BOOK REVIEWS


*Scots Breed and Susquehanna* by Dr. Hubertus M. Cummings is the title of this latest book on the Scotch-Irish. The present day generations will find the book of absorbing interest. It bears evidence on every page of the most careful and extensive research, and the presence of many family names will render the text doubly attractive to Scotch-Irish Americans. The book is fairly and impartially written, without either exaggeration or denigration, and is factual to a degree. It is, in reality, a panorama of life and history in the area drained by the Susquehanna River and its tributaries, from the time of the first arrival in Pennsylvania of Scotch-Irish immigrants down to the mid-years of the nineteenth century.

James Logan, the representative of William Penn and his family, appears early in the story with his famous remark, made in 1727, to the effect that great numbers were coming yearly from the north of Ireland to the new colony. The author also notes an article in Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* that "poverty, wretchedness, misery and want were almost universal in that unhappy country." "The taxes" (in Ireland), said the *Gazette*, "are exceedingly heavy, and money is very scarce, and, add to all this, that their griping, avaricious landlords exercise over them the most merciless racking tyranny and oppression. Hence it is that such swarms of them are driven over into America."

In addition to the aforesaid material hardships, the Presbytery of Tyrone is quoted by Dr. Cummings as declaring in unequivocal language that discrimination against Presbyterians in Ulster and the disabilities arising from the Sacramental Test of 1704, which excluded Presbyterians from all places of public trust and honor under the government, were powerful and impelling reasons for the departure from Ireland of so large a part of its population. It has been estimated that in all, at least one hundred thousand Scotch-Irish came to America in this way, and A. G. Bradley says that practically all of these people passed immediately through the seaboard settlements and threw themselves into the interior. Universally they were looking for land. Dr. Cummings comments that they brought little in the way of earthly goods but much in the way of habits and attitudes. That is
to say, they imported to the back country the Scotch-Irish way of life.

With reference to this subject, it will be worth while to quote from Dr. Cummings' text:

Each farm family had to have its cabin — or its loghouse of two-and-a-half stories, as more prosperity or more children came; its hogpen; its cow stalls; its sheds or its grain cribs; its half-acre of flax; its pasturage for a half-dozen sheep; or its two or three cows. A family must spin its own linen, produce its own wool. From new fields and from forest and stream on its own tract, too often neither a legally warranted nor a patented one, must come the family's food. The women must turn the yield of flax and the wool from the sheep into clothing. The hide of the deer shot in the woods or of the steer garnered out of the miniature herd of the family had to provide leggings and shoes. Little was to be bought by money, which seldom came to hand. In exchange for necessities like salt, iron, glass, and spices a family must supply itself with corn, wheat, butter, and other home-produced commodities for barter.

If the returns for labor were shelter, nourishment, and clothing, not a great deal else was expected. Good cheer, God-respecting gratitude, family affections and pastimes, loyalties in the neighborhood must suffice. The family circle must prove its own and its friends' and kinsmen's inspiration and reward. As much of creature comfort as possible, nothing of luxury, required planning and hard work.

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They looked over the unoccupied vastness of the lands in the Susquehanna country, and realized that for winning a heritage for themselves they had only the labor of their hands.

The Scotch-Irish people deeply wanted land. They have always done so, and perhaps in their hearts their descendants still do. At all events, our emigrant forefathers on arrival found themselves immediately confronted with two problems, namely, the Proprietaries and the Indians. Soon they discovered a further complication in the presence of very active Roman Catholic Frenchmen among the Indians, and they at once recalled that their own ancestors had been planted in Ireland for the express purpose of holding Ireland against Roman Catholic Spain and France. Hence it was not long before there was real friction between the Scotch-Irish settlers and the Indians, much to the embarrassment of the Penns, whose policy was pacific and conciliatory.

Dr. Cummings does not minimize the seriousness of this problem nor does he disguise the summary way in which the Scotch-Irish settlers dealt with their Indian neighbors. He gives the full story of the Conestoga and Lancaster "massacres"; the Carlisle jail delivery and Col. Armstrong's expedition against Kittanning. The need for law and order on the frontier is recognized, and, likewise, the policy of the Proprietaries to live in peace with the aborigines. A very full and complete account of murders, reprisals, raids and violent conflicts over the
years is told in measured language and without comment. The text really is a masterly survey of a basic period in Pennsylvania and American history, which, so far as the reviewer knows, no one else has yet touched with equal authority.

As the years rolled on, the scattered farmsteads, forts and settlements grew into towns, connected by well-defined roads. When the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Scotch-Irish threw their whole weight into the fight against England. They were with Washington at Boston and Montgomery at Quebec. They were in the defeat on Long Island, and through New Jersey. They were at Trenton and Princeton, Brandywine and Germantown, in the Wyoming massacre and at Yorktown. All these names and much accompanying history are justly and truthfully noted and assessed by Dr. Cummings. Even the Whiskey Insurrection is given a place. Chronologically arranged, realistically presented and candidly portrayed, the movement of life and history, and of Scotch-Irish participation therein, is told with calm and quiet accuracy. Through the story runs the thread of Scotch-Irish character, with its red strand of courage, its golden strand of family life, its grey strand of Calvinistic faith and, also, its darker strands of impatience and self-will.

In a nostalgic valedictory paragraph, Dr. Cummings laments the disappearance of the old Scotch-Irish people and their virtues. However, it was inevitable that they should be merged into the ranks of the new American nation which they had done so much to found. From the first, they were frontier people. They refused to observe the Quebec line. Their rifles smoked continuously on the war trails. They literally took the western lands "out of the hands" of the Indians, and, in the process, they dissolved the old closely-knit Scotch-Irish communities and were scattered everywhere in the new western areas. As time passed, they no longer made the same racial impact upon their environment, but were assimilated into the aggressive forward-moving masses of the settlers in the middle west. Their virtues survive in their descendants, who can only now dedicate themselves to preserving the memorials of their forefathers. In so doing, they will find that the old Scotch-Irish spirit yet survives, and, if challenged, that it will blaze forth with renewed vigor. To this all-important work of preserving our past, Scots Breed and Susquehanna has made no ordinary contribution, and we are most grateful to Dr. Cummings. It is sad that we can only say to him, Salve atque Vale. Dr. Cummings died in 1963.

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