

Memoir of the Life

—OF—

DONALD CAMERON,

WITH REMARKS

—BY—

HIS SON ARCHIBALD,

—OF—

Vellore, Vaughan Township, County of
York, Ontario.

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TO THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF INDUSTRY.

I, Donald Cameron, was born and brought up in Baramolach, in the Parish of Kirkmichael, Glassary, Argyleshire, Scotland. The date of my birth was the 24th day of June in the year of Our Lord, Seventeen Hundred and Ninety-three.

My father's name was Archibald and my mother's name, Agnes. The name of my grandfather, on my fathers side, was Duncan, and that of my grandfather on my mother's side, William Cameron. Both my grandmothers died before I was born, so that I am not quite sure of their given names. I think, however, that the name of my father's mother was Crawford and that of my Mother's mother was MacNeilage.

My father's occupation was that of a Herd in Baramolach—it was also the occupation of my grandfather till his death. After the death of my grandfather, Duncan, my father had the whole charge of the farm. Very often he had to do the buying and selling for his master, and I as the eldest of our family helped him according to my strength.

When he thought he could spare me he sent me to service. He hired me with Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Edderline, at four Pounds Stg. for half a year—I was then in my fifteenth year. Mr. Campbell was a very kind master to me, and all the servants were likewise very kind to me, some of them having been my school-mates. I had the charge of cattle and sheep—a very laborious task—however I put in my time, which was up at Martinmas. Then I went home and went to school during the Winter season.

My father left Baramolach and moved to Kintyre the next Spring. Mr. Campbell wanted me back again and my father consented. The wages at that time I do not remember, but afterwards I know they were advanced to fifteen Pounds, Stg. After peace with France my wages were reduced to twelve Pounds Stg. Although at this time I was working the farm and in the absence of my master, had the charge of the work and marked in a book and kept the time

of the labourers. I thought my own wages, as likewise the wages of my fellow-labourers, too little and so I left, bidding farewell to Mr. Campbell, of Elderline, in May, 1819. My thoughts had been turned to Canada and accordingly I prepared to emigrate and make a home in that new country. Before I came away, I married on the 24th of May, Christian McLeven, an amiable, godly young woman, a native of my own Parish. We shipped at Crinan Canal on the 23rd day of June and landed at Montreal on the 21st day of August. We left Montreal for Lachine and while remaining here a few days some of our friends left us and crossed to Chateauguay. A part of our little property was left on the wharf as the storehouse could not contain it all. This we had to watch by turns over night. When my turn came there came with it a great shower of rain; and from that I caught lake fever from which I suffered severely. This fever lingered long with me—indeed I may say that I was not well till the month of March of the following year. We departed from Lachine on our Westward journey with a number of acquaintances, calling at several points on the way. First we called at Glengarry, from that we went on to Kingston and from thence to York, where we remained one day. We left York on the 24th September, 1819, and arrived at Queenston the same day and remained there over the following day, that being Sabbath. Next day, the 26th of Sept., we departed for Fort Erie in a waggon and arrived at Fort Erie on 28th September. At this place I was very unwell, but my dear wife was to me a kind nurse and greatly encouraged and consoled me in all my troubles. We left Fort Erie on the 10th of October, 1819, in a slip keel or Durham boat and arrived at Point Ebinew and remained there four days. Sickness had prevailed among us and at length had completed its sad work, for here a number of our fellow-passengers had to bury some of their children. A great deal of delay occurred at this place. Some of the passengers got tired waiting and commenced to travel forward on foot. I was so unwell that I could not undertake to travel by land. However, in a few days we started with the boat at a slow rate. All things went well till one day above Miller's Bay we encountered a great storm—so great a storm that we were like to founder. We put back to Miller's Bay and let her run on the sand. We all landed except one old man and his two sons, but very soon they had good reason to repent their headstrong choice, for next morning the boat appeared with her deck all under water, and there

was the old man standing in a sad plight and calling upon us to come and save him from drowning. Although the old man and his sons were taken on shore, yet the boat lay in this position with every article we had in the world on board for three days longer. On the fourth day we got some of our things out of the boat, and at length a kind of windlass was made by which the boat was raised.

In this place I was very unwell and all the time in bed. But the people were exceedingly kind to me, often coming from a distance of three and four miles to see me. One person came three miles with his waggon to take me to his own house. Here we were detained four weeks. At the end of this time I got a good deal better; and not being willing to risk ourselves on the boat, we undertook to travel by land. Those on the boat started the same day in good spirits, thinking that they were sure to reach Talbot before us. We arrived at Talbot in due time and got a grant from the Colonel of 50 acres of land. I went to my lot and had just got a few logs cut for a house when word arrived that the boat had sprung a leak and could not proceed further till spring.

