

PIONEER LIFE AMONG THE LOYALISTS IN
UPPER CANADA

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Cover art

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PIONEER LOG CABIN (From an old engraving.)

Pioneer Life Among the Loyalists in Upper Canada

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ILLUSTRATED

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PREFACE

To present a picture of the early settlements of Ontario and enter into the daily life of the pioneers is a most fascinating task. As we visit these historic districts and mingle with the descendants of the men and women who built the first log cabins in the forest, we imbibe the spirit of their simple life. Many of the old

landmarks recall the stories of strange experiences we have so often heard, and the presence of the very flesh and blood of the first actors in the drama of the long struggle in the wilderness makes the scene all the more realistic. We think we can discern in the honest faces and general demeanour of these living links in our history something which indicates a deep-rooted sense of citizenship and a consciousness of a responsibility in keeping inviolate the traditions of their ancestors.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to bring the reader into closer touch with the first settlers. Many excellent historical works have traced the development of our province and laid before us the achievements of our public men. In vain may we turn over volume after volume in our search for information concerning the evolution of the homestead, and the customs and peculiarities of the common folk of long ago.

For the most part the sources of my information have been original documents and interviews with old men and women, many of whom have since passed away. Even from such sources it is an easy matter to fall into error; but I have discarded what I feared was not trustworthy, and believe that I can confidently ask the reader to accept the general statements of facts as thoroughly reliable.

I wish to acknowledge the receipt of many valuable suggestions from the Honourable Mr. Justice Riddell of Osgoode Hall, Toronto, and Dr. James H. Coyne of St. Thomas. I am also deeply indebted to Dr. M. R. Morden of Adrian, Michigan; the late Peter Bristol of Napanee, and Elisha Ruttan of Adolphustown, for much useful information regarding the pioneers.

W. S. H.

Napanee, Ontario, December 1st, 1915.

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PIONEER LIFE AMONG THE LOYALISTS

CHAPTER I THE FIRST SETTLERS OF UPPER CANADA

One of the unexpected outcomes of the Revolutionary War was the effective settlement of what afterwards became known as Upper Canada. Up to that time the greater part of this rich territory was a wilderness, to which the white man had attached little value, except in respect to the part it played, through its chain of forts, in giving access to the great fur-producing tracts of the interior of the continent. Although the French governors had frequently advocated the introduction of settlers into this part of Canada, with a view to establishing the supremacy of France more securely upon the Great Lakes, very little had been accomplished in that direction.

The net result was a few military posts along the border and a French settlement in the neighbourhood of Detroit. The entire European population grouped about a few centres did not exceed 2,000. Throughout the rest of this territory, where now we find busy towns, thriving villages, and well-equipped farms, one might have travelled for weeks without meeting a human being, save, perhaps, a solitary trapper, with a small bundle of peltries upon his back.

That the rich farm lands of what is now the banner province of Canada were apparently so long overlooked might appear strange, if we do not bear in

mind that there was no shortage of territory well adapted to agricultural purposes on the Atlantic seaboard and on the lower St. Lawrence. It must also be remembered that the fur trade had for nearly two centuries held first place in the regard of the governing bodies of Canada, and that little care was bestowed upon the agricultural possibilities of the lands bordering upon the Upper St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes.

The manner in which the settlements were begun was more remarkable than the long delay in beginning them. In most instances, new territories have been opened up for settlement by a few hardy pioneers, whose numbers were added to, year after year; but here we have a whole colony, coming in as one body, taking up all the desirable lands in the front concessions of a score of townships.

The Loyalists were above the ordinary type of emigrants who, too frequently, having made a failure of life in their native surroundings, seek other fields in which to begin anew their struggle for existence. When the thirteen British colonies declared their independence, there were many thousands of their best citizens, men of means and influence, who looked upon the British flag as their best safe-guard of freedom and justice, and they declined to take up arms against their Motherland. Their loyalty brought down upon their heads the wrath of the leaders of the revolutionary movement. Their property was confiscated, some were thrown into prison, and, in a few instances, the death penalty was inflicted, for no other offence than their allegiance to the British Crown. In the face of such threatened dangers thousands rallied to the standard of the king, and many more, who for various reasons, did not enlist in the army, made no secret of their loyalty to their sovereign. When hostilities were concluded, the persecutions still continued, and the Loyalists found themselves little better than outcasts from their own homes. Giving up all hope of regaining their property or receiving compensation for their losses, they set about to seek new homes under the flag for which they had sacrificed so much. Thousands went to England, many more thousands emigrated to the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, and what is now New Brunswick, and large numbers were attracted to the rich farm lands in that territory which was afterwards known as Upper Canada.

In the autumn of 1783 a great body of emigrants sailed from New York, and, coming around through the Gulf of St. Lawrence, wintered at Sorel, in the present province of Quebec. In the following June they proceeded by means of flat-bottomed boats, to the land provided for them. By far the greater number settled in the new townships laid out, under instructions from Governor Haldimand, on the St. Lawrence, and as far west as the head of the Bay of Quinte. Only a few went farther west and settled in the neighbourhood of Niagara and Detroit.

During the next four years straggling bands of one or more families came by different routes to share the fortunes of the first great army of settlers, and

the strictest care was exercised by the authorities to see that none but those who had demonstrated their loyalty to the British cause were admitted to the new settlements.

The appellation "United Empire Loyalist" was not conferred indiscriminately upon all applicants, but was a "Mark of Honour" bestowed only upon those who had taken their stand for the unity of the Empire, and who had allied themselves with the Royalists before the Treaty of Separation in 1783. The terms of the proclamation creating this new Canadian aristocracy were broad enough to embrace practically all of the first settlers of 1784, and those who arrived during the succeeding four years.

In 1788 representations were made to the governor, Lord Dorchester, that there were across the border many relatives of the Loyalists, and other persons, who, although they had not joined the royal standard, were favourably disposed towards the British. With the view of securing a further body of desirable settlers, Lord Dorchester gave instructions that all applicants, who upon examination proved to be unexceptionable in their loyalty and good character, should be given certificates of location for lots of not more than two hundred acres to each: but upon the express condition that they should become *bona fide* settlers. Never were the portals of a new settlement more scrupulously guarded. None but the strong and determined would in any event venture north to hew out a home in the forest, and the government took good care that only those who were likely to become good citizens were admitted.

When, by the Constitutional Act of 1791, the separate provinces of Upper and Lower Canada were created, the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, threw the gate wide open and issued a proclamation inviting emigrants to enter the new province, without any adequate provision for enquiring into their loyalty or character. Among those responding to the governor's invitation were some who had actually borne arms against the king. Many of the Loyalists resented this lack of discrimination and complained that the favours, which should have been reserved for those only who had remained faithful in their allegiance to the king, were being showered upon his enemies.[#]

[#] *Life and Letters of the Honourable Richard Cartwright*, page 93.

These criticisms upon the character of the new-comers were, no doubt, well merited in some cases; but, whatever views they may have entertained during the stormy days of the revolution, they could have had only one object in coming to Canada, and that was to better their condition. They did not need to be told that

their interests were identical with those of the earlier settlers who had entered the country at a time when it was more difficult to gain admission. They were not entitled to receive the "Mark of Honour", but before many years had passed all differences had been forgotten and they and the Loyalists worked together for the common good.

[image]

Some Loyalist Household Articles

The main body of Loyalists, the settlers of 1784, to the number of about ten thousand, came in organized bands, some being remnants of the battalions that had been engaged in the war, and, in some cases, they were under the command of the same officers whom they had followed while upon active service. They, however, were not military organizations in the sense in which we view the term to-day; they were not fighting machines, but were bent upon a peaceful mission. In anticipation of their coming, the government surveyors had been busy for months in laying out the townships. The newcomers were experienced farmers, and understood well the advantages of a home upon the shores of a body of fresh water. In a country, where as yet there were no roads, the water afforded an easy means of communication by boats in the summer, and by sleds upon the ice in winter. They also looked forward to the future, when their flocks and herds, pasturing upon the cleared lands, could find abundance of water to drink without leaving their enclosures. Many of them had previously lived near to the bays, lakes, and rivers of their native States, and had learned to love the companionship of the water.

The longer one has lived upon the banks of a stream or the shores of a bay, the more loath is one to live amid surroundings of a different character. There is a charm about the presence of the water which baffles any effort to describe it. There is a sublime majesty about a mountain, a weird loneliness about a desert, an appealing mystery about a prairie, but a body of water, particularly a small navigable one, seems to comport with all one's moods.

It would have been difficult to convince some of our pious and sainted grandmothers that our lakes, bays, and rivers did not leave their moral effect upon those who lived along their shores. Who is so dead to the influences of his surroundings that he has not stood spell-bound upon the shore as the boisterous waves broke with an angry roar at his feet? No sooner has one wave spent its energy than another, with a fury as relentless, rushes madly forward, followed by countless others; and yet there is no apparent loss of power. Or who could

sit unmoved, upon a moonlight night, and look upon the silver sheen upon the placid bosom of the water, and not feel the inspiring presence of that grand object lesson of "Peace! Perfect Peace!"? Why should it not be a part of the divine plan of the Creator to mould our characters by these evidences of His power and omnipresence?

