No Divorce Problems In Garden of the Gulf

By WILLIAM S. DUTTON

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—In The Golden Future—

Take the latest official table of divorce statistics covering the nine provinces of Canada, and look for the name of Prince Edward Island, the Dominion's smallest province.

You won't find it.

Instead, appended to the table you will find this note by Dr. R. H. Coates, the Dominion Statistician:

"In Prince Edward Island only one divorce was granted from 1868 to 1927; this was in 1913."

That one divorce of 1913, granted by the Canadian Parliament at Ottawa, is the only divorce in the Island's recorded history of almost four hundred years. Its own divorce court, authorized by the legislature in 1835, has never held a session!

Now dip deeper into Canadian records. Take crime.

This same little province which has no divorce problem is also without a crime problem. Its crime rate, as indicated by convictions for serious offenses, is less than one-tenth the rate for Canada as a whole, and the Canadian rate is low. The Island hasn't had an execution in forty years!

Unemployment? There isn't any on the Island.

Poverty? It is almost non-existent there.

This island has, per square mile, twice as many people, four times as many cattle, and eight times as much poultry, as any other province of Canada. It has more railroads per square mile, more post offices, more telegraph lines, and more churches, and its people have more money in the savings banks, *per capita*, than have those of any other Canadian province.

Turn to a map. Crescent-shaped, with rolling hills and fertile fields, Prince Edward Island lies in the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, just off the eastern coast of New Brunswick and the northern coast of Nova Scotia. In area, it is only a little larger than the state of Delaware— so small that thousands of Americans possibly have never heard of it.

However, this little insular province of 88,000 inhabitants has more than 100,000 of its natives in the United States. New England alone has more than 30,000 of its sons and daughters. There isn't another state in the world that has made, in proportion to its size, such a contribution to the manhood of America. It is said that every Prince Edward Island family has helped to populate American soil.

Some Noted Islanders

Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior in President Wilson's cabinet, was a Prince Edward Island boy. America's present ambassador to Germany, Jacob G. Schurman, who was for thirty years the president of Cornell University, was born and reared on Prince Edward Island. Basil King, the novelist, is one of its famous sons. The Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. MacLeod, pastor of one of New York's finest Fifth Avenue Churches, and called by Dr. S. Parkes Cadman "one of the greatest preachers in New York City," was born and still spends his summers on Prince Edward Island. Dr. John M. MacInnis, Dean of the famous Bible Institute of Los Angeles, is another great preacher whom the province has given to America.

But the list is long. Here, in this brief article, I can mention only a few. Through the years this island has been exporting men —men of brain and honor and accomplishment in the world.

To Canada it gave a chief justice, Sir Louis Davies. Monsignor Alfred E. Burke, Papal delegate to Mexico in 1919-20 in connection with the religious dispute there, Archbishop Alfred A. Sinnott, of Winnipeg, and the late Archbishop O'Brien of Halifax, who was one of the continent's greatest philosophers, were all natives of Prince Edward Island.

Sir Robert A. Falconer, president of Toronto University and known throughout the educational circles of North America, is only one of several college presidents the Island has produced in recent years. Sir William MacDonald, of Montreal, whose philanthropies are known to all the Dominion, is only one of its scores of distinguished sons in industry and business.

A Prosperous Island

Now, suppose we sum up the record: [illegible] a little Island, about one hundred and [illegible]-five miles in length, which is less than a thousand miles from New York City and only twenty-four hours by train from Boston. Telegraph and telephone further link it with the world of today. Its people read American magazines and newspapers, buy American automobiles and radios, and see American motion pictures. In summer they entertain American tourists. Virtually every family on the Island has relatives or friends in the United States as well as in other Canadian provinces—which means there is a constant going back and forth and interchange of views. It is a notably prosperous island.

And yet, there is no divorce problem on the Island, though its laws permit divorce and 49,000 of its population are Protestants. It has no crime problem as we know it, no poverty problem, and no employment problem!

There are no highwaymen on its roads, and no thugs and bandits on its streets. There is no commercialized vice, if vice exists there at all as we recognize it today. The total regular police force of the Island numbers only thirteen men. There is no penitentiary in the province.

Progressive, prosperous, and up-to-date, enjoying the newest comforts of modern life and familiar with its luxuries, the 88,000 folks of this island go nightly to their beds untroubled and unscathed by those dark problems which are keeping our own police, sociologists, and preachers awake or tossing with bad dreams.

Why?

It seemed to me that we in America, with our rising crime and divorce rates, ought to be interested in the answer. My wife and I went up to Prince Edward Island to get it.

