

THE DALHOUSIE REVIEW

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RECOLLECTIONS OF HIS LIFE, by James Dawson.

From a Family Scrapbook in the papers of Sir William Dawson, Special Collections, McGill University, Montreal, and edited by Marjory Whitelaw

James Dawson arrived in Pictou, Nova Scotia, from Scotland, aged 22, in 1811, and soon became active in the business and religious life of the community. His son, William, born in Pictou, grew up to be a professor of geology, President of the Royal Society (of Britain), world famous, knighted, and for many years Principal of McGill University -- a wonderfully solid realisation of Pictou's legendary production of scholars.

Recently, among Sir William's papers at McGill University, I discovered the manuscript of James Dawson's *Recollections* (written towards the end of his life), containing some exceptionally interesting material about business methods -- and hazards -- in the early years of the nineteenth century. James was a devout Presbyterian, but with a somewhat egocentric conviction (typical of the time) that the attention of the Almighty was permanently focussed on the affairs of James Dawson. He interpreted God's will as a system of chastisement and rewards; a bad turn in his affairs was seen as disapproval; success, sometimes in sharp business practices, he was able to see as evidence that the Lord was pleased with him.

Dr. Patterson, in his excellent *History of Pictou County*,* remarks only that James did not have "the knack of gaining popularity". The journal begins:

"INCIDENTS OF A LIFE

"Being a Record of 70 Years' experience of God's goodness & mercy.

"Surely goodness & mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." *Psalm 23* - 6

"By reference to the Parish Register of the Parish of Ordequhill -- County of Banff -- Scotland, and to the fly leaf of my mother's Family Bible, it appears, that I was Born at Overtown, in the said Parish on the 25th of March 1789, being the same year in which the French Revolution burst forth. I was the youngest, save one, of Ten Children...

"My Father was a man of great Physical force, being 6 feet 3 Inches high; he, and all his ancestors, so far as I have been able

* Published in 1877 by Dawson Brothers, Montreal; reissued in 1972 by Mika Studio, Belleville, Ontario.

to trace them, were R. Catholics; they are said to have emigrated from Ireland, some Centuries ago -- in disguise, accompanied by one John Gordon, they having been implicated, as two Principals, in one of those many struggles Ireland has engaged in, unsuccessfully, to regain her Liberty from the Anglo-Saxon Rule.

“My Father was much Superior to the ordinary Class of Roman Catholics, in Education, Intelligence and Liberality. While he claimed the liberty to think for himself in religeous* matters he freely extended the same right to all others; it was, therefore a settled point with him, never to enter into any Religious disputes. He was a strict observer of the Sabbath day, and seldom failed in his attendance at Chappel, although distant 3 or 4 miles ... He Read Protestant Religious Books, as well as R. Catholic ones, and on some occasions heard Protestant Sermons, for which offences he was subjected to Discipline & Pennance by his Priest. He was attentive to his Private Devotions, when I was a Mere Child, I can remember having seen him repeatedly on his knees at his morning and Evening Exercises. He was emphatically a man of Peace, both in & out of his family, and never suppressed zeal for Propagating his own Faith to disturb his good understanding with his Neighbours, or mar the Peace of his own family...”

James Dawson does not seem to have thought it necessary to show equal tolerance; his attitude towards Catholicism was very typical of Presbyterians at the time:

“When I left home for the North American Colonies in 1811 my Father was very much affected at our Parting, he shed many Tears and could scarcely refrain from crying. I took advantage of his being in that condition to speak to him about his Religion, and among other things, I said, I begged of him to read & study the Bible and assured him that if he did so in earnest and in a Prayerful Spirit, it would Guide him as to what he should believe & what to reject, and concluded with a hope that if it Pleas'd God to spare us both to meet again, he would be prepared to change his Creed for the Protestant one. The next time I saw him again, which proved to be the last, was in the Winter of 1816, at which time, I found that the Priests still managed to get him to hang on to his old belief, tho with a good deal of reluctance, and I had to bid him farewell in that unhappy state as I could not get him to come boldly out a Protestant. . . Six

* I have retained James Dawson's original spelling and punctuation except in a few instances where clarity requires alteration.

years after that interview he died, and as I had heard nothing of any change in his view I was left to conclude that he had Died a R Catholic; The Reader, then, may judge of my feelings when I tell him that not a year ago, a Sister who was Present when he Died, communicated to me. . . the Cheering fact that he Died a Protestant. . . . This intelligence has been to me a most unspeakable comfort and has relieved me from a load which has hung on my mind for more than 30 years, for which I desire to express deep thankfulness to Almighty God.

“My Mother was a Pious, good Woman, and a Member of the Established Presbyterian Church; she gave all her Children a careful training in the Scriptures and the Shorter Catechism, thus discharging the obligations She had taken upon herself at their Baptism...”

