

CHAPTER XI.

A GLENGARRY DOUBLE SLEIGH FIFTY YEARS AGO.

THE old people of Montreal may have some faint recollection of a Glengarry double sleigh of half a century ago, but to the young of this generation, and even to young Glengarrians of the present day, it will be quite a novelty to them to learn how their worthy grandfathers used to come to town. Therefore, we shall bring them back to those good, quiet old times before the introduction of railways into this Canada of ours. There were two noted annual arrivals in those early days, which caused more talk and created greater excitement on the streets of old Montreal than the arrival now-a-days of an ocean steamer. One was the arrival of the first Indian canoe from the North-West, carrying the news and the letters of a past year from those then nearly Polar regions. The other was the first

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batch of Glengarry double sleighs to reach "John Grant's," or some other of the Scotch inns or taverns of Montreal, about Christmas week, loaded with all good things to replenish the cellars of the citizens, and to place before the traders in pork, butter, cheese, etc., an opportunity for profitable investment.

Glengarry was then, as now, some seventy or eighty miles from Montreal, but travelling was quite different. You could not then take an early morning train at Lancaster or Alexandria and come to "town," as Montreal was then called, and spend some six hours and get back the same night. To undertake a journey in the old days in winter was a matter of a week—two days to come down, three days here, and two days to return. A contemplated visit in the old time by a Glengarry farmer was known from one end of his concession to the other. It was spoken of for weeks at kirk or chapel as an event, and many and various were the little commissions imposed upon him to execute.

Since the construction of railways, the farm-houses are stripped, nearly weekly, by traders purchasing everything the farmer or his good wife has to sell, such as eggs, butter, cheese, etc. ;

therefore, doing away entirely with the Glengarry double sleighs to Montreal about the Christmas week. The present is to picture one of those old double sleighs with which the writer was so familiar in his young days.

The County of Glengarry, at the time of which we write, was fairly an agricultural one. The land had not yet been overworked nor impoverished. The farms were well stocked, having from ten to fifteen head of horned cattle, some half a dozen of good horses, a team or two of oxen, some fifteen to twenty pigs, and about fifty sheep on each farm, besides a well-filled poultry yard of hens, turkeys, ducks, geese, &c. From such resources at hand, the reader may fancy, the people lived in great comfort. The only scarce thing was ready cash.

The young men of the county usually went to the shanties during the winter months, with their teams of oxen or horses, to haul the square timber from the woods in which it was cut, to the nearest stream bank, thence to be floated in the spring. The hospitality of the people was unbounded, particularly to strangers, just such as existed in the Acadian land of old time, and, unmolested by visits from revenue inspectors or

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guagers, Donald and Evan "plied the beverage from their own fair sheaves, that fired their Highland blood with mickle glee."

A great change has taken place since those primitive days. The young men, during the past forty years, have almost entirely left the county, a goodly number of them to follow the occupation of contractors on public works in the United States and Canada. Many of them have prospered. Not one-half, we believe, of the young men could now be found in the old County of Glengarry as were there at the time of the rebellion of 1837, when nearly two thousand fighting men were mustered in one week.

We invite the reader to come with us, in retrospect, to a farm house in Lochiel, in the then backwoods of Glengarry. There is a large home-made sleigh standing empty under the barn shed. It is some ten to twelve feet long, four to five feet wide, with sides three to four feet high. The runners were cut from a large birch or elm tree. The whole is "home-made," except the iron on the runners and the necessary nails and bolts. The whippetrees and traces may be the same as used for plough or harrow. This is the old Glengarry double sleigh, all home-made, strong and well built, of which we write.

Now, to the loading—let us take a peep at its contents: Some ten or a dozen small tubs or kegs of butter in the bottom, a dozen or two small cheeses, a few bags of timothy seed, then much prized, a few fowl, turkeys, geese, etc., to fill up gaps, then eight to ten well-fed dressed hogs (Glengarry pork was nearly equal to Irish), besides many little odds and ends, such as home-made socks and mits, then much prized in Montreal, and, maybe, a few extra hides and stray furs collected at the farm-house during the year. This is something after the fashion a Glengarry double sleigh was loaded in the old time before leaving for Montreal; the whole, we suppose, to weigh about 2,500 to 3,000 pounds, representing a cash value from \$200 to \$250.

The time is the second week of December, with good sleighing; the delay in starting is waiting to hear if the ferries are frozen over; all is now ready. Food for man and horse had to be added to the load. This was some dozen bundles of hay and a few bags of oats for the horses, and a small kist or box containing a good-sized boiled ham and a couple of loaves of bread, **with** a few other small items, such as a select cheese and a little "croudie" for the men on the road, not for-

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getting a little half-gallon brown jug, containing something to keep out the bitter cold. By the way, this top load of hay towering high, something like a loaded elephant, served as a nice protection for the men from the cold winds, by making a cozy seat in the centre of it. And if the good wife made up her mind to go down to town, she would be nearly as comfortable as at her own fireside."

The reader might suppose the cost for such a trip of eighty miles would be very expensive. It did not cost over a dollar and a half to reach Montreal. Here it is, an actual fact. The end of the first day found them at the Cedars, a halt having been made at mid-day to water and feed the horses. This cost them nothing; they were fed out of the sleigh supplies. The men also had their food with them, but we shall allow them to indulge in a few pots of beer on the road during the day, costing about a quarter of a dollar. Beer was then cheap—three to four coppers a glass. This was the actual outlay in cash the first day until they reached the Cedars.

