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was so common in that day. It would not be large, of course. The floor was probably made of logs also and chipped flat with an adze. It was a shelter and that's all that was demanded at the time. The main effort was directed towards the next harvest, whatever it would be. That meant planting among the stumps. The ground was rich, the humus had piled up for many years. Whatever was planted sprang from the ground. The lakes were full of fish, many of the settlers had been fishermen, and so the future looked bright. However, the following anecdote brings to our minds how stringent life was. A few years after the first planting, a visitor stayed the night at the cabin. Everyone put his shoes along the wall before going to bed. The shoes were made like mocassins, with a padding of hay inside the sole. In the morning the father opened his eyes and saw the visitor kneeling by the shoes. He was shaking out the shoes into his hand and putting the hay seed into his pocket. There, indeed, was scarcity. On another cold spring day a friend arrived at the cabin and spoke with the father. Things were bad. He was finding it difficult to plant among the stumps. His children had no shoes and after a few moments in the cold mud, they had to run to the cabin for warmth. The father went outside and returned with a skin he had in his possession. He offered it to his friend. The gift was unexpected and the latter fell on his knees in the cabin and, lifting up his arms, gave thanks to God, the Gaelic words rolling and mmmbling like the very sounds of nature itself. IN MY EARLY YEARS there was something I only vaguely realized and that was that the general culture was still Gaelic. English was definitely on the ascendant and my brothers and sisters spoke English only. But the grown-ups, the rulers and shakers, spoke Gaelic to each other. As long as my father and mother lived, they spoke Gaelic when together. We were accustomed to wait until they would turn to us in English. One reason why we never heard anything gossipy or scandalous was that they had already exhausted those subjects between the two of them. At least so I thought. It made their English conversation rather bland, but their Gaelic was a matter of high mirth, of sudden outbursts, of roguish glances at each other and at us. The fun was buried deep in the language itself. What remained of Gaelic culture was not supported by any concerted effort by school or church or any local society. It existed as naturally as the air and its outward manifestations were in music, song and folklore. The prayers of the older folk were in Gaelic. When we finished our night prayers, said all together and led by my mother, we repaired to bed. But my parents remained on their knees to say their Gaelic prayers. It was as if English prayers did not count for those who had learned Gaelic prayers in their early youth. They were good enough for the children • but not good enough for those initiated into the mysteries. My father entered into these later prayers like a diver entering the water on a hot day. He let himself go with relief into the comfort of the old forms after he had moved to one side the inferior rituals that impeded his way. Their religion they took for granted. There was simply no other way to think and to live. Every iota had to be taken into account. The debts we owed God were to be paid back each hour, each day, each life. On Sunday morning the smart



horses could be seen trotting along before the crowded buggies, parents and children in a heap on the top. Every Sunday was a holy day. I was too young to be present in the church at Boisdale and I never heard the hymns that were sung there. What I heard all the time was my mother singing. She sang day in and day out • as she worked. Most of her songs were in GaeUc. They had a fine impetus and a strong beat, good songs to work to. Later on I picked their melodies up here and there • I never leamed the Gaelic words. I found out that most of them were love songs that she in her tum had leamed from her mother. To me, my mother was already old, but the incomprehensible lyrics spoke of youth, and love, and passion, and the fleetingness of summer. When I was older and living in Glace Bay, there was always a bit of excitement on Wednesday, for that was when the Family Herald arrived by mail. My mother always claimed it first to look at the page of "Old Favorites," a selection of songs. Gen? erally she knew them and would sing them out for us while I waited with rather small appreciation for the gift she was con? ferring. These of course were English songs, popular items handed down from the late Victorian Age. They were easy to leam and easy to sing, but the sweet Gaelic melodies were those that had the greater impact and remain with me stiU with all the strength of early things. It must not be thought that for me life was a song at the time. Life was the usual mixture of everything. Two things come to

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