CHAPTER II

BUILDING AND FURNISHING THE LOG CABIN

When the first Loyalists landed at the different points along the shores, the lots had not yet, in most cases, been marked out by the surveyors; and they were obliged to wait several weeks before the "drawings" could take place. They had brought with them a number of military tents, which had seen service during the Revolutionary War. Camping out in tents, as a recreation for a few weeks during the summer, is still looked upon as a rather pleasing pastime. It was, however, very annoying to the Loyalists. They had left their homes across the border several months before, to enable them to be ready to take possession of their new homes in the early spring, and every day lost meant one day less for them to prepare for the coming winter.

They had no alternative but to pitch their tents near where they had landed, and wait until the surveyors had completed their work. Several weeks were thus passed in idleness, and the first summer was far spent before the "drawings" took place. This was a simple process. Small pieces of paper, upon which were written the numbers of the lots to be apportioned, were placed in a hat, and the surveyor, with a map spread out before him, superintended the operation. The officers came first, and drew their lots in the first concession, fronting upon the water. As each drew forth a piece of paper from the hat, the surveyor entered his name upon the corresponding number upon the map. After the officers had been served, the other members of the company went through the same ceremony. During the few weeks that they had been waiting, some had made short trips through the forest, and had observed favourable locations, and after the "drawings" were completed, there was more or less trafficking in lots, and exchanging locations for a consideration; but for the most part each accepted the lot drawn, and hurried away to his future home.

The white village upon the shore was soon a scene of great confusion. Each

family secured a few days' rations from the government supplies, packed up the tent and their other belongings, and set out through the lonely forest. Unless one has visited a section of Canada from which none of the timber has yet been removed, it is difficult to form a proper conception of the condition of the older settled portions one hundred and thirty years ago. The debris of the forest lay rotting as it had fallen, the swamps were undrained, the rivers and creeks were unbridged, and the only roads were the blazed trails left by the surveying parties. The clearing up and draining of the farms has brought about a great change in the low lands. Large impassable creeks have been reduced to small streams that can be crossed with ease, and the swamps, which threatened to mire any who ventured over them a century ago, furnish now a safe and firm foothold.

It was with difficulty that the lots could be located, as there was nothing to indicate the boundary lines but the "markers" placed by the surveyors. When the little family group arrived at their destination, they pitched their tent again, and the housewife busied herself in preparing their first meal in their new home, while the husband surveyed his domain, noting the character of the soil, the presence of creeks, mounds, and other conditions favourable for the first clearing and the erection of a house. That the selection was in most cases wisely made, is attested to-day by the excellent natural surroundings of the old homesteads.

As they partook of their first meal in their wilderness home they contrasted their primitive surroundings with the comforts and luxuries they had left behind them; but, with no regret for the sacrifices they had made, they laid their plans for the future. On the morrow the father, and the sons if there were any, and not infrequently the mother, too, set out to do battle with the forest. The short-handled ship axe, not much heavier than the modern hatchet, was their principal weapon. They laboured with a will and cleared a space large enough for the cabin.

There was no cellar nor foundation, as for our buildings of to-day. A small excavation, to be reached through a trap-door in the floor by means of a short ladder, served the purpose of the former, and a boulder placed under the ends of the base-logs at each corner of the building was ample support for the walls. It was slow work felling the huge pines, cutting them into proper lengths, hewing them into shape, and laying them into position; but slowly the building rose until it attained the height of nine feet. Then the rafters were set in position. Then, too, the chimney was commenced. A stone foundation was carefully built up to the level of the floor and crowned with flat stones, to serve as the hearth. The huge fire-place was then built of stones, and above it was erected a chimney in a manner similar to the house, but instead of using logs, small sticks, two or three inches in diameter, were laid tier upon tier in the form of a hollow rectangle. It was carried a foot or two above the peak and plastered over with clay, inside and

out. In many of the early dwellings there were no chimneys, and the smoke was allowed to escape through a hole in the roof as best it could.

In some of the first cabins the floor was of earth. If made of wood, large timbers were used, squared on the sides and hewed smooth on the upper surface. Paint was very scarce, and a painted floor was a luxury which very few could afford. A clean floor was the pride of the mistress of the house. Coarse, clean sand and hot water were the materials used to obtain it. Once a week, or oftener, the former would be applied with a heavy splint broom, and the latter with a mop. The hotter the water the quicker it would dry. While the perspiring mother was scrubbing amid clouds of steam, the tub of boiling water was a constant source of danger to her young children.

The roof was composed of thick slabs, hollowed out in the form of shallow troughs, and these were laid alternately with the hollow sides up, the convex form of one over-lapping the edges of the concave forms of those on either side. There was an opening for a door, but no lumber was to be had at any price, unless it was sawed out by the tedious process of the whip-saw, so doors there were none; but a quilt hung over the opening served the purpose. Two small windows, one on either side of the door, admitted light to the dwelling. These windows would hold four or six 7" x 9" panes of glass, but many a settler had to content himself with oiled paper instead. The sash he whittled out with his pocket-knife. Sometimes there was no attempt at transparency; and the window was opened and closed by sliding a small piece of board, set in grooves, backwards and forwards across the aperture. The interstices between the logs were filled with sticks and moss, plastered over with clay. Thus the pioneer's house was complete, and not a nail or screw was used in its construction.

When lumber became available, a plank or thick board door took the place of the quilt in the doorway. This was fastened by a strong wooden latch on the inside. The latch was lifted from without by means of a leather string attached to it and passed through a hole a few inches above, and when the inmates of the house retired for the night, or did not wish to be molested, the string was pulled inside. The old saying, "the latch-string is out", was a figurative method of expressing a welcome, or saying "the door is not barred against you." The pioneers had big hearts, and to their credit it can be said the latch-string was rarely pulled in when a stranger sought a meal or a night's lodging.

If the family were large the attic was converted into a second room by carrying the walls up a log or two higher. Poles, flattened on both sides, were laid from side to side to serve as a ceiling to the room below and as a floor for the one above. A hole left in one corner gave admittance by means of a ladder, and one small window in the gable completed the upper room.

For the same reason that there was no door, there was precious little fur-

niture. Some of the Loyalists brought with them from their former homes a few pieces—a grandfather's chair, a chest of drawers, or a favourite bedstead; but, as a rule, there was no furniture but such as was hewed out with the axe and whittled into shape and ornamented with a pocket-knife. A pocket-knife and a pen-knife were not the same. The former was a strong knife made to serve many useful purposes, while the latter was a small knife carried mainly for the purpose of shaping quill pens.

For a bedstead, there was a platform of poles across one end of the room, about two feet above the floor, supported by inserting the ends between the logs in the wall. Bough benches with four legs served as seats, and a table was similarly constructed on a larger scale. Later on, when lumber was obtainable, these articles of furniture were replaced by more serviceable ones. The deal table, the board bench, and the old-fashioned chair with the elm bark bottom and back, woven as in a basket, were one step in advance. It not infrequently happened that in large families there were not enough seats to accommodate all, and the younger members stood up at the table during meal-time or contented themselves with a seat upon the floor. If a bedstead could be afforded it was sure to be a four-poster with tester and side curtains. "What was a tester?" do I hear someone enquire? It was a cloth canopy supported by the four tall bed-posts. Bunks were built against the walls, which served as seats in the daytime; but when opened out, served as beds at night. Mattresses were made of boughs, corn husks, straw, or feathers, and rested upon wooden slats, or more frequently cords laced from side to side and end to end of the framework of the bedstead. A trundle bed for the children was stowed away under the bedstead during the daytime and hauled out at night. This was like a large bureau drawer, with rollers or small wooden wheels on the bottom and handles in front. The handles consisted of short pieces of rope, the ends of which ran through two holes and were knotted on the inner side.

As soon as the iron could be procured, a crane was swung over the fire-place, and from it were suspended the iron tea-kettle and the griddle. The latter was a large disc upon which the pancakes were made. It was supported by an iron bale, and was large enough to hold eight or ten fair-sized cakes. The frying-pans were similar to those in use to-day, but were furnished with handles three feet long, so that they could be used over the hot coals of the fire-place. The bake-kettle was an indispensable article in every household. It was about eighteen inches in diameter, stood upon short legs, and would hold four or five two-pound loaves, or their equivalent. The coals were raked out on the hearth, the kettle set over them and more coals heaped upon the iron lid. These were replenished, above and below, from time to time, until the bread was thoroughly baked. The bake-kettle was superseded by the reflector, which was an oblong box of bright tin, enclosed on all sides but one. It was placed on the hearth with the open side

next a bed of glowing coals. In it were placed the tins of dough raised a few inches from the bottom, so that the heat could circulate freely about the loaves. The upper part of the reflector was removable, to enable the housewife to inspect the contents.

The reflector in time gave way to the bake-oven, which was built in the wall next the fire-place, so that one chimney would serve for both, or the oven was built outdoors under the same roof as the smoke-house. The latter was a comparatively air-tight brick or stone chamber used for smoking beef, and the hams and shoulders of the pigs. Before the advent of the smoke-house, strips of beef required for summer use were dried by suspending them from pegs in the chimney.

The reflector was sometimes used for roasting meat, but where the family could afford it, a roaster was kept for that purpose. The roaster was smaller than the reflector, but constructed in a similar manner and, running from end to end through the centre, was a small iron bar, one end of which terminated in a small handle or crank. This bar, called a spit, was run through the piece of meat, and by turning the handle from time to time the meat was revolved and every portion of the surface was in turn brought next the fire. The drippings from the meat were caught in a dripping-pan placed underneath for the purpose. These drippings were used for basting the roasting meat, and this was done with a long-handled basting spoon through an opening in the back, which could be easily closed at will.