I and my wife got ready and went back to Long Point where the boat lay. On our arrival we got our things ashore, took a house from Captain Hutchison—a very kind man to us—and remained there fourteen months. Part of this time I was hired with a Mr. Webster. But unfortunately in the month of August 1820 I was stricken with fever and ague which continued with me for twelve weeks. As soon as I got better I started for York and drew land in Caledon. I left Captain Hutchison on the 19th day of February 1821 and arrived in Caledon on the 1st day of March of the same year.

But here misfortune again met me. By some unforeseen accident Mr. Webster the teamster ran short of feed for his horses and in consequence had to leave me eight or ten miles from my place. He left me at the house of a Mr. McDougald who, although a very kind man, was unable to help me forward. I went to my countrymen in Caledon to see if I could get them to take me up—but no, not one would help me. What could be done? Where could I turn for help? A stranger in a strange land—I was very down hearted. On my way back I called at Mr. Wilson's in Albion. When I was telling my story to Mrs. Wilson she said that I would be welcome to stop at their place till I could put up a house. I thanked her for her kindness. She told me that they had no oxen, but that there

was a man by the name of Malloy not far off who had oxen and might perhaps take me to my lot. Well, I went to Mr. Malloy and told my tale of disappointment and he consented to go next day, but he said that we should take some of our things up to his place as there was no house on my own place. My dear wife said, as Providence had provided a lot for us in the wilderness we would go on without a house or shed. As I said before we landed on 1st March with all that belonged to us. There was no house of any kind to which we could go. The good old Mr. Malloy struck up fire, and after resting ourselves we took something to eat. I began to clear away some of the snow where we were to lay our bed. Mr. Malloy said, when you have a piece of ground to log, I and my son will come and help you. I thanked him; and then bidding us farewell, he left us. We were now alone in the wilderness, but not despondent. I commenced to cut some wood for fire and then fixed some boughs of the trees above us for shelter. As night came on I made a large fire six or seven feet in length and we passed the night very comfortably. Next day I commenced cutting some logs for a shanty fourteen by twelve feet—some of them a good size—and when I thought I had all prepared I went for some help to put it up. Four men were all I could muster—no more to be got for miles around. The men came early on the day appointed, and we set to work. We had the heaviest of the logs to roll, and that was not easy as the snow was two feet deep. The lightest we carried on our shoulders—I believe I had to carry the most myself. Before night we had it finished except the covering which I had to prepare. This was made of bark from the basswood. I peeled the bark from the tree about six or eight inches wide and in lengths sufficient to cover one side at a time. The next day I had my little house covered. I had then to cut a place for a door and fill up the chinks between the logs. Then I wanted a floor in my cabin and this I made of the trees from which I had peeled the bark, fixing them with my axe the best way I could. I then made a bed-stead, and on the 10th March we moved into our cabin as contented as ever we were in our life.

The time we were in our camp Providence shined on us with good weather. Not a shower of rain or snow fell, so that God encouraged us in our setting out in the world. I forgot to mention in its proper place that Mr. Hector McQuarrie on one occasion left us a burden of hay which he had brought with him four and a half miles. This we

used as the under part of our bedding, to go between us and the ground, and indeed Mr. McQuarrie and others were sometimes in their travels glad to have a shelter over night in our camp.

Well after we were under a middling good shelter I commenced cutting down the trees, and cut, I suppose, about an acre. Two men who came in after me went to look for potatoes for seed and I accompanied them. We went to Vaughan where I got a few bushels after travelling twenty-six or twenty-eight miles—the price paid, I think, was 3 shillings 1½ pence per bushel. The other two men got what they wanted, and we conveyed the whole with some other articles to one place and made up a little load for oxen. There was some difficulty in getting a person and oxen to take us home, but at last we agreed with Mr. McQuarrie to go with us. The first night we encamped at the Humber, the second night at our own place in Caledon. I buried my potatoes under ground for fear of the frost.