James' father had been a prosperous small farmer; his mother's brother was a doctor. Typically for the Scotland of his day, some of James' brothers were sent to the University; James, for reasons of health, was not. A severe attack of smallpox in childhood left him not only weak eyes but in generally poor health, a condition which stayed with him for many years. The following excerpt relates events which began about the time of his illness:

“When I was about 7 years of age an occurrence of no ordinary kind, took place in our Parish. This was the establishment of a Sabbath evening School, by a man of the name of Mitchel ... under the charge of Rev. Mr. Primrose (Father of Jas Primrose Esq^r of Pictou, N.S. and Alex^r Primrose Esq^r of Halifax, N.S.) ... My Mother sent me and some older sisters to the School, and I continued to attend it Either as a Schollar or a Teacher till I was about 17 years of age. During a large portion of this Period I was sent to the Parish School, during the Winter half year, and assisted my Father on the Farm during the summer Months, where, under Various Teachers I received the elements of a good English Education, Arithmetic, &. For some months I was put into a Latin Class, as my Mother was very anxious to give me a College Education, but my Brother George, who had himself gone through a regular course at College, and other Friends, advised her to relinquish this plan, owing to the Extreme weakness of my Eyes which they thought would unfit me for study. This was a sad disappointment to me, for my whole desire was, at that early period of my Life, bent on the acquisition of a Liberal

Education. From the age of 14 to 17 I was principally employed on the Farm with my Father, but at the Latter period I intimated to him my wish to Learn a Trade, he told me to Choose one; I chose that of a Saddler, when he engaged me to a Mr. Rob^t Milne of Huntley for 4 years...

“In Mr. Milne’s shop there were Generally 12 to 14 young men about my own age, besides a Foreman... Some of the Apprentices were very profligate & Immorral in their behaviour, and presented to me such examples of Human depravity as I had never Witnessed before, but, fortunately for me, there were a few others of quite an opposite Character... They also invited me to attend their several places of Worship, on the Sabbath Evenings, of which I availed myself, but attended the Parish Church in the forenoon, where I had rented a Sitting. At the age of 19, after much serious reflection I resolved to Give myself to the Lord, and accordingly I applied to my Minister, the Rev^d Mr. Monro, a Brother of the Late James Monro, Cabinet-Maker in Pictou, N.S. and I was admitted to the Communion for the first time in the summer of 1809...”

Edward Mortimer, mentioned in the following excerpt, was in 1811 Pictou’s leading businessman, a Member of the House of Assembly for Pictou and a person of considerable stature in the province.

“At the End of my Apprenticeship (1811) I fell in with a Mr. Mitchel, a relative of my mother’s who had been a good many years in the Island of Trinidad, W.I. and was supposed to have made some money there. He proposed taking me with him... He had a vessel at Greenock* with a cargo of W I Produce and went there to have it disposed of while I was consulting my Friends and making up my own mind as to ulterior proceedings, when, all at once we were taken by surpse, by observing in the newspapers that Mr. M-- had committed Suicide at Greenock. Here was one of the earliest designs set aside by the decree of Providence. It so happined that at the same time Edw^d Mortimer esq^r from Pictou N S came home on Business and to visit his Friends in the North of Scotland, and as I had made up my mind to go abroad somewhere, I called on him while he was staying with his sister the Late Mrs. Forsyth of Keith. After some Hesitation he agreed to take me out, on an agreement to serve him 3 years as a saddler for £20 Currency a year, he finding me Board and

* On the River Clyde, a few miles below Glasgow, and one of the principal ports for emigration to North America.

Washing. There were 3 Others, a Carpenter a Mason and a Cooper engaged with him at the same time, and after a little preparation we all set out together, to Walk overland to Greenock where the Vessel (Amphitrite Captⁿ Bat) was lying to receive us. This journey of 18-miles on foot was the first trial of my Phisical Powers in enduring fatigue. . . ”

“Our next day’s journey brought us to a small country Town called Blackburn . . . and the day following we reached Kirkintilloch, within a few miles of Glasgow. On approaching this little Town, and when about a mile from it, we came to a Bridge over a small stream, and found 7 or 8 young men loitering about it, who, as soon as we came up to them, began to abuse us by calling us bad names, and telling us that they would not let us pass till we gave them some money to drink, this of course we Declined, but we were puzzled to find out how to get past them without Trouble. Peter Grant’s* Highland Blood was so much stirred that he called us all aside a little and proposed to make a united rush upon them with our staves and give tham a good Drubing, which he thought we might easily do, as they had no sticks, and he proposed to lead in the van. This, we all declined as a most hazardous attempt. At this time we saw a man with a Horse & Cart advancing in the same Road we had come, when I immediately went and met him and after telling him our circumstances, he immediately told us all to stick close to him at the cart, and he would take us through them or he would have the marks of his stick (he also had a good sapling in his hand) on some of their heads. As the man was apparently very strong and able to fulfill his promise we took courage. When he set the Horse to a gallop and we went thro them in a moment bidding them good bye. They threw some stones after us which did no damage, but we were not done with them yet as the reader shall see shortly. We kept company with this generous individual till we got into the Town, where he kindly shewed us a House of entertainment, where he assured us we would be well taken care of. We had scarcely, however, got our meal finished, when we heard a croud of men rush into the House calling out loudly for Liquor, the waiter shewed them into a Room adjoining the one we occupied, and in passing in we saw them and knew them to be the Rowdies who had insulted us at the Bridge. After geting Liquor they commenced shouting & Singing profane songs, and every now & then we discovered