[image]

INTERIOR OF A SETTLER'S HOME IN 1812. ONE OF THE EARLIEST LOYALIST SETTLEMENTS IN UPPER CANADA. Notice on the left the man using the "hominy-block." From "Upper Canada Sketches," by permission of the author, Thomas Conant, Esq.

As there were no matches in the early days, the fire was kept constantly burning, and when not required the coals were covered over with ashes, where they would remain alive for hours. Occasionally the coals would die out and then one of the younger members was sent away to a neighbour to obtain a pan of live ones. Most families were skilled in making a fire by striking sparks from a flint upon a dry combustible substance, or by rapidly revolving one dry piece of pine against another, as the Indians used to do; but these practices were slow and were not resorted to except in extreme cases.

The blazing logs in the fire-place furnished ample light during the winter

evenings. The inventive genius of man has since produced the kerosene lamp, gas, acetylene, electricity, and other illuminants, but none of these can furnish the bright welcome of the pine knots blazing about the old-fashioned back-log. If any other artificial light was required, the tallow dip was the only alternative. This dip was a tallow candle, in use before moulds were introduced. A kettle was placed over the coals with five or six inches of water in the bottom. When the water was brought to the boiling point there was added the melted tallow. This remained on the surface of the water. The only service the water was intended to render was to support the tallow by raising it so many inches above the bottom of the kettle, where it could be used much more easily than it could if it remained at the bottom. The candle wicks were twisted with a loop at one end, which was slipped over a small stick. Five or six wicks would be thus suspended from the stick and slowly dipped into the liquid tallow, by which process the wicks became saturated. As soon as the tallow congealed they were dipped in again, and the operation repeated until the wick was surrounded by a thick coating of tallow very similar to the ordinary wax or tallow candle of to-day, but not so smooth or uniform in size as those made at a later period in the moulds.

Dishes were as scarce as cooking utensils. A few earthenware plates, bowls, and a platter were displayed upon a shelf; and they were all the house could boast of. Others were whittled out of the fine-grained wood of the poplar and served the purpose fairly well until the Yankee peddler arrived with the more desirable pewter ware.

A corner cupboard, from whose mysterious depths, even in our time, our grandmothers used to produce such stores of cookies, doughnuts, tarts, and pies, completed the equipment of the first house of the pioneer.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE FOREST

Unless the site for the homestead was conveniently near a spring or other never-failing supply of fresh water, one of the settler's first requirements was a well. The location for this was, as a rule, determined by a divining-rod of witch-hazel in the hands of an expert. Confidence in this method of ascertaining the presence of water has not yet died out (the writer witnessed the payment of five dollars last summer for a service of this kind). When the well was dug and stoned up,

heavy poles were laid over it to protect it. A pole, terminating in a crotch several feet above the ground, was planted ten or twelve feet from the well—the height depending upon the depth of the well. In this crotch rested another pole, called a "sweep", from the small end of which, suspended over the centre of the well, hung the bucket. The sweep was so balanced that its heavy end would lift the bucket of water from the well with very little effort upon the part of the operator.

During the first season, barns and stables were not required, as the settler had neither stock nor crop of grain. When he did need barns and stables, they were built of logs in the same manner as the house.

A small clearing about the house was made the first year, and in this was planted some turnip seed. This patch was carefully guarded and yielded a small crop of roots, which were stored away for winter use in a root-cellar built for the purpose. The root-cellar was a small, rough enclosure of logs, built in a bank or the side of a hill and covered over with earth.

Little further progress could be made in the new home until more land was cleared, stock introduced, and farming operations begun in earnest. The clearing was accomplished only after many years, as the land was densely wooded, and even with the aid of the cross-cut saw and the oxen it was slow work getting ready for the plow. The farmers worked early and late battling with the forest, single-handed and in "bees"; cutting and burning the valuable timber, which to-day would yield a fortune; then, the only return from this timber was the potash made from the ashes. The stumps were most unyielding, particularly those of the pine; and all kinds of contrivances were devised to uproot them. Sometimes they were burned out, but this was a slow process, and a large portion of the soil about them would be injured by the fire. Blasting powder was used and many patterns of stump machines were employed, but the most common and perhaps the most satisfactory method was to sever the roots that could be easily reached, hitch a logging-chain to one side, bring it up over the top and let the oxen tip over the stump by sheer brute force. The pine stumps made excellent fuel for the fire-places and were also used for fences.

The word "potash" is indicative of the process of its manufacture and the chief article from which it was made. It was in great demand as a bleaching agent and was extensively used in the making of soap. Shiploads of it were annually exported from Canada. Nearly every farmer had a leach, a large V-shaped vat, which he filled with ashes. Over these he poured a quantity of water, which filtered through the ashes, dissolved, took up in solution the alkaline salts, and trickled out of the bottom in the form of lye. A certain amount of this liquid was required for the manufacture of soft soap for the farmer's own use. This was made by adding some animal fat to the lye and boiling it down for several hours. The ordinary fire-place provided all the ashes needed for this purpose. The large

quantity made from burning the timber in clearing up the land was carried one stage farther for convenience in handling. The lye was boiled down in a huge kettle capable of holding fifty gallons or more, and, when it reached the proper consistency, it was transferred to a large iron pot, known as a cooler, where it congealed into a solid, and in that form received the name of potash. When the country store-keeper became firmly established he received it in exchange for his merchandise, and not infrequently purchased the ashes and manufactured it himself upon a large scale. Some of the farmers hauled their ashes in with their oxen; but the merchant also kept one or more teams thus employed, when not engaged in drawing his goods to and from the nearest shipping point. Up and down the concessions the creaking ash-wagons went, gathering in all that was left of the once proud forest that had been cleared away to make room for the plow. Convenient to the store was an ash-yard, with half a dozen leaches in operation, and the fires were kept roaring under the kettles. Here the wagons unloaded the ashes upon a platform suspended from one end of an evenly balanced beam, while iron weights of fifty-six pounds each, or some other fractional part of the long ton, were placed upon a smaller platform suspended from the other end of the beam. This was the customary method of weighing bulky substances that could not be conveniently weighed by the steelyards.

When the first crop of grain was obtained, it was harvested with the crude implements of the day and conveyed to the threshing floor. As a rule this consisted of a bare piece of ground, sometimes covered with boards or flat stones, but more frequently the bare earth had no covering. Here the grain was pounded out with a flail, and Nature supplied the fanning-mill; the mixed grain and chaff were tossed into the air during a stiff breeze, and the chaff was blown away.

To convert the wheat into flour was a more difficult matter. The government had provided a few little hand-mills, but they were not adapted to the purpose; so that the settler took a lesson from the Indian, burned a large hole in the top of an oak stump and pounded the wheat to a powder with a pestle or a cannon ball suspended from the end of a sweep. It was not many years before government mills were erected at different points, where there was a sufficient supply of water-power. The localities thus served suffered little inconvenience, as compared with less favoured districts.

Ten, fifteen, or twenty years wrought a great change in the wilderness home. Small clearings were everywhere to be seen. Barns had been built, the houses had been enlarged, and the melodious tinkling of bells betrayed the presence of cattle. Sheep and swine were also found on every farm, but they had to be guarded to protect them from marauding bears and wolves. Of horses there were but few. Awkward as the ox may appear, he was more than a match for the horse in finding a sure footing among the stumps, logs, and fallen timbers. Breaking

in "Buck and Bright" to come under the yoke and to respond to the "gee", "haw", and the snap of the whip was a tedious undertaking, but was successfully accomplished.

The general store made its appearance, but the pioneer had learned to be independent and still supplied most of his own wants. He raised his own flax, and when it was ripe he pulled it by hand, tied it into small sheaves so that it would dry quickly, and shocked it up. When it was cured, it was taken to the barn and threshed out with a flail. The straw was then spread out on the ground and left for two or three weeks, until it had rotted sufficiently to permit the stalks to be broken without severing the outer rind, which supplied the shreds. The object was to get it in such a condition that this outer part could be freed from the inner. It was first put through a crackle, which was a bench four feet long, composed of three or four boards standing on their edges and just far enough apart, that three or four similar boards, framed together and operated from a hinge like a pair of nut-crackers, would, when closed down, drop into the several spaces between the lower boards. The straw was passed over the lower boards at right angles, and the operator raised and lowered the upper frame, bringing it down on the flax, breaking the stalks, and loosening the outer shreds from the inner pulp. To remove the pulp the stalks were then drawn over a heckle, which was a board with scores of long nails protruding through. This combed the coarser pulp away, when the same process was repeated over a finer heckle, which left the shreds ready to be spun into thread on a spinning wheel similar to, but smaller than that used in spinning wool. The thread was then bleached, dyed, wound into balls, and passed on to the weaver. The farmer also raised his own sheep, sheared them, and washed and carded the wool.

Every maiden served her apprenticeship at the spinning wheel, and her education was not complete until she had learned how to spin the yarn, pass it over the swift, and prepare it for the loom, which had become a part of the equipment of nearly every house. The linen, flannel, and fullcloth for the entire family were made upon the premises. Service was more sought after than style, particularly in the "everyday clothes"; and, if the mother or maiden aunt could not cut and make a suit, the first itinerant tailor who happened along was installed as a member of the household for a fortnight and fitted out the whole family for the next year.