And now I had to take a longer and harder journey. When we left Long Point, we left our cow behind with Captain Hutchinson. We could not take her with us as I had to be along with the teamster on the way, so on the 15th April I started for the cow. I felt a little depressed at the starting; the roads were then very bad—just at the worst. A long and toilsome journey lay before me, and besides I had left my dear wife and child Agnes alone—the shanty not having even a door to it. I arrived at Long Point and feeling anxious I started for home the next day. I did not go far this day, for unfortunately the cow was very poor and in a bad condition for travelling. On the second day I bought some corn in the ear and carried it on my back, giving the cow an ear now and again. I found that she soon gained by this feeding and in a few days she travelled very well. The night before I got home I stopped in a little tavern west of the Humber. The weather had been bad and on the morning of the next day the people advised me to go and see if I could get over the Humber. When I went I found the river swollen from bank to bank, still I felt that I must venture across. So I returned to the tavern for the cow, drove her straight into the stream and urging her forward, took hold of her tail and swam to the other bank. In this way the cow and I got safe on land. That evening I got home after travelling the best of three hundred miles; my dear wife and I uniting once more on the 1st day of May. And now the woods were beautiful and green and plenty for the cow. It may be asked, why

did I not sell the cow before moving from Long Point and thus save myself this long journey? There was good reason for not selling her. The cow cost me in work four pounds and ten shillings and I can tell you that I could not get one pound and ten shillings in cash for her. There was do money in circulation in those times.

I need hardly mention that on beginning our life in Caledon we were very poor. What, with sickness and other difficulties we had to encounter, we had laid past no money. We had been forced to live from hand to mouth, but still we were not altogether destitute. My dear father had bought for me a good timepiece for three pounds Stg. and this I had to part with. I sold it before leaving Long Point for two pounds ten shillings currency, and with this money, now reduced to two pounds and some provisions—a barrel of flour, some pork and beef—we set ourselves to face the hardships of the forest. This was a small stock upon which to begin housekeeping; but we had a very good shelter over our heads, we were young and hopeful, and I went to work with a will. I got two and a half acres in all chopped for spring crop, and when I burned the brush and was ready for logging, I went for my friend Mr. Malloy. He and his son came with me two days, so that I had plenty logged for my crop. I got it burned and ready for planting my corn and potatoes. I had finished before those that had oxen. Through the summer I got another piece of land logged for turnip. I bought two bushels more of potatoes from a man who was in the settlement the year before me, he had planted in July and they were very small. I gave four shillings 3½ pence per bushel for them. I cut them very small, leaving only one eye in each split. I think I planted five and a half bushels in all. The two last bushels went as far as four bushels.

When harvest time came I went to Vaughan to help with the wheat crop. I worked ten days for a bushel a day, equal to two shillings six pence in money. As I was engaged each day on a different farm, I had to carry all the wheat I got for wages on my back to one place, where I stored it until it could be taken to the mill. This was very slavish work, but there was no way of avoiding it. After I had finished at Vaughan I returned to Caledon to look after my own corn and root crop. It turned out beyond my expectation. I suppose I must have had over three hundred bushels of potatoes. Some days I would dig thirty or forty bushels and cover them in the pits. Of corn, I am sure I had sixty or eighty bushels; of turnips in

proportion large, so that my crop on the whole was excellent. We had also plenty of milk and butter.

This Fall we met with a small loss, but still a loss in our narrow circumstances. I had bought a calf from one of my neighbors and it strayed away with our cow to the place of my friend Mr. Malloy, perhaps intending only a friendly visit, but Mr. Malloy's dog seemed of a different mind, for he so cut the poor calf in the neck that it died. In Winter I went to Vaughan and took my wheat to the mill. It yielded a good return of fine flour, and when I got it home to Caledon we had plenty and some to spare to the hungry. Thus God provided for us in the wilderness.

In the Spring following I worked eight days for a man who had just come into the settlement. For my eight days work I got one barrel of flour, which, with our own little stock in the house lasted us till we got flour of our own. This man, with other three, lodged with us while they were doing settlement duty on some land. Most of their provisions, these men had brought with them from a distance of some thirty or forty miles, but this was no unusual experience in those days. There was no easy road to independence and prosperity then. If a living was to be got from the stern wilderness it must be by determined energy. I know something about this from my own experience. I have carried a large pail of butter from Caledon to Little York, a distance of nearly fifty miles. I once carried half a bushel of salt on my back from Thornhill to Caledon, more than thirty miles. After a while the salt began to melt and left my flesh raw. The pain from this soon became very severe and much harder to bear than the weight of the salt. My back kept me in mind of this journey for a long time. Such like difficulties as these were very common—so common that we hardly minded them—for except in taking wheat to the mill and other very heavy burdens our back was our usual means of transport. Indeed we had difficulties of many kinds to overcome. The Canadian forest was a grand school in this respect. Almost everything we wanted to make life endurable, we had to make for ourselves as best we could. We had to try our hand at all trades, and I soon found it necessary to try mine on a pair of shoes for myself. The shoes I had brought from the Old Country were all worn out. I set to work with some scraps of leather and a few working tools I had by me, and made a pair of new ones. This was a trade I knew nothing about, but I succeeded

wonderfully well. The shoes got finished and were a good fit—at least they did not pinch me. They might not be after the newest fashion, but they were good, strong, serviceable shoes, and I can say that the making of them tickled my patience as much as the half bushel of melting salt tickled my back.