* Peter Grant was the Carpenter.

that we were the subjects of their meriment. We were, therefore, at no loss to judge what was their intensions; fatigued as we were with our day's journey, we were neither in good condition nor spirits to enter into a scuffle with such a set of blackguards. Tired tho we were, we sat up to a late hour, in the hopes that they would go away or the Landlord expell them; this was a vain hope for after siting till past midnight they were still there & geting more & more noisy. Not knowing well what to do, we called the Landlord and told him how the matter stood and that we apprehended they intended to attack us in our Beds. He promised to get them out of the house as soon as possible but added that it would be no easy matter, as they had all got drunk, he advised us to go to bed, and said that if he could not get them out soon he would send for some constables and clear the House of them. We went to our Bedrooms (2 Rooms with the Doors within about a foot of one another) two in each, and lay down with our Cloths, on, for we knew well that we could sleep none while these men were in the house. We locked both our Doors inside, & it was well we did so, for we had no sooner laid ourselves down when they made an attempt to Burst them open. We heard the Landlord and some waiters urging them to desist and go home, but without effect. Very luckily he had sent for the constables before the time, and while they were all in the midst of the Melee the Constables rushed in and with our aid and that of our Host & his Servants they were all Secured and Marched off to Gaol. We thus got to bed, and had a little disturbed sleep towards the morning. We rose late and after taking Breakfast proceeded on to Glasgow, where we made no stay, and to Paisley, where we found a stage coach was to leave for Greenock in an hour. . ."

"I need say nothing about our Passage as we had a very fine one , we left Greenock on 11 April and arrived at Pictou on Sunday the 19th May 1811. There were in the Cabin E. Mortimer & John Dawson Esq^{RS}*, and a Mr Goodlett from Edinburgh or Leith, and in the Steerage there were about 30 including us 4 -- they chiefly consisted of masons & carpenters & their Families, whom Mr Mortimer had engaged to assist in Building his stone house which he had begun the previous year (now called Norway House).** There were, besides, one or two Farmers which Mr M. intended also for his own use on the Farms."

*John Dawson, from Dumfriesshire, was in Pictou as early as 1791. He seems to have been associated in business ventures with Edward Mortimer. He was not related to James Dawson.

** Edward Mortimer's house still exists in Pictou, though changed and enlarged; it is an elderly persons' home, run by the Oddfellows. But the central core of the original stone house is much as it was in Mortimer's time-a very fine example of the type of house an affluent merchant would have built in Scotland, with an oval hall in the classical manner of Robert Adam, and a dining-room with a particularly fine decorative plaster ceiling. It is worth visiting.

“When I left home, I had very little money, with me, and my journey and long stay at Greenock^{***} had nearly exhausted that little. All my stock when I arrived at Pictou was one *Guinea*. This however did not discourage me in the least. I had good health and I had laid in a good stock of cloths, & my boarding was to be paid by Mr. Mortimer, so that I had no need of money, nor any legitimate way of spending it; accordingly at the End of my first year’s service, I had still some portion of my guinea in my pocket and my £20 all to the good. . .

“Before I had been a year in Mortimer’s employ, I began to see that there were Several things I could run my attention to in order to increase my little stock of money after I came in Possession of my first year’s salery, without in the least interfering with my duty to Mr. M^F, accordingly I agreed with him as to what time I should devote to his Service which was from 6 A. M. to 6 P. M. I mentioned my views to Mr M -- to which he offered no objections, only he set it down as a rule for my Guidance that I should engage in nothing that would interfere with my duty to him. Keeping this Requirement in view, the first thing I directed my attention to, was the Purchase & manufacture of Furs into mens & Boys Caps; Ladies Gloves, Muffs & Tippetts (Boa’s had not been thought of) & Fox, martin, mink, Musk Rat & Otter were all then very Plentiful about Pictou and as no one in the Place had turned their attention to this Branch of Trade leaving it all in the hands of the Pedlers, who wheelded them out of the Peoples’ hands for almost nothing, I saw that a very handsome thing might be made of my little capital by turning it over & over a number of times in the course of the Winter, in which I was not mistaken, for in almost every Instance the Furs I Sold more than doubled the Price I had paid for htem, whilst those I manufactured generally yielded me 4 or 500 percent of Profit. My first year’s experience left me in Possession of over \$100 of clear Gain, which to me then was quite a fortune. In succeeding years my gains from this source increased for a time, when the Fur Bearing animals began to Exterminated, and the resident Trade, they all got after it, so that in a little it ceased to be Profitable when I gave it up.”