The horses had to be stabled at the Cedars, costing a quarter of a dollar for a double stall for the night. The men fed their horses from their

own supplies, costing nothing. As for the men (there were always two with a double sleigh) a double bed would cost a shilling, but Glengarrians of that day were accustomed to rough it; and invariably made beds for themselves in a corner of the large old-fashioned bar-room, by using their buffalo robes and blankets, thereby saving a little. We shall, however, suppose they spent a quarter each for beer, or something else, to wash down the food from their supply box.

The first halt the second day was at the Cascades, to water the horses, and sixpence for beer. The next was at St. Annes, to water, and another sixpence for beer. The third was at Pointe Claire, for an hour, to feed horses and men, and we shall allow them a shilling for beer. Lachine is the next halt, to water, and sixpence for beer.

The charges for beer on the road may not have been actually indulged in by the men, but they had to pay about sixpence at each halting-place to the country innkeeper for the use of his shed to water and feed the horses, and for this payment were each entitled to a glass of beer—take it or not.

About sunset, the second day, a long string of double sleighs (Glengarrians always came in

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squads of twelve or fifteen) might be seen between Dow's brewery and the Tanneries, jogging along at a slow pace of about five miles an hour. If their approach was slow, they made noise enough announcing the coming of the Cameron and the Macdonald men to town.

The reader of to-day never heard the merry cling-clong of the loud-sounding, large Glengarry bells of those days. They could be heard fully half a mile distant. Those Glengarry bells were as characteristic of the people as were their own bagpipes. Highlanders always make a noise by making themselves heard and felt when they come to the front, be it at market town, in the legislative halls, or on the battle-field.

Just as the shades of evening are closing over the unlighted streets of old Montreal, the sleighs are passing down St. Joseph street, some wending their way to John Grant's, on St. Henry street, others to Sandy Shaw's, at the corner of Wellington and Grey Nun street, a few to Widow McBarton's on St. Paul street, opposite to the centre of the present St. Ann's market, and a portion of them finding their way to Jemmy Cameron's, the Glasgow tavern, on the Main street.

There were then a goodly number of Scotch taverns in Montreal, having large stabling. These were the resort of the Glengarrians; they could stable their horses for a quarter of a dollar a day, while they fed them out of their sleigh supplies; therefore costing them a mere trifle for the two or three days they spent in town. The men could live like princes, as they thought, at a cost of half a dollar a day each. This was the charge per day at any of those Scotch taverns.

The morning talk the next day at every breakfast table, rich or poor, was of the arrival of the Glengarry sleighs. People now-a-days, when we have railway trains arriving every hour, can hardly conceive the importance such an arrival was to the old inhabitants of Montreal. Perhaps for a full month previous, the whole outside country had been cut off, waiting the freezing of the rivers and ferries, many articles of country produce becoming scarce and dear, and sleigh loads of good things from the

TOWNSHIPS ARGENTEUIL AND GLENGARRY
were anxiously looked for.

An early visit to the Scotch taverns by the thrifty housewives of old Montreal, was the first duty of the day. There they found Donald,

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Evan and Sandy prepared, with all the native dignity of Highlanders, to greet their town customers, and to allow the ladies to inspect their good things, and tubs of butter, cheese, turkeys, etc., soon found ready sale.

Glengarry butter had a special character of being good in those early days, and the first arrivals found ready sale to private families; the traders and merchants picked up the balance. Some of the older Glengarrians who had visited town several times before had learned that sides of pork cut into nice "roasting pieces" found a ready sale; therefore, they had prepared themselves for this demand, by which they profited largely.

Our Glengarry friends soon found their sleighs empty, and their pockets full of good hard silver. We shall allow them to prepare for their return home, after purchasing such needed articles as they required for their houses and their farms, these being mostly in the hardware line, such as axes, saws, nails, etc., but one very common article, "Liverpool salt," took up most of the sleigh; nearly every sleigh carried half a ton of salt home. This article was cheap, about a shilling a bushel, but one of the most expensive for a

farmer to buy from the country merchant, owing to the heavy charge of transport in those early days.

The old Glengarry double sleigh, like the once far-famed mail coach of Old England, is now an institution of the past—a relic of departed days. We shall never again see one on the road. We might use the vulgar phrase, "Their usefulness is gone." Never again shall their loud-sounding bells, once so familiar here, be heard on the streets of Montreal, announcing their welcome arrival during the Christmas week. Those days are gone, never again to return!

Relic of departed days, farewell! The writer has endeavoured to picture one of those sleighs, and its usefulness, to the best of his humble ability. Although not a Glengarrian, he was as familiar in his young days with a Glengarry double sleigh as most Glengarrians. He has seen squads of twenty-five, and sometimes fifty, on the road at one time, and he is one of the very few now living in Montreal who rode in from Lachine with the 1st Regiment of the Glengarry Highlanders, on their entrance to Montreal in February, 1838, when there were

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nearly two hundred double sleighs conveying the two regiments on their way to the Napierville frontier, where they were stationed during the winter of 1838.

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