As I thought my prospects began to brighten I bought two steers, expecting some time they would become oxen. And so I struggled on, having my ups and downs, but being always hopeful. In the month of August, Eighteen Hundred and Twenty-three, I went to the mill thirteen miles from my place, with three bushels of wheat in a sleigh, remained at the mill all night, and next day got home with the flour. In a few days after, on the 21st August, my dear wife got sick and was delivered of a still-born child. Our daughter Agnes was very sick at the time and not expected to recover. One day we thought her very near her end, and her mother got up from the bed on which she had just been confined to attend to the wants of our dying child. All hope seemed gone when fortunately I thought of trying sugar and cream. I mixed these together, got her to take a little and in a few minutes we thought her easier. Soon she began passing worms and from that day she was always mending. But alas! my dear wife got worse every day. Nothing we could think of gave her any relief or did her any good. Seven days before her death she lost her speech, and depend upon it my struggle was hard when I saw this dark cloud of death fast settling around me. Hope seemed to die within me, but all my neighbors for five miles round me were very kind and attentive, and this helped me much. Lardly a night was I left alone. They made an arrangement that two would remain with me every night—so that there was with me on the last night a man and a woman. My dear wife departed this life on the 7th October 1823. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away." My prospects were now dark; and the state of my mind, as I thought of being thus left alone in the wilderness with my two little ones, no one knew but God alone.

In a few days after my wife's death Mrs. Wilson took Agnes and Sarah with her. I was to pay for their support so much every week in work. Money I had none. But now my troubles grew worse and much harder to bear. One of my steers got I think overheated and

died—he was the best of the two. I bought another one from a neighbor on credit. My own one I took to his place, yoked them together, and drove them home. The man told me that his steer was used to stand in the yoke and that I might leave them so all night. I did so; and what had I to do in the morning but take the hide off the one I had bought. This was very hard, but it could not be helped. The two hides would bring something. So I got them taken on a sleigh to Farr's Mills now called Weston. Here a man took them on his waggon four miles further for which he charged me one shilling and six pence. The rest of the distance to York I carried them on my back and sold them to Catchum, the tanner. They weighed fifty pounds. After this I went some distance from home and bought another steer, and this along with the one I had, put me in a good way while I lived in Caledon. I may mention that I did not log any with my steers while in Caledon; mine were not strong enough for logging. What I did was to exchange work. That is, I gave two days work for one, which was very hard, but there was no other way that I could get along.

At this time my life was a very laborious one. Besides doing my own work at home I had to travel three and a half miles to Mrs. Wilson's every night and morning. There I had to milk and feed the cow, prepare fuel and make fires. I had also to mend my children's clothes and keep them in good repair and wash my own linen. In February, 1824, it came on a great storm of snow. To Mrs. Wilson's I had then to travel morning and evening and be there before sun rising for work. There was no one travelling the road then except myself, the snow being three feet deep. Sometimes I would sink deep into the snow and then stagger from one side of the road to the other. I thought this was killing work. I thought I could not provide for myself and the two dear little ones in this way of working. It seemed impossible. Therefore I made up my mind to try for a wife. It was not in vain, and God directed me on a blessed errand when I went to ask Elizabeth Armour to be my wife. She gave her consent, and I have now to say that to me she has been a good and faithful wife, and to my two little motherless ones, she has been also good and kind, and all that a mother could be. We were married by the Rev. Mr. Harris in Toronto, on the 10th March, 1824, and got home on the following Saturday. My Elizabeth was not very content with our prospects in Caledon. Indeed from

the date of our marriage up to the time of our leaving she never seemed to acquire any better liking for the place, so the first offer we got for it we sold it to a man named John Drummond, and bought Lot No. 30, on 5th concession, Vaughan, the place on which we now reside. It was a good change for us, and I may say that from that time to this day we have had plenty to eat and to drink and to spare. God has been good to us in the past and we may well trust Him in the future. Looking up to Him with steadfast faith we may say with the Psalmist :—

“ Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me ;
And in God’s house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be.”