*** Dawson was detained in Greenock about a month, waiting for the vessel to be got ready for the voyage.

“Indian Porcupine Quill Manufactures was another Class of Wares which during my agreement with Mr-- I dealed in largely. Ship Captains was my Principal Customers for them and they never grugged a *good* Price for a *good* article. The Porcupine was then Exceedingly Plenty in N Scotia, but like other aborigins they have now got so scarce that they may be considered extinct. By the means I have mentioned together with the most rigid Oconomy, I was able, at the end of my 3 years apprenticeship with Mr. Mortimer, not only to Purchase the stock of unmade Saddlery he had on hand, but also to pay Mr Milne of Huntly £20 Sterling for the last year of my Brother's apprenticeship, £10 more for his Passage out and £10 more for his outfit. I was induced to do this to gratify the intensity of his desire to come out and join me in Business. As I have mentioned my Brother (Robert) I may state here that he chose the same Trade that I did he entered Mr Milne's Service, at Keith, in 1810, and came out to Halifax with Captain Oswald Brig Louise in May 1813. . .

“I had at this time still a Year to serve Mr Mortimer on my agreement with him, and I at once said that in my now altered circumstance it would be most desirable for me to try to make a compromise with him for it, so that I might be free to act on my own account, and as Mr M-- seemed to be as anxious as I was to enter into any arrangement that would close up his saddlery speculation without loss, I found no difficulty in entering into a compromise by which I took the tools, shop and all the unmadeup stock off his hand at a fair valuation and he took my obligation to pay in made up Stock in half yearly instalments. . . .

“In 1815 an Election of Elders took place in the Congregation; the Choice fell on John & Jas Patterson, two Brothers, Don^d Cameron of Chance Harbour & Myself; I pled very hard to be excused, at least at that time, on account of my youth & inexperience, but after a long debate the Congregation finally adhered to their first choice. . . Not Knowing well to what side Duty impelled me, I prayed Earnestly to God for Direction, when the Lord himself seemed to lead me by a way I knew not to stand forth for the honour of his Name, saying to me, “Fear not, I will make my strength perfect in your Weakness!” Having devoted myself anew to my Heavenly Father in Prayers, and Supplicated him to lead me in the way he would have me go -- to cast in my Lot more unreservedly with the people of

God than I had ever yet done, and to keep me from improper desires of the Riches & honours of the World, I consented to be Ordained an Elder. This office I continued to hold 41 years, that is till 1856 when I resigned preparatory to my leaving Pictou & going to Montreal. Here let me pause and Bless God for this further token of his Loving Kindness, in permitting me to Exercise the office of a steward in his vineyard here below, and in making that office instrumental in keeping me aloof from many of the fashionable Sins & follies of the time and place...

“When my Brother came out in 1813 we entered into Partnership in the Saddlery Line, under the firm of Jas & R Dawson, the Capital being all mine; it was but a small Business, but when taken in connection with the other matters I had added to it, of Fur manufacture & Indian wares it bid fair to support us decently, and it would probably have been well for us both if we had been content to stick to it alone; but in 1816 we added to it General Merchandize chiefly in the Hardware, Soft Goods and Stationery line, in which, by close attention we were generally prosperous, but still we were under the impression that we were not doing enough, and in the fall of that year, we took the assignment of the charter of a Brig called the “*Seaton*” of Workington, from Mr. Thos Davison which he was unable to load. I went up with her to Wallace and bought her Cargo there, and then took Passage home with her to Liverpool, to see her cargo sold, and to make arrangements with furnishers in England & Scotland for our future Supplies. I employed in L’pool as agents Messrs Dempsey & Picard and they succeeded in selling the cargo tolerably well, we made a small Loss upon it, but it was trifling and we expected as much. We had a very stormy passage Home, being often Scuding under bare Poles. The vessel was Staunch & Strong, but had two very Bad faults. She would not *Lye too* under any Sail, and she steered so badly that in Gales she took 4 men at the Wheel & Capⁿ Turnbull was a most disagreeable companion in the Cabin, being both a Blasphemer & a Drunkard. He Promised to introduce me to a Respectable Boarding House in L’Pool, but in place of that he introduced me to a House of Bad fame. Of course I never went within the [door]. I left him there and got a Porter to show me the House where the Ship’s owner put up when in the City. For this and other misdemeanors Mr. Morrison the Owner unshipped him when he came up. The Night before we got into Liverpool we were very nearly lost on the Formby or Chester Sands between Holyhead & L’pool in a

Northerly gale & Snow storm. At day-light the Captain after telling me to prepare for the worst as he had little hopes of saving me, went up to the masthead, the vessel being at the time almost on her Beam ends, and while he was up there I saw what I never expected to see -- Captⁿ Turnbull on his knees. When he came down I asked him for an explanation, when he said he had sighted the N^w West Buoy, and found he was not quite so near the shore as he Expected, that he had therefore some hopes of saving the ship & our Lives, for which he thought it his duty to thank God. My Business being done in L[']pool I took passage to Greenock in a ship in Ballast, and was again nearly wrecked on the Isle of Man..."

"In the fall of 1819, a Company was formed to Build a large Brig to carry on the Trade between Pictou & Liverpool -- the Parties were D Crichton, Jno Taylor Henry Hatton and ourselves, Captain Hibbard to command her. She was called the Enterprize. She performed 2 voyages yearly for some time and was on the whole a Profitable Concern. . .