The boots and shoes were also homemade, or at least made at home. Somewhere about every farm was to be found a tanning-trough, in which a cowhide would be immersed for three weeks in a weak solution of lye to remove the hair and any particles of flesh still adhering to the skin. It was then transferred to a tub containing a solution of oak bark and left for several months, after which it was softened by kneading and rubbing, and was then ready to be made up.

The making of the boots required considerable skill. A man can wear and obtain good service from an ill-made suit of clothes, but a poor-fitting pair of boots is an abomination likely to get the wearer into all sorts of trouble. Corns and bunions are not of modern origin, but have afflicted the human race ever since boots were first worn. A kit of shoemaker's tools, composed of a last, hammer, awls, and needles, was to be found in every house; and some member of the family was usually expert in adding a half-sole or applying a patch; few, however, attempted to make the boots. The travelling shoemaker went about from house to house and performed this service. A few years later every neighbourhood had its tannery, and every village its one or more shoemakers. The tanner took his toll for each hide; and the shoemaker, for a bag of potatoes, a roll of butter, or a side of pork, would turn out a pair of boots, which would long outwear the factory-made article of to-day.

The skins of the bear, fox, and racoon furnished fur caps for the winter; and the rye straw supplied the material for straw hats for summer. In nearly every house some one would be found capable of producing the finished articles from these raw materials. The milliner, as such, would have had a hard time in earning a living a hundred years ago, as head-gear at that time was worn to protect the head.

The life of the early settlers was not all work and drudgery. They had their hours of recreation, and what is best of all, they had the happy faculty, in many matters, of making play out of work. This was accomplished by means of "bees". There were logging bees, raising bees, stumping bees, and husking bees for the men, while the women had their quilting bees and paring bees. The whole neighbourhood would be invited to these gatherings. It may be that upon the whole they did not accomplish more than could have been done single-handed, except at the raisings, which required many hands to lift the large timbers into place; but work was not the only object in view. Man is a gregarious animal and loves to mingle with his fellow men. The occasions for public meetings of any kind during the first few years were very rare. There were no fairs, concerts, lectures, or other public entertainments, not even a church, school, or political meeting, so, in their wisdom, the early settlers devised these gatherings for work—and work they did. but, Oh! the joy of it! All the latest news gathered from every quarter was discussed, notes were compared on the progress made in the clearings, the wags and clowns furbished up their latest jokes, and all enjoyed themselves in disposing of the good things brought forth from the corner cupboard.

Perhaps some special mention should be made of the logging bee, since it stands out as the only one of these jolly gatherings that was regarded as a necessary evil, particularly by the female members of the family. Perhaps the grimy appearance of the visitors had something to do with the esteem in which

they were held at such times. The logging bee followed the burning of the fallow, which consumed the underbrush, the tops and branches of the trees, and left the charred trunks to be disposed of. In handling these, the workers soon became black as negroes; and the nature of the work seemed to demand an extraordinary consumption of whiskey. Anyway, the liquor was consumed; the men frequently became disorderly, and concluded the bee with one or more drunken fights. It was this feature of the logging bees that made them unpopular with the women.

The afternoon tea now serves its purpose very well, but modern society has yet to discover the equal of the quilting bee as a clearing-house for gossip. To the credit of the fair sex, we should add that they rarely made use of intoxicants; but the old grannies did enjoy a few puffs from a blackened clay pipe after their meals. Both men and women were more or less addicted to the use of snuff.

Whiskey was plentiful in the good old days, but the drinking of it was not looked upon with such horror, nor attended with such disastrous consequences as in our day. This difference was probably due both to the drink and the drinker. Some people will not admit that any whiskey is bad, while others deny that any can be good; but the whiskey of a hundred years ago does not appear to have had as fierce a serpent in it as the highly-advertised brands of the present day. It possessed one virtue, and that was its cheapness. When a quart could be purchased for sixpence, a man could hardly be charged with rash extravagance in buying enough whiskey to produce the desired effect. It was considered quite the proper thing to drink upon almost any occasion, and upon the slightest provocation; and, if a member of a company received an overdose and glided under the table, it created no more sensation than if he had fallen asleep. As the population increased, taverns were set up at nearly every crossing of the roads. Some of these, especially the recognized stopping-places of the stage coaches, were quite imposing hostelrys; and as the guests gathered about the huge fire-place on a winter's evening and smoked their pipes, drank their toddy, and exchanged their tales of adventure and travel, the scene was one that has no counterpart in our day. It was a form of sociability and entertainment that departed with the passing of the stage coach.

In this age of railroads and motor cars we have no conception of the discomforts of travel eighty or a hundred or more years ago. The Loyalists clung for many years to the bateaux, the flat-bottomed boats, which conveyed them over the last stage of their journey to their new homes. These boats were very popular upon the Bay of Quinte. In going west they were carried across the Carrying Place at the head of the bay by a man named Asa Weller, who kept a low wagon and a yoke of oxen ready at hand to transport the travellers from the bay to the lake and back again upon the return trip. It is needless to add that Weller's Bay was named after this enterprising teamster.

In 1816 the first stage line in Upper Canada was inaugurated between Kingston and Bath by Samuel Purdy, of Bath, and in the following year he opened a line from Kingston to York. The roads were wretched, and the fare was eighteen dollars. Fourteen years later William Weller, a son of Asa, whose business of transporting the bateaux from one body of water to the other had brought him in contact with the travelling public and acquainted him with their needs, established a bi-weekly service between the Carrying Place and York, in connection with the steamer *Sir James Kempt*, which carried the passengers on to Prescott. The fare from York to Prescott was £2 10s. (\$10). The stage left York at four o'clock in the morning, arriving at the Carrying Place the same evening.

The very term, stage-coach, suggests to our minds a spanking four-in-hand, in brass-mounted harness, attached to a gayly-decorated conveyance. We picture them dashing through a village under the crack of the coachman's whip. Away they go, rattling over the bridge, down the turnpike, and with a shrill blast of the guard's horn, they haul up at the wayside inn, where a fat and smiling landlord escorts the passengers in to a hot dinner. Such were not the stagecoaches of our forefathers; they were simply lumber wagons without springs and covered with canvas like the prairie schooners, or plain wooden enclosures with seats suspended by leather straps. Just think of being cooped up in such an affair from sunrise to sunset—the clumsy "coach" jolting over the rough roads, dodging stumps, rocks, and fallen trees, plunging down a steep embankment, fording rivers and streams, and sinking now and then to the axles in mud!

During the summer months the mosquitoes and black flies added to the misery of the travellers. Even so, in this, as in all things, the pioneers looked not so much on the dark side of life as on the bright. The distance had to be covered; every jolt and bump brought them one step nearer their destination. The tales of the fellow travellers were entertaining and helped to shorten the way. Perhaps one was a legislator just returning from a meeting of the House, perhaps a merchant on his way to Montreal to make his year's purchase of goods, or a young adventurer from the old country spying out an opportunity to better himself in the New World. The forest had its charms, although the insects at times were abominable. As the coach passed through a clearing the yeoman, with a swing of his hat, would wish the travellers God-speed. The monotony was broken, time and again, by a glimpse of a bay or lake; and the road, in places followed the beach, where the waves broke under the horses' feet. Awaiting them at the journey's end were that rest and peace which the home alone can afford, that bright welcome of the fireside built with their own hands, and the smiles of

the loved ones who had shared all their trials and victories.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY COURTS AND ELECTIONS

All that territory from the Ottawa River to the Detroit, in which the Loyalists settled, inclusive of the western bank of the latter river, was, of course, part of the Province of Quebec; but there was very little in common between the newly-arrived settlers and their French neighbours on the lower St. Lawrence. There were no judges, no lawyers, and no regularly established courts in any of the new settlements. The people were too busy to devote much time to litigation. The nearest court was at Montreal, and to the English-speaking settlers the French civil code, which was in force, was an untried experiment, and they wisely endeavoured to avoid making use of the legal machinery at their disposal. Minor differences were frequently referred to some of the officers who had been appointed to take charge of the bands of emigrants when they left their former homes. These officers did not profess to be versed in the law, but they had exercised a certain amount of authority during the voyage and in locating the families committed to their care, and in distributing the supplies. It was quite natural that they should be appealed to when the parties to a dispute were unable to come to a satisfactory understanding between themselves. They were not hampered by hair-splitting precedents or long-established forms of procedure; but they made the best use of their common sense in their efforts to apply the Golden Rule, and so far as is known, substantial justice was done. As early as 1785, indeed, the Justices of the Peace were given jurisdiction in civil cases up to £5 (\$20); but they had little to do, and their courts were very informal.

On the 24th of July, 1788, Lord Dorchester, Governor of Quebec, issued a proclamation dividing the newly-settled territory into four districts as follows: Lunenburg, composed of all that portion east of the Gananoque River; Mecklenburg, from Gananoque to the Trent; Nassau, from the Trent to a line running north and south through the extreme projection of Long Point into Lake Erie; and Hesse, that portion of the province west of the last mentioned line. There was established in each district a Court of Common Pleas of unlimited civil jurisdiction, presided over by three judges (except in Hesse, where one judge only was finally appointed), attended by a sheriff and the other necessary officers.

