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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Account Recalls Remarkable Minister

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I WAS passing the Orwell Head United Church recently and my eyes turned almost automatically, in the direction of the monument to Rev. Donald MacDonald, a son of Scotland who left the imprint of his character, and his personality, on this Island as few others have done.

This week I came across "The Golden Future", a magazine printed by The Guardian back around 1930 – there is no date on it. And there I found a reference to Rev. Mr. MacDonald I read some years ago.

William S. Dutton wrote about MacDonald in the American Magazine back in 1929. The Golden Future reproduced his reference.

Dutton was talking about some of the outstanding men in this Island's development. He wrote in part:

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

Most Remarkable Man

DUTTON SAID: "The most remarkable of these was Donald MacDonald, 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 or since."

The words of description are those of Dutton, but he was repeating what somebody had told him during his visit to the Island for his magazine.

"Donald MacDonald 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 audience 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.

Silent Communion

"AT TIMES, in the midst of his exhortations, he would stop abruptly, plunk his big 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 MacDonald's great voice would boom with terrible portent.

“It is now one minute past eleven o’clock. Every man, woman and child is now one minute nearer eternity.”

“And later, “two minutes have passed”.

“Then, ‘You are three minutes nearer to your God’. The Island still talks of him,” Dutton wrote 40 years ago.

“Of the sinners who fell prostrate on the floor, crying out for forgiveness, of the conversions he made, of the good done by him.

“F.J. Nash of The Patriot told me “Donald MacDonald’s influence is still felt. For more than 30 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 MacDonald.”

Rev. Mr. MacDonald was born July 1, 1783, in the parish of Logicrack, North Britain (this wording is on the monument at Orwell Head). He was educated at the University of St. Andrew’s and ordained by the presbytery of Abertharff in 1816. He emigrated to this country in 1824 and died February 22, 1867 after laboring on this Island for nearly 40 years. It was in the fiftieth year of his ministry.

Recognition Of Pioneer

ORWELL HEAD Church is now closed, though I would hope that the cemetery will be maintained, for Donald MacDonald and many others are buried there, in the little patch of ground back of where the building still stands.

Here is one of the early pioneers in the work of the Church in this land. Surely his name deserves some recognition from the people who are responsible for such things.

Seven-Leaf Clover

SOME PEOPLE have the ability to walk along and stop casually and pick up four-leaf clovers. Mrs. Elmer McQuaid, Bedford is such a lady.

But this week she stopped and picked a seven-leaf clover, she tells me. She is wondering, and so am I, if such a thing has ever been known before.

I have heard of five-leaf clovers, and occasionally of ones with six leaves. But I had never heard previously of one with seven leaves.