"In 1821 I build the Schooner Harmony for the W India Trade, she was of 96 Tons Register. I fited her out first on a fishing voyage to the Labrador Coast, and thus sent her with a cargo of Fish to Demerara. She made a highly profitable voyage. I had both Vessel & Cargo insured for £15000 out and back to Halifax, only as it was winter and she could not come to Pictou. On the opening of the navigation, I and J & A Patterson who had a vessel there also from the W Indies, consulted together, and we agreed to send down one John Kenedy, who was esteemed an Excellent Pilot from Halifax to Pictou, to come round in one of the vessels, the other to keep company. This we were to do without insuring. I however on second thought did not like to Risk all, and Insured \$500 on the Cargo. My Captain (Captain Jas Arthur) took offence at this arrangement, and thinking himself a better pilot than Kennedy he sailed the Evening before the time agreed on, and on the next night thereafter, in a thick snowstorm, got the vessel on shore in Rockey Bay, Isle Madame, where she went to pieces and nothing was saved but the lives of the Crew. Here was a clear loss of One Thousand Pounds thro my own folly and inexperience. . .

"[In 1824] I bought from W & Jas Campbell the Sch^r Margaret, of which my Brother-in-Law W. Rankine owned a small part, for the West India Trade, and put Jas Tate on Board as Master, he

had been Employed for some years by J & A Patterson, as Master & Supercargo, they said to their entire satisfaction. I consigned the cargo to him, and instructed him to call first at Barbadoes where he would learn the state of the Leeward Markets, he did not sell there but proceeded to Demerara, where he sold, but unfortunately he had been there before and had formed acquaintance with some bad Weamen; these got hold of him, and by keeping him continually Drunk they succeeded in getting out of his hands the most of the Proceeds of the Cargo; when he became sober again, he was so ashamed of his conduct that he made up his mind to keep the vessel, and never to Return; it was a long time before I could hear what had become of him or the Marg^t as he never replied to my Letters. At Length, However, my agents in Barbadoes who were very Clever, active men, discovered him Trading on his own account among the French & Danish Islands and they having a Power of Atorney from me sent an officer of Police after him and brought him a Prisoner in the vessel to Barbadoes. While there, the vesel was claimed by Parties to whom Tate had mortgaged her. Our agents, by puting in their own Security for these Debts, succeeded in getting the vesel liberated and sent her home in charge of a new Master, Tate being still a Prisoner. When he arrived home, I Transferred him to jail, & altho he had committed a felony for which no doubt he might have been Hanged, I thought it better to try to get something out of him and let him go, but after trying my utmost, all I could get out of him, was, an acknowledgement from a House in Demerara, who had bought a part of the outward cargo to amt of £120, and not being very substantial, they had never paid Tate, even this Tate tried to conceal from me. This being all I could get from him I sent for his Father (a Farmer near Parsboro) to see if he would do any thing for his Son, but he said he had nothing to give, being a very poor man, he admitted that he owned some land together with his son it was nearly all in the Wilderness state and worth very little. However, this being all I could get, I took a Deed of it and Discharged the Prisoner. 150 Acres of this land I have since sold for £30 and there is 400 acres more to sell -- I took a Draft on the Demerara House from Tate for what they owed, and sent it to my agents in Barbadoes, who recovered a part and part became a bad Debt. They applied what they got to relieve the vessel from mortgage. The vessel herself was little better than a Wreck, having been away nearly two years, and never cleaned, repaired or Painted."

“There being still some debt of Tait’s contracting lying against the vessel I sent her out to Barbadoes with a cargo of Fish under Command of Capⁿ Dobinson (another of J & A Pattersons’ old captains). I ordered my agents to sell the vessel there if possible & remit the Ballance of Proceeds to my agents in Halifax, and in the event that the vessel would not sell, to write said agents to insure her back to Pictou for £500. They could get no offer for her and therefore cleared her in Ballast and wrote for Insurance as directed, but here another unforeseen Misfortune awaited me; the vessel by which my agents sent the Letter to Halifax made a long Passage, and before it was received, Captain Dobinson was here, having met with a severe gale in the Gulf Stream, which upset the vessel. Another vessel, bound to Quebec, fortunately came up while the Marg^t was in that Position, and took the master & crew off the wreck when she immediately sunk, this vessel had a fine Run to the Gut of Canso, where they reshipped Dobinson & his men in a Sch^f bound to Pictou, which they reached in 31 days after leaving Barbadoes. The actual Loss I made by this concern amounted to £900...”

Dawson lists a number of other business ventures, some successful but more ending in a loss; it seems clear that although the losses were sometimes his own fault there were many difficulties in this trade between Britain, Nova Scotia and the West Indies. By 1827 he had begun to be seriously concerned about his business affairs:

“In the Spring of 1827, after settling as far as possible with all my Creditors in Britain, I took Passage from Greenock in the good old ship Thetis, Cap Auld for Pictou. We had a fine passage and made our Port in 19 days. Owing to my Continuous & heavy Losses I did not attempt to bring out any goods with me Except a small stock of Books & Stationary from my friends Messrs Oliver & Boyd,* having resolved to try my hand in that line...