In naming the first judges to serve in the newly-established courts, Lord Dorchester selected men of well-known probity from different walks of life, regardless of their experience in courts of law.

On the division of the old Province of Quebec into Upper and Lower Canada, John Graves Simcoe was appointed the first Governor of Upper Canada; and the first Parliament met at Niagara on the 17th day of September, A.D., 1792. With a due regard for the wishes of the people, the first Act placed upon the statute book abolished the French code, and declared that "in all matters of controversy relative to property and civil rights, resort shall be had to the laws of England." This was a longed-for boon welcomed by all classes.

At the same session, there was passed an Act for establishing Courts of Request for the recovery of debts up to forty shillings, whereby it was declared to be lawful for any two or more Justices of the Peace, acting within the respective limits of their commissions, to hold a court of justice on the first and third Saturdays of every month at some place fixed within their respective divisions, for the purpose of adjudicating upon these small claims. It was essentially a justices' court. They appointed their own officers, devised their own forms, and laid down their own method of procedure. These courts afforded the magistrates an opportunity of appearing upon the bench and taking part in judicial proceedings, without calling for the exercise of any superior legal knowledge. This was a privilege which many of them greatly enjoyed and of which they took full advantage, as is shown by the fact that as many as ten have been known to preside at a sittings, although only two were necessary.[#]

[#] I find upon an examination of the records of the Court of Requests, held at Bath, covering a period of eight years from 1819, that rarely were there less than four justices present, frequently there were more than that number, and at the four sessions of March and April, 1827, there were seven, ten, six, and eight, respectively.

There were no court houses at the disposal of the justices when the Act first came into force, and only one in each district when buildings were afterwards erected; so they were forced to hold their courts in private residences, taverns, or any convenient room that could be secured. When we endeavour to picture a row of justices behind a deal table across the end of a low-ceiling kitchen, crowded with litigants, any preconceived notions of the dignity of the Court of Requests are speedily dispelled.

In 1816 the jurisdiction of the Court of Requests was extended to claims of £5, where the amount of the indebtedness was acknowledged by the signature of

the defendant, or established by a witness other than the plaintiff. It did not take the merchants long to discover that it was greatly to their advantage, in more ways than one, to take from their customers promissory notes in settlement of their accounts; for by thus obtaining a written acknowledgement of the debt, an action for the recovery of the amount within the increased jurisdiction could be brought at a trifling expense in this court.

By another Act of 1792 the German names of the four districts were changed respectively to the more acceptable English ones. Eastern, Midland, Home, and Western; and provision was made for the erection of a gaol and court-house in each of them. Before these very necessary public buildings were erected, even the higher courts were held in cramped and uncomfortable quarters. It is said that the first sentence of capital punishment imposed in Upper Canada was pronounced in a tavern on the shore of the Bay of Quinte at Bath, and, as summary execution was the recognized method of carrying into effect the judgment of the court, the convict was immediately hanged to a basswood tree on the roadside, only a few rods distant. The pathetic part of this tragic incident is that it was afterwards learned that the poor victim was innocent of the charge of which he was found guilty, the theft of a watch. Such a stigma attached to this particular basswood tree that it was adopted and used for years as a public whipping-post.[#]

[#] This incident was, I believe, first published by Dr. Canniff in 1869 in his *Settlement of Upper Canada*. I am unable to point to any official record bearing out his statement; but up to a few years ago old residents, including descendants of the tavern-keeper, told the story and evidently believed it.

In the early courts the parties before them were occasionally represented by counsel; but the only recognized standard of admission to the bar was under an ordinance of the old Province of Quebec, and few were called. Under such conditions it can readily be conceived that it would be difficult to maintain any uniformity in the practice. In 1794 the Legislature empowered the governor, lieutenant-governor, or person administering the affairs of the province, to "authorize by license, under his hand and seal, such and so many of His Majesty's liege subjects, not exceeding sixteen in number, as he shall deem from their probity, education, and condition in life best qualified, to act as advocates and attorneys in the conduct of all legal proceedings in the province." In 1803 the demand for lawyers had become so pressing—at least so it was alleged—that an Act was passed making it lawful to add in a similar manner six more practitioners to the

roll. Neither of these Acts called for any educational test or professional experience. It is not therefore a matter of surprise to learn that the gentlemen of the long robe, who were thus admitted to the bar, were sometimes alluded to as "heaven-born lawyers", though some of them were of the highest standing, one becoming a judge of the King's Bench, another treasurer of the Law Society.

The Law Society of Upper Canada, which has now its headquarters at Osgoode Hall, Toronto, may properly be classed among the pioneer institutions of the province. It came into being under the provisions of a statute of 1797, which made it lawful for all persons then practising at the bar to form themselves into a society, under the name which it still retains. The declared purpose of the society, in addition to caring for the needs of the legal profession, was "to support and maintain the constitution of the said province." It was created a body corporate by an Act of 1822, and its affairs are administered to-day upon somewhat the same lines as those upon which it was first formed.

Before the arrival of Governor Simcoe, many of the communities had organized their town meetings and appointed their local officers, such as clerks, constables, and overseers of highways. The provisions of the first statute authorizing such meetings were based upon the organizations already in existence, so that the idea of local self-government did not originate with the Legislature. Parliament merely legalized and made general throughout the entire province the holding of just such town meetings as had already been organized in many of the older townships.[#]

[#] For instance, the town meetings of the township of Sidney date from 1791, and those of Adolphustown from 1792, although the statute authorizing them was not passed until July, 1793.

It is no particular mark of superiority to-day to be enrolled as a Justice of the Peace. Not so in the early days of Upper Canada. The humblest citizen may now in correspondence be addressed as "Esquire"; but, a hundred years ago, all hats were doffed when the "Squire" passed through the streets of a village. He was a man of some importance. He tried petty offences in his own neighbourhood; as a member of the Court of Requests, minor civil actions were heard by him; but, as a member of the Court of General Sessions, he rose to his greatest dignity. This body of justices, assembled in General Sessions, not only disposed of criminal cases, except those of the gravest kind, but were clothed with executive power as well. They enacted local legislation for the districts which they represented, they levied and disbursed the taxes, granted licenses, superintended the erection of court houses and gaols, the building of bridges, and generally performed the

functions of our municipal councils of to-day. They met periodically in the leading village of the district and sometimes remained in session for a week, and, considering the amount of business they transacted, they were very expeditious, as compared with the modern county council. Few would gainsay the statement, if I were to add that the municipal legislators of to-day frequently do not, in many other respects, attain the standard of a hundred years ago.

[image]

PIONEER STAGE COACH. The Weller Line from Toronto East

The town meetings continued to meet once a year on the first Monday in March, to appoint officers, and, although they had no jurisdiction to do so, to pass, repeal, and amend enactments for purely local purposes. These "Prudential Laws", as they called them, regulated such matters as the height of fences, the running at large of certain animals, and the extermination of noxious weeds. The people favoured the town meeting, as it was of their own making. It was the first step in democratic government by and for the people. The chronic grumbler found there an opportunity to air his grievances. The loquacious inflicted his oratory upon his assembled neighbours. Each man to his liking played his part at the annual gathering, and realized that he was of some consequence in controlling the affairs of the township. Thus did the inhabitants continue to encroach upon the authority of the Justices in Session, who from time to time issued their decrees, dealing with some of the matters over which the town meetings had assumed jurisdiction, until 1850, when our present municipal system was introduced and the justices were practically shorn of all but their judicial power.

Parliamentary elections to-day are very tame affairs compared with those of a century ago. The open vote afforded opportunities for exciting scenes that the rising generations know not of. The closing of the bars on election day has robbed the occasion of a good deal of romance. The actual voting contest is now limited to eight hours, from nine to five; and to-day one may rest peacefully in a room adjoining a polling booth and not be aware that an election is in progress.

It was all very different in the days of our grandfathers. Whiskey and the open vote were two very potent factors in keeping up the excitement. Instead of having several booths scattered throughout each township, there was only one in the electoral district. The principal village in the district was generally selected, but sometimes the only booth was set up in a country tavern, especially if it was in a central location and the proprietor could pull enough political strings. A platform was constructed out of rough boards and protected from the weather

by a sloping roof. On Monday morning of election week the candidates and their henchmen assembled in the vicinity of the platform, which was known as the hustings. The electors came pouring in from all parts of the district. Each party had its headquarters at a tavern, or tent, or both, where the workers would lay their plans. The forenoon was spent in listening to the orators of the day, and at one o'clock the polling began. It is easy to imagine what would happen to the doubtful voter when he arrived at the village. As the poll was kept open all day and every day until Saturday night, it is not quite so easy to picture the scenes during the last day or two of a hot contest. Couriers with foaming horses were going and coming. Heated discussions frequently terminated in a rough-and-tumble fight, in which a score or more participated. Drunken men reeled about the streets until carefully stowed away by their friends in a tent or in a stall in the tavern stable. If the inebriate had not yet polled his vote, his whilom friends were most solicitous in the attention bestowed upon him.

