

BOOK REVIEW

Living in a pleasant country

By R.L. GORDON

Canadians are sometimes overly modest about their country, as though they needed someone from outside to reassure them that they were indeed living in a pleasant land and doing passably well.

A New Kind Of Country, by Dorothy Gilman (Doubleday, 192 pages; \$7.95) is a book that will not merely reinforce a Canadian's belief in his own land, but may make many Americans wish that they could be part of our community.

This is not tourist brochure. Near the beginning, the American author says: "It was a country I'd never visited before. It was this that was foreign, not my surroundings. And it was frightening".

East Tumbill is the code name for the small town where she bought her house and came to know the lobstermen of Nova Scotia. She came to know the people who lived there.

MISTAKES FORGIVEN
At the end of the book, she says, this: "Nothing in life stands still. The tides are in incessant motion, the earth moves on its axle, our bodies manufacture twenty million new blood cells every second, and yesterday's mistakes are forgivable because this is today."

"I changed a great deal from living in East Tumbill, outwardly as well as inwardly."

"One day when my son Jonathan visited me in February and the pipes froze he said, 'How calm you are! Do you remember how this would have upset you three years ago in New Jersey?'"

"On a visit back to the States a friend said, 'You look so different now, so relaxed. The strain's gone from your eyes.' 'Some of the time and space of the Nova Scotia coast is inside of me now and always will be. It is the best part and the newest!'"

SELF-DISCOVERY
There is much self-revelation going on these days, on television and on the printed page. A good deal of it is somewhat startling in a vulgar way.

This, too, is a book of self-exploration - but most readers will, I predict, feel there are companions in the exploration rather than mere on-lookers.

There are nice quiet bits like this: "When we first visited East Tumbill, my son Jonathan said, 'Have you noticed the way everybody talks about the weather? You'd think there was nothing else to talk about.'"

"Well, in a way there wasn't. The weather was THERE, an integral part of life, elemental, unpredictable and always, ALWAYS dramatic. I could leave for town in a thick fog, reach Tumbill Centre to find the sun shining, and drive through a snowstorm before I reached town."

"When the sun shone it was dazzling; when there was fog it was wraithlike and peaty, drifting past one's windows or sometimes following one up from the beach when it moved in fast; and then of course there was the wind."

"As I grew immersed in country life, I took, began every conversation with speculations about the weather; what else was more important?"

"Even today I remain uneasy if the day ends without a complicated weather report and a complete marine forecast; I remain eternally braced for the unexpected now, which in East Tumbill was the norm."

And then, a page later, she says "We are born alone and we die alone. . . we'd better learn how to handle aloneness and solitude."

ALWAYS ON CALL
Later on she seems to recognize the difficulty of the thesis she has laid down.

"It's hard to separate oneself and stand alone: For a cause, for a belief, for a purpose, even to try something new. And for women the ryles are little more complicated than for men."

"It's hard enough PHYSICALLY for a woman to continue being a teacher or physicist after she's had a child, but emotionally, it's the hardest of all: She runs the intolerable risks of being called not independent but selfish, or, most biting of all, masculine."

"We move from guilt to guilt, damned if we do, and damned if we don't."

The book is perhaps at its best when Dorothy Gilman is simply describing her life in the small Nova Scotia village but is made fuller and more meaningful by her reflections on the state of man. A reader may disagree with some of her thoughts but will not lightly dismiss them.

This is Dorothy Gilman's first non-novel. I hope she will do another before too long. Richard Gordon L. Gordon's latest novel, You'll Hear Me Laughing, is to be published later this year.

— Thomson News Services.



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