“I had now arrived at an important Crisis in my life. From 1818 to 1827 I had been deeply immerced in Business, such as general merchandise, shipping Timber to Britain, sadlery, Fish & to the West Indies, Building Vessels & Houses & fitting out vessels to the Fishery &, and my importations during these years ranged from £1,000 to £5,000 per annum. I have noticed some of my heaviest losses I sustained during these years, leaving out of the account however all the smaller losses, chiefly arising from Bad Debts which were greatly augmented by my dislike of Recovering them at law or securing them

* Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh publishers then and now; although they were not long ago bought by a London firm, they continue to publish educational texts under their Edinburgh imprint.

by mortgage. These minor losses, if they were all put together, would not be less than £2000. It is not to be supposed, however, that during the years, no part of my Business yielded me gains to compensate me for my Losses; on the contrary, my gains on my imortations & Foreign Trade must have been such as to just Keep me afloat, but the result was, that in 1827 I found myself Poorer than I was in 1818. After bringing every thing to the Test of Settlement, and reducing the number of my creditors to 5 or 6, I was *Minus* more than £4000 for which I had nothing to offer them but Mortgages on my Real Estate and which if brought to the Hammer at that time would not have realized half the sum. What was to be done under these circumstances lay entirely with my Creditors, and I submitted the matter entirely to their decision, at the same time stating my Reluctance to offering them a Composition, preferring to Toil on all my life for their Benefit, rather than submit to the disgrace of Bankruptcy. They all without hesitation yielded to my wish, some of them asked nothing but my promisory note, without security, payable at a distant day, while to the others I gave a mortgage of all my Real Estate, which, both notes & mortgages were eventually paid up to the Last Shilling, both Principel & Interest. Here let me take no Cridet to myself for this result, for had not the gracious hand of God been working for me all the Succeeding years, I must have gone the way which nearly all those have gone when driven to the necessity of mortgaging their Property, namely disappointment, Disipation and an early and dishonoured Grave... All my creditors held forth nothing to me but the Language of Encouragement, thus said all, that they had got so many proofs of my Integrity, Sobriety & honesty, that they could trust everything to myself, one of them afterwards entrusted me with large consignments, which yielded me considerable sums as commissions, another interested himself in procuring for me the highly responsible situation of agent for Lloyds, which, from time to time, yielded me something in the shape of fees & remuneration for services performed. This agency I held from 1828 to 1857, 29 years, [when] I resigned it.”

“Thus, in 1827 I began that Business which was destined to carry me gradually out of all my worldly Embarrasments & for many long years it was truly uphill work, for I had not only to maintain my credit with my furnishers, but had to provide for my family and pay more than £1200 a year for Interest, all out of my small Profits,

which at first was but small owing to the circumstance that all the *cash* Merchants of those days dealt in Books & Stationery as well as me, and I could not get them to relinquish it until I drove them all from the field by underseling them.

“My furnishers in Scotland assisted me in this by giving me all the discount they could possibly afford, and my dear Partner in Life did all in her Power to keep up my Spirits by adopting a Strict course of Saving and Oeconomy besides aiding me by her Council... I was now led in deep Humility to implore the Divine Blessing on my prosecuting this new line of Business and more especially that he would preserve my health and life till, under his Blessing I might be able to discharge all my Debts honourably, and, I bless his holy name, he has not only answered this Prayer but has far Exceeded it by providing for my declining years much more amply than I dared to venture to ask. I have now to Pray that he would make me a good Steward of his Manifold goodness, and that he would accept my thanks for keeping me from falling into those debasing vices, into which the unfortunate are so liable to fall -- that he has sustained me while wading thro a sea of Difficulties, and that he has so blessed my substance that I have been abled to pay off all my just debts, and relieve my Property from all encumbrances, for all which undeserved Mercies, I bless & Praise his Name.

“In 1834 the man who had Printed a newspaper in Pictou for some years, got in Debt by Mismanagement and was obliged to close up his Business. His Creditors, who had taken an assignment of his effects offered me his Press & Printing materials, and I at once saw that it would be highly advantageous to me in more ways than one to get the concern into my hands -- it would enable me to advertise largely and cheaply and keep the same advantage out of other Peoples' hands, who might be disposed to oppose me in my line of Business, and it would be a good employment for my two sons, should any of them make choice of such a calling.

“I then commenced a Weekly Newspaper and called it the ‘BEE’. This paper I continued to Edit & Print for 3 years, when an event happened which induced me to sell off the Printing Establishment, and confine myself to the Books & Stationary. On the 14th of July 1837 my youngest son (James), being then 13 years of age, was seized by Scarlatina, and on the 17th he died. This severe

and sudden chastisement inflicted by my Heavenly Father, I bore up under with all the Christian fortitude I was able, and endeavoured to improve the sad Event as much as possible, but was a Severe trial to me, and much more so to his Mother, whose affliction knew no bound...