It not infrequently happened that the indifferent voter purposely played into the hands of both parties. It was a golden opportunity for free lunches and free whiskey; and the longer he deferred the fateful hour when he had to announce to the returning officer the candidate of his choice, the more difficult it was for him to choose. In his dilemma he would seek his solace in a little more whiskey, and, in the end, perhaps vote for the wrong man. If unhappily he did make such a mistake, his political guardians never failed to call his attention to the error in a manner not likely soon to be forgotten—such incidents were thereafter associated in the mind of the offender with unpleasant recollections of the village pump or the nearest creek.

CHAPTER V

SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PREACHERS

The Loyalists were so busy in clearing the land and getting the new home into shape that little time was left for looking after such matters as educating the young. There were no laws regulating the school system, no buildings nor funds for school purposes, no officials to take the lead, and what was done was the spontaneous outcome of a desire to equip the rising generation for the duties of citizenship.[#]

[#] The first enactment of any kind respecting schools in Upper Canada was passed in 1807. This made very inadequate provision for the establishment of one public school in each district. The first legislative attempt to encourage, assist, or regulate common schools was by an Act passed in 1816. Both of these statutes were very crude and left much to be desired.

The first efforts were those of the mother and other elder members of the household. Later on a few families clubbed together and employed a man to instruct their children in the rudimentary elements of a common school education. There was no building for the purpose, so a room was set apart in one of the dwellings, probably the only room on the ground floor, and while the good housewife busied herself about her duties on one side of the room the teacher was training the young ideas how to shoot on the other side. For one or two weeks he would remain with this family, getting his board and washing and two or three dollars a week, and then he would move on to the next neighbour with his little flock, and so on until the circuit of his subscribers of five or six families was completed, when he commenced again at the first.

As late as 1818 in a contract entered into between a teacher and a few of the farmers in one of the first townships, we find the covenant to teach in the following words: "That the party of the first part engages to keep a good school according to his ability, and to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic." His hours were from eight o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, with one and one-half hours for noon. He was to teach every alternate Saturday. In addition to his board, lodging, and washing, he was to be paid the princely salary of twelve and one-half dollars a month, "whereof one-half in cash at the end of the quarter and the other in orders or other value monthly."

Soon the little log school-house appeared, not larger than fifteen by twenty feet, with a door in one end and a window on each side. On the inside holes were bored in the logs about two feet six inches from the floor, pegs inserted, and upon these pegs rested a plank. This was the desk, and the pupils, while working at it, necessarily sat with their faces towards the wall. A rude bench without a back was the only seat. Books were very scarce. About the only real school book that ever found its way into the hands of the pupil was Mayor's spelling book. The New Testament was the universal reader, and if any other books were in use in the school the teacher was the only one who had access to them. The three R's: "Reading, Riting, and Rithmetic" were the extent of the general curriculum. There were no authorized text-books, and such as were in use were far from perfect.[#]

[#] The Act of 1816 required the trustees of each school to report to the district Board of Education the books used in the school, and it was lawful for the Board to order and direct such books not to be used; but no one was clothed with authority to order what books should be used.

For many years the only Geography used in the schools contained the following information relating to the continent of America:

"What is America?"

"The fourth part of the world, called also the New World."

"How is North America divided?"

"Into Old Mexico, New Mexico, Canada or New France, New England, and Florida."

The next answer must have been particularly enlightening to the ambitious youth thirsting for knowledge.

"What is New France?"

"A large tract of ground about the River St. Lawrence, divided into East and West, called also Mississippi or Louisiana."

Having given this very lucid explanation the author then proceeds to make his readers feel at home by acquainting them with their neighbours.

"What does the East contain?"

"Besides Canada, properly so-called, it contains divers nations, the chief of which are the Esquimalts, Hurons, Christinals, Algonquins, Etechemins, and Iroquois. The considerable towns are Quebec, Tadousac, and Montreal."

"What is New Britain?"

"It lies north of New France, and is not cultivated, but the English who possess it derive a great trade in beaver and originac skins." (In passing it may be pointed out that "originac," or more correctly "originac," was the name applied to the moose.)

The painful part of the story of this most extraordinary geography is that what I have already quoted was all there was between its two covers in any way touching upon North America.[#]

[#] *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada*, Vol. I., page 106.

The great drawback to the legislative efforts to improve the system was the lack of uniformity. Each section, and later, each district, followed its own inclination, and no satisfactory results were attained until Egerton Ryerson introduced his reforms, and brought every school in Upper Canada under the same general

supervision.

The old teacher of the pioneer days is gone from us forever, and, while he served his day and generation as well as he could, we cannot entertain any feelings of regret that he will never return. Brute force played an important part in his system of instruction. The equipment of no school was complete without the tawse or leather strap, and the offending pupil was frequently despatched to the neighbouring woods to cut from a beech tree the instrument of torture to be applied to his particular case.

The minor parts of speech were recognized as such, not from the functions performed by them in the sentence in which they appeared, but from the fact that they were in the list which the pupil was forced to memorize. "With" was a preposition because it was in the list of prepositions, and "forth" was an adverb because the teacher said it was, and if by chance, from nervousness or any other cause, the boy with a treacherous memory failed to place it under its proper heading, a flogging was considered a proper chastisement for the offence. It sometimes happened that a boy did not see eye to eye with his teacher upon this question of corporal punishment, and a scrimmage would ensue. If the teacher came out second best, his usefulness in that neighbourhood was gone.

To be learned, as the teacher was supposed to be, was a distinction which gave him a certain amount of prominence, and opened up for him several other fields of usefulness. He was frequently called upon as arbitrator to adjust complicated accounts, or to settle disputes in the measurement of wood or lumber, or to lay out a plot of ground with a given acreage. He was the court of last resort in matters of orthography and spelling. If he happened to be of a religious turn of mind, he might be called upon to fill the pulpit in the absence of the regular clergyman.

The Squire and the school teacher each played his part in the administration of the affairs of the neighbourhood. Each carried some weight and commanded a certain amount of respect; but both yielded first place to the clergyman. While there were several other denominations, the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists formed the great mass of the population. The Anglicans were the pampered class; they received most of the public favours and were correspondingly haughty and independent. For the first fourteen years of the settlement the clergymen of this church enjoyed a monopoly in the matter of marrying. It was a common occurrence, before there was a Protestant parson or minister duly ordained residing in the province, for a Justice of the Peace to tie the knot, and in rarer cases still for a military officer to perform the ceremony.[#]

[#] All such marriages were confirmed and made valid by "The Marriage Act" passed in 1793; and

it was declared lawful for a Justice of the Peace to solemnize marriages under certain circumstances, when the parties lived eighteen miles from a parson of the Church of England.

In 1798 the privilege of performing the marriage ceremony was extended to the ministers of the Presbyterian Church, and as they did not insist upon the wedding party going to the church, the "meenster" secured many fees which otherwise would have gone to his Anglican brother of the cloth. The great democratic body of Methodists were severely handicapped, and did not come to their own until 1831, when the gate was thrown wide open, and the clergy of nearly every recognized religious denomination were placed upon the same footing in respect to marrying as the Anglicans and Presbyterians.

Some of the extreme Loyalists could not reconcile Methodism and loyalty to the Crown, and the records inform us of more than one persecution for preaching the doctrines of the Methodist Church; in fact, one duly elected member of the Legislative Assembly was refused his seat in the House, because he had upon occasions filled the pulpit in a Methodist meeting-house. It is only fair to those who supported such extreme measures to explain that these extraordinary occurrences took place at a time when the feeling in this country against the United States was very strong, and the Methodist body in Upper Canada was under the jurisdiction of a General Conference across the line.

The life of a preacher even in our day is not one of unadulterated bliss. But as far as the comforts of this world are concerned, the modern clergyman has a very easy time of it when compared with the life of the pioneer preacher of a hundred or more years ago. Then the clergyman travelled on horseback with his Bible and a change of clothing in his saddle-bags, preaching ten or twelve times a week in churches, schoolhouses, taverns, and the log cabins of the settlers, wherever a few could be collected to receive the Gospel message. In all kinds of weather, he might be seen plodding along through the heavy snow drifts, or fording the unbridged streams, upon his holy mission to the remotest corners of the settlements. No complaint escaped his lips as he threaded his way through the lonely forest, now and then humming a few snatches from some old familiar hymn. Perchance he halted beside a spring for his mid-day meal, and fervently thanked God, from Whom all blessings flow, as he hauled from his spacious pockets the sandwiches furnished by his host of the night before.

His circuit extended sometimes for fifty, sixty, or an hundred miles, and he rarely spent his evenings at home, if he had one, but slept where night overtook him, glad of the opportunity to share a bunk with his parishioners' children, or make himself as comfortable as he could upon a mattress on the floor. His uniform may have been frayed and not of the orthodox cut; his sermons may not

have possessed that virtue of brevity which so many congregations now demand; they may have fallen far short of some of the sensational discourses of to-day; but he was a faithful exponent of the Gospel, the plain and simple truth as he found it exemplified in the life of our Saviour. That the pioneers closely followed the tenets of the Golden Rule is largely due to the self-sacrificing efforts and exemplary life of the early missionaries.

[image]

FOOT STOVE. CRACKLE

Among the Methodists no other religious gathering could compare with the camp-meeting. It was the red-letter week of the year, given up wholly to prayer, singing and exhortation. In selecting a location for these annual gatherings there were several details to be considered. The first essential was a grove, high and dry, and free from underbrush, accessible both by land and water. The auditorium was in the shape of a horseshoe, about one-half acre in extent, surrounded by tents made of canvas or green boughs supported by poles. Across that part corresponding with the opening in the shoe was a preachers' platform. In front of it was a single row of logs—the penitent bench—and the rest of the space was filled with parallel rows of logs—the pews.