We went by motor—up the Atlantic Coast into Maine, on over the "line" into New Brunswick, and then eastward across New Brunswick to Cape Tormentine, on its eastern coast. From this picturesque cape it is only nine miles across Northumberland Strait to the little village of Port Borden, on Prince Edward Island. Here a huge car ferry of the Canadian National Railways links mainland and island, making hourly trips daily, except in winter.

"What happens in winter?" I asked the second mate of the boat.

"Ice," he answered. "The whole gulf freezes up. The ice gets from ten to fifteen feet thick and we've got to smash our way through it. Our boat, the Prince Edward Island, is an ice-breaker, and a good one. We try to get her over and back at least once a day in winter; but it's work."

This evening, however, the strait was clear. Whipped by the wind into tossing white caps, it shimmered golden and blue under the glow of a glorious sunset. The last boat had gone for the night and so we wandered about the Cape village. Men were making ready lobster traps for the next day, which opened the season. Women chatted on front porches and over garden fences. Presently we, too, settled down on a front porch for a chat with the village physician, Doctor Barnhill.

"Great Folks"

"So you're interested in the Island, eh?" he said. "Well, you'll like it. Great people, those folks over there. They always know how to get what they want."

I asked him what he meant by that.

"They get what they want," he repeated with emphasis. "It wasn't so many years ago, maybe twelve or fifteen, when they had no car ferry. Winter came and shut 'em up tight. Then they decided to have a year-round ferry service, went out after it, and it wasn't long before they got it. The government built it for them and gave them one boat, but they wanted two. Now they're getting a second one."

Doctor Barnhill blew a smoke cloud and then went on:

"They know how to work together, those Islanders. They don't divide themselves by squabbles when it's to their advantage to be united. They may be Conservatives or Liberals on election day, and Presbyterians or Methodists or Catholics on Sundays, but on other days of the year it's each for all and all for the place in which they live.

"They've got telephone and telegraph cables laid under the Strait, and now they're talking of building a tunnel under it. A tunnel between here and the Island would have to be twelve miles long, and it would cost two million dollars a mile. It may not be a year, or even in twenty years, but the day'll come when that tunnel will be built. If they want it, they'll get it. If the daddies don't get it, the sons will."

The doctor told me of the start of the silver-fox-breeding industry on the Island, and of how, at the height of the demand that followed for Prince Edward Island foxes, as much as $35,000 was paid for one pair of them, and $15,000 a pair was a common price.

"They've made millions out of foxes," he said. "And lately they've gone in for seed potatoes. Through cooperation and study and by banding themselves together for mutual benefit, their farmers are growing some of the finest seed potatoes in the world. Almost every farmer on the island is a grower and making money from them."

Crime?

"They don't go in for that. They earn their money," said the doctor.

Divorce?

Doctor Barnhill pondered. He had seen much of life. I wanted his opinion, that of a disinterested neighbor.

"I don't know," he said presently. "Maybe it's their persistence that holds 'em together. They've a habit of finishing what they set out to do. They're not easily licked—by anything."

Later, I detected in the voice of others of the mainland village that same note of admiration which rang in the doctor's as he spoke of "the Island."

"They're rich over there," said one.

"They've fine farms," said another.

"They can afford the best," said a third.

On that crescent-shaped bit of land out there across the darkening Strait there seemed to be the secret for well-being, contentment, and power!

Arrival at Borden

Next morning, with a long line of others, our automobile was loaded onto railroad flat cars, and a locomotive shifted the cars out over a long jetty onto the waiting ferry. Freight trains are thus conveyed bodily to the Island, which has two hundred and seventy miles of railway. Within an hour we were unloaded at Port Borden and headed for Charlottetown, the Island's capital and only city, thirty-odd miles away.

Almost at once, on this island, there comes upon you a feeling of utter peace. There is no noise, no bustle, no hurry. The patchwork of tilled fields, with their variety of waving grains and dark-green splashes of thriving potatoes, seems to snooze in the sunshine. Farmers jog leisurely along the red dirt roads in old-fashioned farm carriages. Even the motors seem to loaf on their way, and thousands of tiny yellow wild flowers nod drowsily by the roadside.

In Charlottetown, next day, I called at several offices at eight o'clock in the morning—to find them still deserted. Not until nine o'clock does the town get to work, though in the country farmers are up at daybreak, as farmers are everywhere.

Yet the work gets done. Stores are prosperous, houses are painted, lawns are cropped, streets are clean. There is a complete absence of the "Tourists Accommodated" signs that one sees everywhere in New England.