Details of the Dawson family life are sparse James mentions his wife only twice, except for a long and harrowing description of her death; he believed she had never fully recovered from the shock of James' death.

“During the whole of my married life she was truly a help-mate to me -- always anticipated my wants, my affectionate companion in affliction, my counseller when in Difficulties, and my encourager in well-doing.

“When I was from home on Business She seldom went to bed till my Return, and on one Occasion when she thought me in Danger, when Sickness overtook me in Halifax, she Started to come to me in the Silence of the Night, in the midst of a snowstorm and nearly lost her own life in the attempt. If she had a fault, it was in indulging too much affection for her Relations, which made her sufferings acute beyond description when the hand of God took any of them from her...”

Mrs. Dawson died in 1854. By this time the other son, William, was well established in his profession of Geology.

“It happened at this time that the then Professor of Natural History in Edinburgh University Died, and my son having for some time set his desires upon a Professorship in a College, immediately made application for the vacant Chair. 3 or 4 others did the same, but eventually they all withdrew from the competition except Professor Allman of Dublin College and himself... It is a fact worthy of being recorded, that my son being at Halifax Aug^t 1855, waiting the arrival of the Packet from Boston to take his passage to Britain to Press his Claim, by the advice of his friends there, received a letter notifying him of the appointment being made in favour of his competitor. On the same day... I rec^d another for him from the Governors of McGill College, Montreal, stating that on the recommendation of the Governor General they had resolved to offer him the Situation of *Principal* of the University with a Salary of £500 per Annum and a free Dwelling. Here as an unmistakeable interposition of divine Providence which did not fail to call forth my heartfelt thankfulness...”

And subsequently James sold his house and his stationery and printing business to a Mr. James MacPherson, at a comfortable profit, and moved to Montreal to live with his son William and his family.

“I have great reason to thank God for all his mercies connected with my removal, more especially for the way in which he prearranged all Events connected with it to my hands, rendering every thing pleasant and agreeable -- resulting as it has in leaving me possessed of ample means to live on during my remaining days.”

“Here, it may not be unprofitable, either to myself or the readers, to take a short retrospective view of what I have written, bearing, as my case does, such a close resemblance to that of the Patriarch Job. Cast on my own resources at the early age of 22, in a Land where everything was new and strange to me, with only a solitary guinea in my Pocket. Twelve years later I was at the head of a Business, second to none in Pictou, shipping yearly from 10 to 15 cargoes of Timber to G Britain -- 3 to 4 Cargoes of Fish & to the West Indies, and receiving in return as many cargoes of W India Produce, -- fitting 10 or 12 vessels annually to the Gulf and Labrador fishery, and building a vessel yearly for the British market, so that, had any person at that time offered me £10,000 for my property and Business, it is not at all likely I would have accepted it. 4 years further on (1827) saw me reduced to the verge of Bankruptcy; God had seen meet for my Good, to strip me of all the substance he had bestowed on me -- not only so, but in Debt also to the Extent of between £4000 & £5000, for which I had nothing to pay... Very many, when so situated, lose their moral characters, never to be retrieved, either by defrauding their Creditors, or, betaking themselves to disipation, or both, and ultimately, sink into an early and dishonoured Grave, it pleased God in his Great Mercy to order my Lot otherwise. It was not the Wish of my Creditors to discourage me, by subjecting me to the Pain of Bankruptcy, always distasteful to a true Scotsman; all they asked was my Promisory Note, to which I added Mortgages of all my Real Estate, without reserve by way of Security... 1827 saw me commencing a New Line of Business... A part of my Daily Prayers then was that God would so prosper me, as to permit me to live till I could pay off all my Debts, and to this end I bent all my energy, by close attention to business habits, and economy in every department, by which course in 1838 I began to retire some of my

mortgages, and continued year after year to diminish them till in 1850 I paid off the last one, and in 1857 I was able to retire from Business with from £ 4000 to £ 5000. ...”

“The means which God employs, sometimes to bring a person out of difficulties, appears highly mysterious; the following incident in my life is an illustration of this. In 1836, I was publishing a newspaper called the ‘Bee’ and I accidentally observed in one of my Canadian exchange Papers that the Article of *Pork* had taken a great & sudden rise in the market there, and that owing to the Insurrection which was then imminent, and from the short supply of the article which might be expected from the country, owing to the failure of the Potato Crop, it might be expected to go up still higher. At this time there was a very large quantity of this article in the hands of the merchants of Pictou, and I lost no time in consulting my friends in Halifax as to the propriety of their joining me in a speculation on it. Two Respectable Houses thought well of it. . . My Pictou Friends, not having informed themselves of the State of the Markets in Canada, sold me readily nearly all they had, and the result was that in about two months’ time I realized nearly £600 of clear gain on my purchases which I applied partly to pay off my Debts and partly to purchase a small Farm in the Vicinity of the Town, to give me health exercise, as my Health was suffering from too close attention to my Business -- Especially from the amount of Night Work I had with the ‘Bee’.