Thither by land and water came the devout Methodists of the district; but then, as now, the women far outnumbered the men in their religious observances. With them they brought chests of provisions, their bedding, and Bibles. Morning, noon, and night, the woods resounded with songs of praise, the warning messages of the preachers, and the prayers of the faithful, pitched in every conceivable key. The surroundings seemed to add an inspiration to the services. When the great throng joined fervently in "All hail the power of Jesus' name", to the accompaniment of the rustling leaves, the hearts of all present were deeply moved. During the closing exercises, marching in pairs around the great circle, with mingled feelings of gladness and sorrow, they sang lustily the good old hymns and then, with many affectionate leave-takings, dispersed to their several homes.

The Methodists looked upon dancing not only as a very worldly but also as a very sinful form of amusement, and as the violin was closely associated with the dance it also was placed under the ban. The Loyalists were musically inclined, but during the first years of the settlements little opportunity was offered for the development of their talents in that direction. Later on singing in unison was extensively practised, and singing schools were organized during the winter

months in nearly every neighbourhood. There was a great scarcity of musical instruments before the introduction of the accordeon and concertina, both of which were invented in 1829.

The members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, as they were more commonly called, were sorely handicapped by reason of their refusal to take an oath under any circumstances. By their strict adherence to this article in their creed they were debarred from holding any public office, or giving evidence in any court of law. That this was a great hardship, from which no relief could be obtained except by legislative enactment, goes without saying. One of their number was regularly elected to the first Parliament and trudged through the forest to the seat of government at the assembling of the members. From purely conscientious scruples he refused to take the prescribed oath, so his seat was declared vacant, and he trudged back home again.

It is not to the credit of the other denominations of Christians, that no steps were taken to relieve the Quakers from the disability under which they were placed, until after twenty-five years of patient endurance. It is true the disability was self-imposed; but they were actuated by the purest of motives, and their exemplary lives and standing in the community entitled them to more consideration from their fellow citizens. The relief first extended to them, after the lapse of a quarter of a century, was only partial, and allowed them to give evidence in civil courts by a simple affirmation instead of an oath. The Legislature having to that extent admitted the principle of affirming instead of taking an oath, could find very little to justify its course in postponing for another twenty years the admission of the Quakers to their full rights, by accepting their affirmation in criminal courts and in all other matters in which an oath was required.

The Quakers took a most decided stand against the law of primogeniture, whereby the eldest son of a man who died intestate inherited all the real estate of his father to the exclusion of all the other sons and daughters. In this respect they were in advance of their age and insisted upon an equitable distribution among all the children of the deceased. Many a young Friend was given the alternative of dividing among his brothers and sisters the real estate thus inherited according to law, or of submitting to the humiliation of being expelled from the Society. To their credit it can be said that very rarely was there any occasion to enforce the latter alternative. The statute abolishing primogeniture came into force on January 1st, 1852.

The Quakers were uncompromising in their opposition to the liquor traffic, and could be relied upon to support all measures for the advancement of temperance. They were progressive in educational matters; they established and maintained efficient schools, and generally took a deep interest in all matters directed towards the general improvement of the country. Beneath their quaint

garb and solemn faces, there frequently was found a deep sense of humour, all the more effective when expressed in their peculiar form of speech.

CHAPTER VI

PROVISIONS AND PUBLIC HIGHWAYS

The staple articles of food among the pioneers were much the same as in our day. Pork formed the chief item of meat. The hams and shoulders were smoked and the rest of the carcass preserved in a strong brine. The flour was coarser than the article we get from the modern roller mills, but none the less, rather the more, wholesome. Corn meal was used much more extensively than now; it was boiled and used as porridge for breakfast, a thick covering of brown sugar being sprinkled over it; what was left over became quite firm as it cooled, and was eaten for supper with milk, or cut into thin slices and fried. Corn meal griddle-cakes were also in great demand. Johnny-cake was not popular, as it was regarded as a Yankee dish; and it took a good many years for the Loyalists to reconcile themselves to anything in any way associated with their former persecutors.

Wild strawberries, raspberries, plums, and gooseberries were to be had for the picking, and the thrifty housewife always laid in a good supply. The raspberries and plums were dried in the sun and put away for future use, or made into a jam, like the gooseberries and strawberries.

The maple furnished the most of the sugar, but cane sugar was afterwards imported—not the white lump or granulated sugar of to-day, but a moist, dark-brown, unrefined product known as "Muscovado".

Tomatoes were not considered fit for human food until after the middle of the nineteenth century. If grown at all, the fruit was used merely for purposes of ornamentation, suspended from strings in the windows under the name of "love-apples". Many believed that they would cause cancer in those eating them—a notion that is not even yet wholly dead in some places.

Although our fresh waters abounded in fish of a superior quality, the Loyalists were not what we would call a fish-eating people—perhaps no people ever were or are as a matter of choice. Most of us enjoy a fish dinner once in a while; but few, if any, of us would care to accept it as a steady diet, or as a substitute for meat. The rigors of our climate and the outdoor life of hard work seemed to call for something more sustaining. The bays and rivers teemed with maskalunge,

bass, salmon, pickerel, and pike, and in the late autumn months the whitefish and herring were very plentiful. The "mascos" were speared at night by the aid of a jack-light; they were even shot from the shore as they were lazily swaggering along in the shallow water. In the early spring, a mess of pike could be secured at any time with very little effort; every inlet and creek seemed to be alive with them. The whitefish always has held first place among our merchantable fish. In the summer season they were caught in nets upon the shoals of the Great Lakes, and in October and November the seines were thrown across their path as they were running up the lesser bodies of water. I have heard an octogenarian, whose truthfulness even in a fish story I had no reason to doubt, declare that he had frequently, when a boy, speared fifty or sixty whitefish in one night.

If we examine the map of any of the first townships, we find that the road allowances are in straight lines, intersected at right angles by cross-roads, also in straight lines. About the only exceptions are the roads along the waterfront, which of necessity must conform to the irregularities in the shores. How few, however, of the roads in actual use are straight! We find them twisting and turning in every direction and intersecting each other at various angles.

During the first few years of the settlements a path through the forest was all that was required. A low piece of ground, a steep precipice, or even a fallen tree, which would present no difficulty to the modern road-builder, might at the time have been deemed a sufficient cause for departing from the blazed trail. Once such a path was laid out and improved from time to time, it became a very easy matter for it to be recognized and adopted as a regular highway. In time the cause for the deviation may have passed away, but the crooked road remained. The writer knows of several "jogs" in public thoroughfares which were so constructed in order to pass around buildings carelessly erected upon the road allowance. Many of the most important highways in Ontario appear to be the shortest practical lines between certain towns or villages, and were unquestionably laid out as a matter of convenience, with an utter disregard for the road allowances reserved by the government surveyors.

During the second session of the first Parliament of Upper Canada the Legislature passed an Act to regulate the laying-out, amending, and keeping in repair the public highways and roads of the province. Under its provisions the whole matter was left in the hands of the Justices of the Peace, who were declared to be commissioners of highways to lay out and regulate the roads within their respective divisions. They were also given power, upon the sworn certificate of a majority of twelve of the principal freeholders of the district, summoned for the purpose by them, to alter any road already laid out or to construct new ones. We can readily imagine how many of the crooks and turns in our roads were thus introduced in the first instance to serve the temporary purpose of some friend of

the commissioners, or to satisfy the whim of some influential land owner.

By the same Act was introduced a form of statute labour, which has deservedly met with little favour and much condemnation; but has undergone little change for the better from 1793 to the present time. Men possessing little or no qualifications for the position are appointed pathmasters to act as foremen over their friends and neighbours. Annually they turn out in full force, do a good deal of visiting and some work, and frequently leave the road they were supposed to repair in a worse condition than they found it.

To overcome the accumulation of snow in the roads a very simple remedy was provided as follows: "In case any highways are obstructed by snow at any time the overseers are hereby ordered to direct as many of the householders on the road as may be necessary to drive through the highway." So long as the present system of statute labour remains in force and gangs of unskilled workmen persist in annoying the travelling public by rendering the highways practically impassable, this section might, with appropriate modifications, be re-enacted to-day.

CHAPTER VII

DOCTORS, DOMESTIC REMEDIES, AND FUNERALS

Our forefathers were subject to the same physical ailments as ourselves, but they do not appear to have suffered to the same extent from disease as we do in our day. The surgeon was rarely called upon to exercise his calling, and then only when amputations were felt to be necessary, or some mutilated member needed mending. Fashionable operations were unknown. The vicious tendencies of the *bacteria* in the human body were not then discovered, or, if they had, war had not yet been declared upon them. Men went about their daily occupations, too busy to bother with the microbes that the modern scientists tell us are gnawing at our vitals. Their greatest fear was from epidemics like smallpox, which occasionally swept through a neighbourhood, leaving a trail of sorrow in its wake. Of licensed practitioners there were but few; and they were, for the most part, attached to the military posts. Occasionally, if the roads were passable, and they felt in the humour and saw a prospective fee of respectable proportions, they might be induced to visit a patient in the neighbouring townships. In this, as in all other matters, the settlers did their best to serve themselves.