And everywhere, in town, village or country, two facts quickly impress themselves upon the visitor: First, these Islanders have a deep-rooted and active pride in their homes; second, they have no less an interest and pride in their churches. Charlottetown, which has less than 13,000 inhabitants, boasts churches which would grace the streets of a great city. Every country-side church is immaculate. A shabby home is so rare as to cause comment.

Homes and Churches

One of the first men with whom I talked in Charlottetown was Frederick J. Nash, the president of the Patriot Publishing Company. A newspaper man of long experience, he is also a lecturer of note on the Island, and a former member of the local Legislature.

"Have you noticed the homes here, and the churches?" he asked. "There is your first reason for the absence of divorce. Few young men marry here until they can provide homes for their brides, and maintain them. Our young married folks don't live in r[illegible] but in houses, and they're proud of the[illegible]."

Every leader with whom I talked brought up this subject of home and church—such men as Frank R. Heartz, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province; John A. Mathieson, the Chief Justice and Dr. Cyrus Macmillan, who is head of the English department of McGill University, at Montreal, and rated as one of the most brilliant of the younger men of Canada.

These men, all Island-born and reared, spoke of the home as a "shrine" and as linked with the church. The custom is not so commonly practiced today as it was, but morning and evening religious services are still conducted in hundreds of Island homes daily.

"This island is isolated," said Chief Justice Mathieson. "We are not disturbed by metropolitan influences, nor bothered by every new 'ism' and cult and creed. Our people have been left free to maintain their ideals and traditions."

Looking Backward

It is worth while to look back to the day and men whence these ideals and traditions sprung, for the Island's present state grew from its past.

The basic stock was Scotch, English, Irish, and Acadian French, and this was augmented in the period of the Revolutionary War by immigrants from New England who remained loyal to Britain. Later immigration changed the stock but little. On every hand you hear tales of daring men, of devout men.

There were churchmen who left deep footprints in the Island's soil of memory—such as Angus McEachern, a Catholic beloved by Protestants and his own alike; Samuel McCully, the Baptist; the doughty Donald McDonald; MacLean Sinclair, who became one of the world's great Gaelic scholars; and other fighting preachers.

The most remarkable of these was Donald McDonald, a powerful, rugged Highlander of fiery zeal and eloquence. He made Presbyterianism the dominant Protestant creed of the Island and swayed people as did no Island preacher before his day, or since.

Donald McDonald would stride into the pulpit, throw off his coat, roll up his sleeves, and tear open his collar. Poising the big pulpit Bible upright, he would strike a hand downward into the pages. Wherever the Book opened he would find his text and blaze forth into a sermon that held his auditors spellbound for two hours.

For forty years he stormed up and down the Island in periodic sorties from his stronghold at Belfast. His was a religion of old-fashioned intensity, with the fires of Hell lashing in the foreground to consume the sinner and to spur the righteous. At times, in the midst of his exhortation, he would stop abruptly, plunk his silver watch down upon the pulpit, and command five minutes of silent communion with God. A minute would pass, without the stir of a muscle, without a sound other than the labored breathing of the worshippers; and, suddenly, from out of the silence, Donald McDonald's great voice would boom with terrible portent:

"It is now one minute past eleven o'clock. Every man, woman, and child is one minute nearer to eternity!"

And then, later: "Two minutes have passed!"

Then, "You are three minutes nearer to your God!"

He held them in the hollow of his hand. The Island still talks of him—of the sinners who fell prostrate upon the floor, moaning and crying out for forgiveness, of the conversions he made, of the good done by him.

Mr. Nash, of the "Patriot," told me: "Donald McDonald's influence is still felt. For more than thirty years after his death he was a living power here. You could pick up any Island newspaper years after he had gone and still find his name in the paid death notices of his followers. The item would announce the death of a person in the usual way, but at the bottom would be this line:

"'Converted by the ministry of Donald McDonald.'"

Years of Progress

Outside of the church, there are other stories of these old-timers, likewise significant. The Island has not always been so prosperous as it is today, nor so inviting and easy to live upon. It has been *made* so, by work and by courage, within comparatively recent years.

Today, the big government ice-breaker, the Prince Edward Island, maintains daily communication with the mainland in winter, but twenty years ago there was no ice-breaker. Winter trapped the Islanders behind an icy barrier, nine miles wide at its narrowest point and broken by treacherous "lollies"—the channels of soft ice formed by the grinding together of the floes. It demanded skill and boldness to cross this barrier.

