

Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland in Old Words, Phrases and Expressions, Their Origin and Meaning. Compiled by P. K. [Patrick Kevin] Devine. (St. John's, Newfoundland: Robinson & Co., Ltd., Printers, 1937. Reprinted St John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, 1997. Pp.iii-v + 81. Preface by Philip Hiscock. \$8.95, ISBN: 0-88901-317-9, pbk.)

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In Newfoundland we all know how to put a good face on bad times. It is very important for your dignity and your hope. One of the most heartrending things about the moratorium is that there seems to be an unwritten law that people be denied their good face. The rest of the world wants to see us pitiful (19).

The struggle between hope and despair unites the collaborative efforts of Stapleton, Brookes and Lewis into a package that ultimately does justice to its subject, the Newfoundland cod moratorium, and to the people whose lives it so altered.

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Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland is a piece of Newfoundlandia neatly frozen in time. Its original 1937 publication was financially supported by Gerald S. Doyle (1892-1956), a prominent Newfoundland businessman and Devine's cousin who, as is pointed out in Philip Hiscock's Preface to the book, knew the commercial value of Newfoundland folklore, since he distributed five free collections of Newfoundland poetry and songs as a means of promoting his own business. Doyle placed advertisements for his drugstore variety products

throughout *Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland*, purchased most of the copies and distributed them free of charge to his customers, apparently with the aim of increasing his business' sales and revenue. With the 1997 reprint, Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications may in part be following Doyle's example and hoping for similar results, though now the slim volume is being sold for a modest price.

Hiscock's brief Preface is itself something of a review of the book, pointing out, for instance, that one of its shortcomings is that some of the words included within are in fact not peculiar to Newfoundland at all (iv). It is mainly, though, a tribute to Devine (1859-1950), including biographical information and contextualizing his research and writing within the development of the study of Newfoundland folklore; wondering about his contribution to that folklore canon; and calling the book "a snapshot of the cultural and intellectual milieu of Newfoundland's capital city in the 1930s and a part of the flowering of Newfoundland culture that had been fertilized for decades" (v). Elsewhere he has referred to *Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland* as "an example of the best of old-fashioned folklore collection: a catalogue of sayings and superstitions without a lot of superfluous explanation" (Hiscock 18). While today's folklorists may balk at the cataloguing without contextualizing approach to folklore collection, Devine was an enthusiastic writer and collector but not a professional folklorist and the book reflects its era.

Hiscock has said of Devine, "If he was around today he'd have phone-in shows on Newfoundland trivia on the radio. He was the person of his time who best foreshadows the scholarly explosion in Newfoundland studies we've had in the last 20 years" (*Gazette* 7). In his Preface to *Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland* Hiscock writes, "It is an honour for me, a folklorist in the 1990s, to help bring back into print this work of P. K. Devine, one of our first folklorists and a Newfoundlander I personally admire" (v). In fact, it is thoroughly fitting that Hiscock, Archivist at Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) at the time that the Preface was written and currently a professor with Memorial's Folklore Department, contributed to the reprint since he seems to share with the late Devine much enthusiasm for learning about Newfoundland culture and sharing that knowledge.

Though the book's design is rather lackluster, part of the volume's charm is that it is a facsimile of the 1937 publication, complete with Gerald S. Doyle's advertisements, so evocative of the 1930s. These ads make an intriguing collection in their own right. Some are for products long off the market, and

others are for those that have stood the test of time, including Camay soap, Bayer Aspirin and Listerine Antiseptic. And, of course, the back cover features an ad for Doyle's Newfoundland Cod Liver Oil, the bane of many Newfoundland children's existence. (Although one of my uncles had such a taste for the stuff that my grandmother had to hide it to limit him to the regular daily dose, or risk having him guzzle it all.) Some folks may have been persuaded to abandon this cod liver oil in favour of Scott's Emulsion, swayed by the ad which features the product's trademark fisherman, who claims in a balloon caption, "Scott's Emulsion builds more effective resistance to colds and disease because it digests 4 to 5 times faster than ordinary cod liver oil" (16).

Some of these ads are interesting to consider in comparison to their present day counterparts or lack thereof. For example, an ad for Vicks Va-Tro-Nol claims that it can "Prevent many colds" (28), while today herbal remedies like echinacea are promoted with the same claim. In the meantime, medical researchers are still trying to slay the common cold and recently pharmacies are being stocked with new drugs developed to allay the flu. Another product, Dr. Hobson's Derma Zema Ointment is lauded in its ad as a germicide and antiseptic to use for itchy or otherwise irritated skin, and as "Good also for chapped hands and face bruises, burns, chafing athlete's foot [and] rectal applications" (44). Contemporary television advertisements for Gold Bond Medicated Ointment cannot help but come to mind for anyone who has seen them.

Another gem is an ad for Dr. Chase's Nerve Food, something of a precursor of Prozac. It appears with a caption which asks, "Are you irritable with your children?" and responds to itself with, "It's your nerves." It pictures a desperate-looking mother and her two children, the latter two armed with a hobby horse and trumpet, and goes on to explain that "all the cares and worries of housework and a family of lively, frolicking children to look after" could leave a mother "headed for a complete nervous collapse" "once the nerves fail to get their full supply of nutrition from your blood." Dr. Chase's Nerve Food to the rescue: "what would thousands of mothers do without the restorative, revitalizing influence of this well-known food for nerves" — turning their children into their "greatest joy instead of a worry" (64). As many of us say in Newfoundland, "Oh me nerves!"

If Dr. Chase's Nerve Food may be regarded as a precursor to Prozac and its peer drugs, then *Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland* is a precursor to one of

Newfoundland's premiere scholarly books, *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (1982). J. D. A. Widdowson is one of that volume's editors and has said, "Devine's book was very useful in feeding into the early collecting phase [the early 1960s]. There weren't many references in those days" (*Gazette* 7).

In addition to its catalogue of words, Devine included in the book such sections as "Superstitions, Phrases and Weather Lore," "Superstitions and Local Phrases" and "Proverbs and Sayings," managing throughout to pepper the text with references to Horatio, Chaucer, Horace, Bacon, Emerson and Shakespeare. Some of his writing cannot help but seem rather histrionic, as when Devine holds forth on the pride of the descendants of the *Mayflower* travellers who "traversed the great waterway with nothing but their brave hearts and a challenge to fortune," intending to encourage Newfoundlanders to be at least as proud of their heritage, for "our brand of nobility should be the greater for the more rigorous nature of the climate" (80). The juxtaposition of Devine's writing style with the vernacular words and phrases that he is documenting is another part of this book's charm, so I conclude with words of wisdom from the "Superstitions and Local Phrases" section: "If you don't want your pork to ruin/ Kill your pigs at the full of the moon" (73).

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