

RAMBLING RECOLLECTIONS OF MY SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DAYS BY A NATIVE OF
BADBEA.

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Few people forget their schooldays and great and good men frequently indulge in relating some incident in connection with them. The time of youth is a very important time in the lives of men. It is in youth that we learn most things. Learn young learn fair is a correct and true saying. As an infant we begin our education and as an infant of a few months we begin to learn.

Education in my young days was very different from what it is now. There were 12 families in Badbea and they can scarcely be enough to have all the machines within themselves to educate their children. There were 13 families in Auchincraig closely adjoining Badbea, and now what one community could not do when left to its own resources, the two communities could accomplish. The schoolhouse was on the east, or Badbea side of Auchincraig. It was a dry stone built house with thatch roof and earthen floor, and light was supplied by a skylight of ordinary dimensions in the roof, a short distance above the eaves. There were no windows in the walls. The dimensions of this bigging as far as my memory can serve me, would be probably 20 feet by 12'. The fire was in the centre of the floor and the smoke made its exit through a round hole in the roof right above the hearth. Fuel was supplied by each scholar carrying a peat to school every day under his oxters. There was a sentry placed on the peat neuk to see that every scholar laid, or flung as it was often the case; a full sized peat on the neuk, and should anyone be guilty of an attempt to defraud the neuk by trying to slip in without his peat, or slip a half one instead of a whole, he was forthwith marched to Headquarters where his delinquency was rewarded by several pandies. One delinquent of this kind felt the indignity dealt out to him so keenly and showed such a rebellious spirit that he would refuse to bring another peat with him to school and when reading the lesson expressed his feelings in gaelic. It required a big fire to keep the school in heat during the winter for the walls were dry built without mortar. The force of the wind through the crevices in the wall was broken by the crevices being stuffed with dried moss or fog gathered from the hills. It was forced into the crevices with pieces of wood but in the winter the drifts came through it and formed miniature wreaths in the school and it was not an uncommon spectacle to see an urchin sitting in this wreath with his bare feet during a lesson. Of course he came to school barefooted. Children were real hardy in those days.

I don't think that I can give a better description ~~XXXXXX~~ to your readers of the school where I was taught my first lesson than by quoting part of a speech made by the Duke of Argyll in the House of Lords during a discussion on the Education Act. He said: "About 20 years ago, I went into a school on one of the western islands of Scotland. It was not suited to any of the rules laid down by my Lord President of the Council. It was what we call a drystane bigging with thatched roof and mud floor. On going into/

into the school, I found in it a number of children poorly clad, nevertheless with extraordinary intelligence of expression. One of the subjects given to the children was to read a description of how extract lead ore was treated. The description said that it was pounded and subjected to a current of running water to free it from extraneous matter. I then thought that it was impossible that a poor child, so poorly clad, could have understood the meaning of such a word as extraneous. I thought that it was a made cram and that he would be unable to answer any questions about this elaborate metallurgical process. I asked him what was the meaning of extraneous. He answered my question by saying, 'Not belonging to itself.' Now my Lords, I put that same question to many highly cultivated people, and nine out of ten, however highly cultivated they be failed to answer that question as clear and concise as that child."

It is quite true that in no other part of the kingdom has education attained such a high standard in proportionate to circumstances as in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The schoolhouse at Auchincraig was much the same as was to be found in similar districts in Scotland. The snow had free access to it in winter and in summer the bees found in the moss packed walls an inviting place to rear their young and many a bee was in these walls. When the young brood began to move about, the school room was like a monster bee hive, and many a sore sting went on the legs and thighs of boys by the young bees creeping up inside their kilts while they were seated on the forms at their lessons. The forms were placed with no backs on them and the writing desks were also of the simplest make.

The teacher from whom I got my first lesson was a Badbea lad of the name John Sutherland better known as Balaam. What qualifications he possessed to entitle him to be classed as a teacher, I know not, but I know that his fitness for that office was questioned indeed. He was as devoid of human feelings as he was of other qualifications. In place of the time honoured tawse he used a knotted piece of rope about $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick. He would cause an offender to be taken up on the back of a fellow scholar, when the kilt would be turned up and the lower part of the back laid bare, and then the knotted rope was applied without mercy. Should the person fail to hold the delinquent or refuse to hold him, he suffered the same degrading punishment as the guilty one. The teacher was paid so much in hard cash with board and lodging. He was boarded and lodged in each house alternatively, so many nights a week as the case might be according to the number of children from a family - a week for a child. There would be about 70 or 80 children of school age in the district. Sutherland was not long in office and after him came John Grant of Kinsary, Berriedale, who possessed a measure of qualifications for his office. He was young but inexperienced and was said to have a slate loose on his upper storey, and was known as the subtriquet of Trollie meaning silly, but he had a fair amount of education and was not so cruel and unmerciful as his predecessor. He also had some ambition and prosecuted his education and came out for ministry. He was succeeded by a lad from Balnabruich, Dunbeath, by the name of Sutherland, he possessed a modest amount of education and was well suited for the district under his charge. He also prosecuted his education and is in the ministry. The last of the dominies in Auchincraig was Donald Bain or Mackenzie from Hainstry who was more respected by the children and parents than his predecessors. He was of a gentle, mild disposition.

But the days of the school at Auchincraig were numbered. The eviction notices were served and it did not require a strong body of Police or a Magistrate, to execute the fiat of the Laird of Langwell, as we hear now taking place daily in other parts of the kingdom. No such proceedings were necessary. In Ireland evictions are taking place because of non-payment of rent, but in the case of Auchincraig there was not a shilling of arrears against any of the 13 tenants turned out with their families and scattered to the four winds of heaven. Their holdings was to be turned into green fields to rear sheep and game for the laird. There was no appeal to Parliament on their behalf, not one word of sympathy uttered to soothe and soften their hard fate.

There was no Saturday holiday in the school days. We had to be as regular at the school on the last day of the week as on Monday, but we got away a few hours earlier. This was to revise the Shorter Catechism and Bible Lessons. Neither were there any regular vacations during the summer season. There were no trips to the country or any of the modern advantages enjoyed in the present day by all classes. The teacher had to stick to his post summer as well as winter. During the summer the number of scholars were considerably diminished as many went to the herding and herring fishing where they earned a few shillings, the only chance they had of making a shilling the whole year.