The accepted way of crossing was by the use of a boat so constructed that it could be dragged over the firm ice like a sled until a lolly was reached, when it was launched in the lolly and rowed to firm ice again. The women rode in the boat; the men "worked" their passage by pulling it afoot, harnessed together in single file. The harness had a double purpose, the second being safety, for the lead man's discovery of a lolly often was made only after he had plunged bodily into it.

"Then what?" I asked a native.

"They'd pull him out, launch the boat, and row on," he answered in matter-of-fact fashion. "What else could they do?"

He added that each man wore high rubber boots to protect him as much as possible from the water, and they would all take turns in the lead position.

Those winters caused thousands of people to leave the Island. Farmers who were satisfied and happy there but for that drawback abandoned their farms. In 1891, at its peak, the population of the Island was 109,078. This number had dropped to 93,728 in 1911, and to 88,615 in 1921. Lately the Island has been holding its own and perhaps gaining a trifle. The abandoned farms are being taken up again in spots. The presence of the ice-breaker in the strait, of telephone and telegraph cables under the ice-jammed waters of winter, and of regular railroad service uniting the province with the world, as well as the building of roads, has checked emigration and encouraged immigration. Nevertheless, the Island owes a debt to its ice barrier and to its winters.

The ice barrier kept out the faint of heart, but it was no barrier to the courageous. Those who came and stayed were the strong and not the weak—men and women who felt no qualms at inconvenience, isolation, danger, and even hardship. It was a sturdy manhood that the Island attracted and reared.

Captain Alex. Taylor, now a farmer in the Belfast district of the Island, but who in his seafaring days sailed with Jack London's famous character, Wolf Larsen, told me a story of one of the old-day mail carriers whose route took him across the ice. The story shows the type of men that Prince Edward Island begot in those days when the ice in the strait was unbroken.

Alone and on foot, with the heavy pouch of mail slung over his back, this mail carrier set out one winter day for Pictou, Nova Scotia, twenty miles distant across the ice. At Pictou he was to deliver the mail to the stage driver, who was to convey it to Halifax, where it was to be placed on a boat sailing for England.

However, a storm delayed the carrier and he arrived late at Pictou. The stage had left, for it had passengers for the boat, and the boat was sailing on the next day. It was ninety miles from Pictou to Halifax over the stage road, and that road was deep in snow. Without a word of complaint, the carrier from Prince Edward Island reshouldered his mail and *walked* on to Halifax! He caught the boat!

"Not Easily Licked"

After hearing such stories as this one, I readily believed a Prince Edward Island farmer when he said: "When it comes to getting work done our Island boys are worth four Old Country immigrants."

And I better understood what the mainland folks had meant in saying that "when those Islanders start something, they usually finish it"—and the doctor's statement, "They're not easily licked—by anything."

On this island the pioneer spirit, the unspoiled spirit of the worker of the land, still lives. It is the background against which is silhouetted the Island's attitude on divorce.

"Divorce is looked upon as an admission of failure here," said Chief Justice Mathieson. "It is a mark against a man's record, a thing he must explain. The divorced man has failed in his duty as a home-maker, a husband, and a father, and few duties in life are higher than these three.

"The fact that a man is divorced is a handicap to him if he seeks a responsible position, and justly so," continued the Chief Justice. "An applicant for a post of responsibility must stand upon his past record. If that record is marred by a failure in three of the most important duties he has undertaken, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he will fail in other duties. At least, the burden of proof to the contrary ought to be upon him. In business and in other pursuits men don't overcome obstacles by running away from them.

"Then why ought we to foster a different standard for marital difficulties, which frequently are of the most trivial and childish sort? It is ridiculous and silly for a man who has mastered oceans and deserts and conquered continents, to come meekly into a court-room, hat in hand, to plead that he can't get along with his wife.

"Public opinion on Prince Edward Island demands that a man give the same attention and effort to marriage that he gives daily to his business. Consequently divorce does not exist on the Island."

Mention divorce to a farmer there and he will look at you blankly. The word has no place in his thoughts. But mention potatoes, or foxes, or the American tariff, and he becomes a cyclopedia of information.

I talked one evening with A. E. Dewar, a prosperous retired farmer, now residing in Charlottetown. Mr. Dewar is over seventy years old. I sought him out because of his reputation for sound thinking and common sense. He is something of a philosopher.

"Mister, divorce just isn't fashionable here," he said. "It isn't a subject for popular conversation. Folks aren't concerned over it like you are in the States.

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