On this place we have had a time of prosperity and a time of adversity ; a time to gain in the world and a time to lose. But through all our varied life God’s blessing has attended our exertions, so that we have plenty of this world’s goods. I pray that we may be looking for a world beyond the grave—“for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

I might put down a good deal more of what has happened to me in my life time since we came to live here, but I feel that I must now come to a close. “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord—(for we walk by faith not by sight)—we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.’

May God guide us all and prepare us for our latter end.

(Signed) DONALD CAMERON.

Dated April 21st, 1857.

POSTSCRIPT.—I have to mention that I interred the body of my wife Christian on my own farm. When I sold the place I still reserved my right to the burial plot, but as I had retained no title to a way of entrance, my friends thought with myself that it was best to remove the dead. I therefore in the year of Our Lord 1855, removed the dust of my wife Christian to Mrs. Allen McKinnon’s burying ground at the church on Lot No. 12 on 5th con., Caledon.

(Signed) D.C.

REMARKS BY ARCHIBALD CAMERON.

I may state that these slight sketches of a portion of my father's life came into my hands after his death. He evidently penned them towards the close of his life, and it is interesting to find him thus engaged. He had stood the heat and burden of the day and was drawing near the haven of rest. Even then his mind reverts to the past. In memory he revisits the scenes of his early trials and lingers fondly on all the way by which the Lord had led him. Doubtless, this very employment was to him then a source of strength and comfort. In printing his manuscript, I beg to say that I have not done so with a view to general publicity. It is not for a moment supposed that his simple unvarnished narrative lays claim to that kind of merit. It is addressed not to the critical eye but to the sympathetic ear. It is, in short, printed with the sole object of circulation among his relatives and those who were his personal friends, and I have ample reason to know that many of these will read with interest the story of his early Canadian struggles as given in his own words. There is but little more that I need add. My father's manuscript closes with his marriage to Elizabeth Armour, who became my mother. I know that some of my relatives of the younger generation would like to hear something about her. They want especially to ask me a question or two about their Canadian ancestress—who she was? and whence she came? I will therefore venture on a few details. Like my father, she was of Scottish birth and up-bringing. She was the daughter of Alexander Armour and Jane Love and was born in the Parish of Kilchenzie, on the 12th of April, 1797. The Armour family came originally from Ayrshire, and claimed, I believe, some distant cousinly relationship with Burns' "Bonie Jean." This may not be much; it certainly does not give a patent of nobility, but still it is something in these pedigree-loving days, to be able to claim a connection with one so far-

famed in Scottish song. Part of the family consisting of John Armour and his two sisters, Jean and Elizabeth, emigrated in the year 1820 and in due time landed in the United States. For some months they stayed in the town of Pittsburg, but feeling restless and longing for a sight of the old flag, they set out one bright morning with a team of horses and waggon for Canada. The roads were very bad and the journey slow and toilsome. Several weeks were spent on the road and when they had crossed the Canadian frontier and reached the River Credit, then they encountered their main difficulty. The bridge had been swept away and the river was full of floating logs—how were they to cross? Fastening the box firmly on the waggon, John Armour mounted one of the horses and with the aid of a long pole to ward off the floating logs, swam the team across. The two girls followed. Young and active, they made their way across the logs, jumping where necessary from one log to another until they reached the opposite bank. John Armour, with his sister Jean as his housekeeper, rented the farm which has years ago given place to Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Elizabeth took service with first Peter McDougal and then Colonel Duncan Cameron, whose farm has long ago been swallowed up by the city of Toronto. There she remained about two years—in fact up to the date of her marriage with my father. Their life in Vaughan was somewhat chequered—now prosperous and again adverse. They had difficulties to meet and surmount, but upon the whole their industry was rewarded with substantial and growing prosperity. Nor did they forget, even in these early days of hurry, to cultivate the social side of life. They had many warm friends; among these were the various members of the Malloy family, Arthur McNeil, John McLean, Donald McNaughton, and a host of others—all good and true men. A sturdy race were these old settlers—men distinguished alike for sound common sense and the solid homespun virtues, and warm hearted withal. Each one seemed to vie with another in promoting good fellowship, and thus it was that our fathers lived in the olden times—all helping by their genial kindness, to smooth the asperities of the wilderness and diffuse happiness around them.

One thing more. My father was an elder in the Presbyterian Church of Vaughan in connection with the Church of Scotland. He was ordained by the Rev. Peter McNaughton in the year 1833, and regularly performed the duties of his office up to the date of his

death. I may say that he always felt and manifested a deep interest in the prosperity and welfare of his church.

My father died on the 11th August, 1858.

My mother died on the 18th April, 1883.

Both lie till the resurrection in St. Andrew's Churchyard at Maple, on the 4th concession of Vaughan.

