's family—the Macneills—that I inherited my knack of writing and my literary tastes. John Macneill had come to Prince Edward Island in 1775; his family belonged to Argyleshire and had been adherents of the unfortunate Stuarts. Consequently, young Macneill found that a change of climate would probably be beneficial. Hector Macneill, a minor Scottish poet, was a cousin of his. He was the author of several beautiful and well-known lyrics, among them "Saw ye my wee thing, saw ye my ain thing," "I lo'e ne'er a laddie but one," and "Come under my plaidie"—the latter often and erroneously attributed to Burns.

John Macneill settled on a north-shore farm in Cavendish and had a family of twelve children, the oldest being William Macneill, my great-grandfather, commonly known as "Old Speaker Macneill." He was a very clever man, well educated for those times, and exercised a wide influence in provincial politics. He married Eliza Townsend, whose father was Captain John Townsend of the British Navy. His father, James Townsend, had received a grant of Prince Edward Island land from George III., which he called Park Corner, after the old family estate in England. Thither he came, bringing his wife. Bitterly homesick she was—rebelliously so. For weeks after her arrival she would not take off her bonnet, but walked the floor in it, imperiously demanding to be taken home. We children who heard the tale never wearied of speculating as to whether she took off her bonnet at night and put it on again in the morning, or whether she slept in it. But back home she could not go, so eventually she took off her bonnet and resigned herself to her fate. Very peacefully she sleeps in the little, old, family graveyard on the banks of the Lake of Shining Waters—in other words, Campbell's Pond at Park Corner. An old, red sandstone slab marks the spot where she and her husband lie, and on it is carved this moss-grown epitaph—one of the diffuse epitaphs of a generation that had time to carve such epitaphs and time to read them.

"To the memory of James Townsend, of Park Corner, Prince Edward Island. Also of Elizabeth, his wife. They emigrated from England to this Island, A.D. 1775, with two sons and three daughters, viz., John, James, Eliza, Rachel, and Mary. Their son John died in Antigua in the life time of his parents. His afflicted mother followed him into Eternity with patient resignation on the seventeenth day of April, 1795, in the 60th year of her age. And her disconsolate husband departed this life on the 25th day of December, 1806, in the 87th year of his age."

I wonder if any homesick dreams haunt Elizabeth Townsend's slumber of over a hundred years!

William and Eliza Macneill had a large family of which all the members possessed marked intellectual power. Their education consisted only in the scanty, occasional terms of the district school of those rude, early days; but, had circumstances been kinder, some of them would have climbed high. My grandfather, Alexander Macneill, was a man of strong and pure literary tastes, with a considerable knack of prose composition. My great-uncle, William Macneill, could write excellent satirical verse. But his older brother, James Macneill, was a born poet. He composed hundreds of poems, which he would sometimes recite to favoured persons. They were never written down, and not a line of them, so far as I know, is now extant. But I heard my grandfather repeat many of them, and they were real poetry, most of them being satirical or mock-heroic. They were witty, pointed, and dramatic. Uncle James was something of a "mute, inglorious" Burns. Circumstances compelled him to spend his life on a remote Prince Edward Island farm; had he had the advantages of education that are within reach of any school-boy today, I am convinced he would have been neither mute nor inglorious.

The "Aunt Mary Lawson," to whom I dedicated *The Story Girl*, was another daughter of William and Eliza Macneill. No story of my "career" would be complete without a tribute

to her, for she was one of the formative influences of my childhood. She was really quite the most wonderful woman in many respects that I have ever known. She had never had any educational advantages. But she had a naturally powerful mind, a keen intelligence, and a most remarkable memory which retained to the day of her death all that she had ever heard or read or seen. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and it was a treat to get Aunt Mary started on tales and recollections of her youth, and all the vivid doings and sayings of the folk in those young years of the Province. We were "chums," she and I, when she was in the seventies and I was in my teens. I cannot, in any words at my command, pay the debt I owe to Aunt Mary Lawson.

When I was twenty-one months old my mother died, in the old home at Cavendish, after a lingering illness. I distinctly remember seeing her in her coffin—it is my earliest memory. My father was standing by the casket holding me in his arms. I wore a little white dress of embroidered muslin, and Father was crying. Women were seated around the room, and I recall two in front of me on the sofa who were whispering to each other and looking pityingly at Father and me. Behind them the window was open, and green vines were trailing across it, while their shadows danced over the floor in a square of sunshine.

I looked down at Mother's dead face. It was a sweet face, albeit worn and wasted by months of suffering. My mother had been beautiful, and Death, so cruel in all else, had spared the delicate outline of feature, the long silken lashes brushing the hollow cheek, and the smooth masses of golden-brown hair.

I did not feel any sorrow, for I knew nothing of what it all meant. I was only vaguely troubled. Why was Mother so still? And why was Father crying? I reached down and laid my baby hand against Mother's cheek. Even yet I can feel the coldness of that touch. Somebody in the room sobbed and said, "Poor child." The chill of Mother's face had frightened me; I turned and put my arms appealingly about Father's neck and he kissed me. Comforted, I looked down again at the sweet, placid face as he carried me away. That one precious memory is all I have of the girlish mother who sleeps in the old burying-ground of Cavendish, lulled forever by the murmur of the sea.

I was brought up by my grandparents in the old Macneill Homestead in Cavendish. Cavendish is a farming settlement on the north shore of Prince Edward Island. It was eleven miles from a railway and twenty-four miles from the nearest town. It was settled in 1790 by three Scotch families—the Macneills, Simpsons, and Clarks. These families had inter-married to such an extent that it was necessary to be born or bred in Cavendish in order to know whom it was safe to criticize. I heard Aunt Mary Lawson once naively admit that "the Macneills and Simpsons always considered themselves a little better than the common run;" and there was a certain rather ill-natured local saying which was always being cast up to us of the clans by outsiders, "From the conceit of the Simpsons, the pride of the Macneills, and the vain-glory of the Clarks, good Lord deliver us." Whatever were their faults, they were loyal, clannish, upright, God-fearing folk, inheriting traditions of faith and simplicity and aspiration.

I spent my childhood and girlhood in an old-fashioned Cavendish farmhouse, surrounded by apple orchards. The first six years of my life are hazy in recollection. Here and there, a memory picture stands out in vivid colours. One of these was the wonderful moment when, I fondly supposed, I discovered the exact locality of Heaven.

ONE Sunday, when I could not have been more than four years old, I was in the old Clifton Church with Aunt Emily. I heard the minister say something about Heaven—that strange, mysterious place about which my only definite idea was that it was "where Mother had gone."

"Where is Heaven?" I whispered to Aunt Emily, although I knew well that whispering in church was an unpardonable sin. Aunt Emily did not commit it. Silently, gravely, she pointed upward. With the literal and implicit belief of childhood, I took it for granted that this meant that portion of Clifton Church which was above the ceiling. There was a little square hole in the ceiling. Why could we not go up through it and see Mother? This was a great puzzle to me. I resolved that when I grew bigger I would go to Clifton and find some means of getting up into Heaven and finding Mother. This belief and hope was a great, though secret, comfort to me for several years. Heaven was no remote, unattainable place—"some brilliant but distant shore." No, no! It was only ten miles away, in the attic of Clifton Church! Very, very sadly and slowly I surrendered that belief.

Hood wrote, in his charming *I Remember* that he was farther off from Heaven than when he was a boy. To me, too, the world seemed a colder, lonelier place when age and experience at length forced upon my reluctant seven-year-old consciousness the despairing conviction that Heaven