“The following Singular Incident has been omitted in Place. In the year 181- there lived at Pugwash in N Scotia a Gentleman of the name of A.N.S., Merchant & Exporter of Timber in which he had not been very successful. . . He laid down a Keel, and set up the frame of a New vessel, and persevered in Building her, notwithstanding he was getting Poorer every day; Somehow or another I came in contact with him, when he mentioned to me that he had the vessel nearly ready for Launching, and wanted to know whether I would assist him in Rigging her. After thinking the matter over a little I consented to make him advances to a stipulated amount on getting a Bill of Sale of the Vessel. This was given and she was launched, fitted out and sent to the Labrador fishery for the summer months. She made two voyages and was tolerably successful. She came in from the 2nd Voyage about the beginning of November of that year, and after

making an ineffectual attempt to Dry the Fish, they were put in Barrels and Pickled and taken on Board again, together with those Dried from the first Voyage. He then sent her down to Pictou to take in 800 Quintals of Codfish which I had Screened and ready for a Market. She came into Pictou in the first week of Decr and about the same time Mr S came overland himself. The Vessel, when loaded was to be sent to the W Indies in charge of a Captain, Crew and Supercargo of myproviding, on the 15th of the month she was ready for Sea, and to avoid the risk of being Frosen in, she was moved down to the Beaches and in the Evening the Captn and 3 Men left her in the only Boat belonging to her to come up to Town for Ships Stores, intending to return to her late that Evening and to sail towards the morning, but a Snow storm came on and they concluded to stay all night in town and to join the vessel in the morning of the 16th. The vessel had been left in charge of two Boys who had no means of geting on shore. The 16th was Post day to Halifax (we had mails then only twice a week), and I had written the night before to my agents in Hx Messrs G & A Mitchel to have my interest in vessel & cargo insured. I tried also to persuade my friend Mr S to order Insurance on his Interest but without success. . .The Post left Pictou that morning at 6 o'clock and between 8 or 9 while I was at Breakfast a man rushed into my house crying that the Vessel was on fire. I immediately ran out and sent off as many people & Buckets as I could pick up by Land and as many as the Ship's Boat would carry besides (for she had not yet left), but by the time the people had reached the vessel she was all on fire from stem to stern -- the People living near the Shore had seen and rescued the 2 Boys and cut the Cable and run the vessel on the Beach, to prevent her from Sinking in the Channel -- by 10 o'Clock she was burned to the Waters Edge.

“At the time the Alarm was given the Post was only 10 or 12 miles from Pictou, and it was therefore Quite possible to overtake it by an Express with the Intelligence, but it was not my Business to do so, and no person bore me so much ill will as to do it for me. Before the next post day I had the Protest and other Papers made out & forwarded, not knowing whether the Insurance would be effected or not, but here, the value of prompt and faithful Agents was Conspicuous. Immediately on receiving my Letters one of the Mitchels went to an Insurance office, and after convening the Director

and agreeing with them for the Premium and other Particulars of the Risk, the application was filed in the office and he got a written Memorandum from the Secretary, as is usual in such cases to serve till the Policy was delivered, which was to be ready on the following day at 12 O'Clock. In the Interim, Messrs Mitchell received a letter from me covering the Protest and other Papers connected with the Loss, and altho their own Interests were affected by it, being underwriters themselves in the same office, Such was their Integrity that they kept the matter a profound secret till they went at the time agreed on, and on Receiving the Policy from the Secretary, handed him the Protest &.

“There are many Boards of Underwriters who under such suspicious Circumstances would have deemed this a fair field for withholding payment, but not so these, they had indeed to institute an Inquiry to satisfy those who were not in the Direction of the office, and this course I courted to remove all suspicions from myself, and the Result was that the Loss was settled without any trouble, and the Secretary was directed to furnish me with a Letter setting forth that the office Exonerated me from all blame in the matter, and none could be atached to Mr S, for he, Poor man, did not insure, and no blame could be affixed on the two Boys who were left on Board to take care of the Vessel, for they had no Boat and ran the risk of losing their lives in the event of the Vessel being Burned. The fact turned out to be, that the Boys bed cloths were not on Board, but were to be brought down in the Boat & the night being very cold and stormy they sat up late till Sleep overcame them, and kept up a good fire in the Cabin stove, and the consequence was that after they fell asleep some dry wood which happened to be behind the stove got ignited, and about Daylight in the morning they wakened up almost choked with the smoke and they set to work with all their might to try to extinguish it, and continued at it till the People on Shore Saw what had happened, and came to the Relief and were instrumental in saving the boys Lives, but not the vessel. This Incident shews very clearly the great value of the Scientific Discoveries which have been made since the year 181--. No such an occurence could possibly take place now since electricity & steam began to exercise their astonishing influence on Mercantile affairs.”

Note: Here the manuscript of this fascinating journal ends - possibly incomplete, for the last page is only partially filled. The journal is undated, but one may assume that it was written some time after 1857. Dawson would at that time have been in his late sixties or early seventies, and perhaps he did not live to complete it.