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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Rescue By Mother Noted In Clipping

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IT'S SEVERAL years since Frances (Mrs. Jack) MacRae, formerly of Cherry Valley, told me to look into a Belfast story of a little baby girl who fell in a well, and her mother who went down the well and brought the child back to the top.

I've talked to several people about it since, but recently I was reading an old scrap book loaned me by Alf Egan of Charlottetown and I found the item. The clipping, so far as I can determine, was from a newspaper of 1876 or 1877, and it said the incident took place some fifty years before that, which would make it back in the 1820's. Of that, however, I am not sure.

Here is the story:

In August 1855, while William Ross, Flat River was away from home, his father came into the house and asked for a drink of water. A little girl gave him a tumblerful from the bucket.

But Mrs. William Ross said "That water is warm, go to the well and draw a cold drink." The girl went, let the bucket down, but finding it would not sink into the water, drew it up again. She ran to her mother and told her "something is in the well".

Little Head Seen Far Below

THE MOTHER suddenly missed one of her small children, rushed to the well and, on looking down, saw only the crown of the little head 25 feet below her in the water.

As quick as thought the mother fastened the bucket at the top of the well – she feared to let it down lest it would hit the little head below – and let the loop of the rope down as far as it would go into the well. It would only reach half the distance to the bottom.

For younger readers who do not know how the old well buckets were operated, there usually was a wheel hanging from the top of a frame fixed there for that purpose. The water was hoisted in a bucket, which was attached to a chain or a rope – in this case it was a rope, apparently – and the bucket would be let down into the well where it would fill, then the bucket would be brought to the top, by pulling the rope, or chain over the circumference of the turning wheel.

Mrs. Ross slid down the rope as far as it reached, then she scrambled down the rest of the way to her daughter, lowering herself by getting her toes into the cracks of the stones on the side of the well, while she braced herself with her hands and her back at the other side.

At the bottom, she raised her child out of the cold water, but the little one was stiff and cold! Apparently it was quite dead", the old story said.

Teeth Used To Bring Baby To Top

QUICKLY LAYING the child across her own stomach the brave young mother, bending over caught the lower part of her dress in her teeth – it was actually wrapped around the child – and climbed back up, using her feet or toes to get a foothold in the cracks, or interstices between the stones, with her hands and back against the wall, bracing herself much the same way as she had descended a few minutes previously.

As she reached the end of the dangling rope she worked her way to the top.

Racing into the house, the mother bathed her child in hot water, as she tried to pour some spirits into the little throat.

Apparently it was a hopeless fight the young mother made as she tried to bring her little one back to life. “The jaws were stiff as death, the eyes glazed, upturned and full of sand from the well bottom.”

Liquor – A Good Scotch Remedy

USING A SPOON handle between the teeth, the mother pried the little mouth open and poured in some liquor, a good old Scottish remedy for many purposes.

Then she wrapped the child in hot blankets. But there wasn't the faintest sign of life, so far as could be seen.

The mother dashed the child's body once more into the hot water – it was made hotter this time – and rubbed and chafed the little body through the moist and hot wrappings.

Under the little arms, and near the heart, the body was still as cold as ice, from the long stay in the chilly well water.

A third hot water bath was tried; though the young mother must have been torn by doubt, she refused to give up as she fought for the life of her loved one. More hot flannel wrappings, more diligent rubbing by the valiant mother and finally, the child gasped for breath – there was a faint cry from the tiny throat.

An hour later the little one was smiling happily in her mother's arms.

That evening, says the old story of 111 years ago, “the father came home to see his little daughter hale and hearty where he might have seen a corpse and the family disconsolate in tears.

A Highland Mother's Pluck

AND THIS was “thanks under God, to a Highland mother's pluck”, the old news story observed with deep feeling.

The old clipping came from “The Presbyterian”, one of the earlier newspapers in this province.

The lady who performed the brave rescue operation was Christina Marion Ross, wife of William Ross, who lived on the farm where Richard Knox resides now.

The late William Martin, Flat River was a grandson, which means that Mrs. Callum MacPherson, Flat River is a great granddaughter. And Scott MacPherson, who was associated with CFCY for some years, is a great, great grandson.

FOR THOSE who read my farm column on Tuesday, there has been little change in Mrs. Matheson's condition, though we who are closest to her feel just a tiny shade better about the possibilities for her eventual recovery.

And that reminds me that I should explain why this column has not appeared for two weeks. It was a case of strict doctor's orders for a complete rest. The rest lasted two weeks. And that's why "Across The Island" did not appear as usual.