In no community of this or any other age have there ever been lacking the services of skilled specialists in any line very long, before some unqualified individual volunteered to supply the lack. It was not long before the quack doctor with his vile decoctions appeared among the pioneers. Strenuous efforts were made to legislate him out of existence, but he managed to evade the statutory prohibitions and has even survived to the present day.

During the first few decades of the Loyalist settlements it was not so much a question of whether the quack *could* practise in the townships,[#] but the question more to the point was whether the educated and skilled physician *would* practise. The settlers had become so expert in treating most of their complaints, that they rarely deemed it necessary to secure the services of the medical practitioner; and, when the real physician did take up his abode among them, he not uncommonly engaged in some other calling as well and practised his profession as a side-line.

[#] The first statute providing for the licensing of practitioners in physics and surgery throughout the province was passed in 1795. Up to that time the quacks had it pretty much their own way. The Act was found unworkable and was repealed in 1806; a new and more effective Act was passed in 1815.

The mother or grandmother, as a rule, was the doctor, nurse, and apothecary for the whole family. In the month of September, or perhaps October, when the phase of the moon was supposed to be favourable for the purpose, she organized an expedition to the woods in search of a supply of herbs to replenish her medicine chest. In some cases she dug in the ground for roots, in others the bark, leaves, or stems were sought, and in others still the fruit or seeds possessed the necessary medicinal properties. When she had gathered in her stores, she tied them up in bundles and hung them up in the attic, or stowed them away in some convenient nook until required. Her collection contained specifics for nearly every ache and pain.

It may be that in those days there was not the mad rush for excitement and wealth, and the average citizen kept better hours, ate more plain and wholesome food, had some respect for the different organs of his body, and did not make such ridiculous demands upon them as are made by some of the high livers of to-day. It may be, too, that mother's simple remedies went a long way to correct the excesses and indulgences of the weak and careless and to restore the health of the sickly. In any event the mortality among the pioneers does not appear to have been any greater than it is to-day. It may not be out of place to enumerate

some of the uses to which some of the common herbs were put, as they possess the same, if any, medicinal properties to-day.

For coughs and colds, a syrup was made from the roots of the spignet, another name for spike-nard. The tuber of the blood-root was dried and then grated into a fine powder; this was snuffed up the nostrils as a cure for polyypus. Catnip has lost little of its popularity as a medicine for children. There are few, if any, of us who have not protested vehemently against having our mouths pried open to receive a spoonful of tea made from the leaves of this common weed; the first symptoms of a stomach-ache were sufficient to set the vile decoction brewing and almost any affection of the throat called for a dose of the same liquid.

The word "tansy" is derived indirectly from a Greek word meaning "immortality", because the yellow blossoms, when dried, lose very little of their original shape and colour. It is doubtful if the name had anything to do with the prescribing of tansy-tea as a tonic. It was extensively used for this purpose, and I can readily conceive a patient, after taking a dose, being quite ready to eat the first thing in sight to overcome the disagreeable taste left in his mouth by the medicine. Hop-tea for indigestion and cherry bark tea for regulating the blood were remedies widely known and extensively used.

Reference has already been made to the danger of children falling into the tub of hot water used in scrubbing the unpainted floor. This and the open fire-place were sources of great anxiety to the mother of a young family. The frequency of severe scalds and burns from these causes created a demand for a soothing and healing salve. A favourite prescription was black alder, lard, resin, and beeswax.

Smartweed steeped in vinegar was applied to bruises and swellings where there was no abrasion; it gave instant relief from pain and reduced the swelling. For use upon dumb animals, particularly the legs of horses, wormwood was substituted for smartweed.

For lame feet and other troubles requiring a soothing poultice, the leaves of the plantain were used. The stems and ribs were first removed, the leaves allowed to wilt and were then crushed by rolling them between the hands.

A healing ointment for abrasions and open sores was made from the leaves of the ordinary garden bean. These were cut up, mixed with lard, and heated over a slow fire. While still hot, the liquid lard, which had absorbed some of the juice of the leaves, was poured off and allowed to cool, when it was ready to be applied to the affected part.

Even the roots of the burdock, a most persistent and troublesome weed about most country homes, were put to an useful purpose. These were preserved by being dried, and when required were steeped and the tea thus produced was administered as a cure for indigestion and to regulate the blood.

The mandrake, mandragora, or may-apple, has attracted much attention from the days of King Solomon to the present day. It has figured in literature in many capacities, all the way from a death-dealing agent to the main ingredient of a love potion. From its roots our forefathers made a tea which they used as a gargle for sore throat.

The roots of the nerve-vine were chewed to quiet the nerves; hence the name. The roots of elecampane were utilized for man and beast; when steeped they produced a soothing and healing lotion for open wounds, and made into a syrup, were administered to children suffering from whooping-cough. Spearmint tea was given to "break up" a cold; and an infusion of mullein was administered to give relief in the more advanced stages of the same complaint. The more bitter the medicine, the more frequently was it prescribed. Thus wormwood tea was regarded as a general tonic to be given in almost all cases where other remedies failed.

It was not at all uncommon for a plain and simple farmer, with no pretension to a knowledge of medicine or surgery, to acquire a reputation as a specialist in some particular branch of the profession. Perhaps in some emergency he would set a broken limb, with results so satisfactory that his services would be requisitioned in the next case of a similar character. His patients so successfully treated would proclaim his fame abroad, and with the little experience thus acquired he would, in the eyes of his neighbours, become an expert in this operation. Another may accidentally have had thrust upon him the distinction of being able to reduce a dislocated joint.

[image]

SPINNING FLAX

Dentists there were none, and extraction was the only reliable treatment for troublesome teeth. Some one in the locality would own one of those instruments of torture, a turn-key. If a molar had been demanding too much attention from its owner, and a hot fomentation had failed to overcome the pain, the man with the turn-key was paid a visit. Anæsthetics were unknown, and sterilization was not practised by the unprofessional. The victim was seated in a kitchen chair and grasped the rungs on either side. The operator loosened the gum from the unruly tooth with the blade of his pocket-knife, the hook of the turn-key was inserted, and with grim determination the two men faced each other. The one clung doggedly to the chair, the other twisted the key. I will draw a curtain over the further details of the operation. Brute strength in the end prevailed.

Such services were, as a rule, rendered gratuitously, and while we would not care in our day to be at the mercy of such amateur practitioners, yet they were a great benefit to the neighbourhood in which they resided, where it was frequently a choice of such aid as they could render or none at all.

Of an entirely different class were the "fakirs", who, with little or no knowledge of the diseases they treated and the remedies they prescribed, preyed upon the helplessness of their patients. With such the two great specifics were opium and mercury—in all cases of doubt a dose of calomel was administered. Bleeding, as a remedial measure, was a very common practice, and it was not considered at all extraordinary to relieve a patient of a quart or two of blood at a time.

The educational qualifications of the quack may be inferred from the following advertisement, which was posted up in a public place in 1817:

"Richmond, Oct. 17, 1817.

"ADVERTISEMENT:—This is to certify that I, Solomon Albert, is Good to cure any sore in word Complaint or any Pains, Rheumatick Pains or any Complaint what so ever the Subscriber doctors with yerbs and Roots. Any Person wishing to employ him will find him at Dick Bells.

"Solomon Albert."

Mr. Albert's parents misjudged the possibilities of their hopeful offspring when they bestowed upon him his Christian name. He must have been quite exhausted after his literary effort in composing that advertisement.

In due season the need for doctors and medicine was no more, and the grim reaper claimed his harvest. The undertaker had not yet risen to the dignity of a separate calling, and the plumed hearse was unknown. Simplicity and economy were the main features of the last sad rites; the nearest carpenter was furnished with a rough estimate of the proportions of the deceased, and, with plane and saw, he soon shaped a coffin out of basswood boards. This was stained on the outside or covered with a cheap cloth, and, with plain iron handles as its only adornment, it was ready for the corpse. It was not until well on into the nineteenth century that rough outer boxes were brought into general use.

The funeral service was held at the residence of the deceased, after which a silent procession was formed and accompanied the remains to the grave, and in the winter season the silence was intensified by removing the bells from the horses and sleighs. The general regret over the loss of the deceased was measured

by the length of the funeral procession.

[image]

THE PIONEER STORE

In some neighbourhoods there were public graveyards, as a rule in the rear of the church; but in many instances a plot was selected on the homestead, generally a sandy knoll, where a grave could be easily dug and there would be little likelihood of a pool of water gathering in the bottom. In such a lonely spot were laid the remains of many of our ancestors, with a wooden slab at the head of the grave. Upon this was painted a brief epitaph, with a favourite quotation from Holy Writ. In time the lettering yielded to the ravages of the weather, the paint was washed away, the board rotted, and the fence surrounding the reservation, if such there was, was broken down by the cattle. A careless posterity neglected either to remove the remains or to renew the wooden marker by a more enduring monument, until sentiment ceased to play its part in the respect for the memory of the dead. The farm was sold with no reservation, and the plough and harrow soon removed the only visible trace of the last resting-place of those who, in their time, played important parts in shaping the destiny of Upper Canada.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIONEER LIFE AMONG THE
LOYALISTS IN UPPER CANADA ***

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