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The Enlightenment and Toryism: A Loyalist's Plan For Education In British North America

In 1789 there appeared in the first volume of the *Nova Scotia Magazine* a significant article on education. The unsigned essay was entitled "A Plan of Liberal Education for the Youth of Nova Scotia and the Sister Province in North America". Prompted by the recent steps taken towards the establishment of King's College at Windsor, Nova Scotia, it was most likely written by Professor William Cochran, editor of the magazine and shortly to be principal of the college.

The author projected a series of articles touching on many facets of education, but never completed it. Only the first part appeared, outlining his philosophy and belief in the increasing role that the state must play. Because of the importance of education to the welfare and progress of society, the author felt that the government must support it far more actively, both through the extension of facilities to allow more people the opportunity, and through the endowment of the schools to ensure superior teachers.

It seemed inevitable that the article should appear at this time, for the period saw a growing awareness in Nova Scotia of the needs and importance of education. Learning had always been a step-child of Nova Scotia society. Concerning it the government felt little responsibility, and the people little want. It had been left to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the missionary wing of the Church of England, and had basically remained a monopoly of this religious organization until after the arrival of the New England Planters. This increase in population, however, and the New Englander's distrust of the proselytizing efforts of the missionaries, had led to the rise of private schools, chiefly in Halifax, and the increase of itinerant teachers throughout the province.

From this development came the Act of 1766, an attempt to bring some uniformity, religious as well as academic, to the qualifications of those disparate elements teaching in the province. It was not a particularly enlightened school act, but it was the first one of general application passed by the province, and a symbol at least of the government's slow acceptance of its responsibilities to education.

A bill was passed in 1780 to establish a Grammar School in Halifax, the money to come from a lottery. The lottery failed, plans for the school's opening were shelved, but the government for the first time voted money for schools.

The coming of the Loyalists hastened the evolving attitude to education in Nova Scotia. Their numbers alone underlined the need for a more comprehensive system of education. Their American heritage and sense of sacrifice demanded the equivalent of what they had lost on leaving the revolted states. And, as part of the Loyalist wave, had come Charles Inglis, who in 1787 was named by the Church of England their first Bishop of Nova Scotia.

Inglis hoped to extend and entrench the Church of England in Nova Scotia, and one means was to stress its role in establishing a conservative society loyal to Britain and her traditions. Essential to this design was the need to prevent the youth of Nova Scotia from acquiring their education in the United States where they would be contaminated by republican principles.

To avoid this, an academy was begun in Windsor, and in 1789 a bill was passed for "founding, establishing and maintaining a College in this Province". In the same year classes began at the Halifax Grammar School. In this atmosphere of educational change and awakening, the "Plan of Liberal Education" was written.

Its author, William Cochran, was representative of this awakening. Although a member of the Anglican clergy, he was primarily an educator. An Irishman who had emigrated to New York, he left America with the great Loyalist wave after the American Revolution to serve the Church of England in Nova Scotia. The journal he edited was a facet of his attempt to improve the lot of Nova Scotia, particularly the new Loyalist communities, through the extension of knowledge. It contained foreign news, long articles of contemporary interest, serialization of current books, book reviews, essays, poetry, and frequent articles on the improvement of agriculture. It seemed natural that a

man with such a commitment to progress through the dissemination of knowledge should publish in his magazine at this time an essay on both the importance of education and the practical implementation of a programme.

People and nations, according to the author, had no intrinsic disparities, but differed only in the instruction they received. What separated nation from nation and dictated the level of each nation's attainment was neither geography nor heredity but education. What applied to nations applied equally to individuals. Although people did differ in ability, the innate difference was small, the ensuing difference owing to "the opportunities of improvement" open to them. This being the case, and to Cochran it was indisputable, then nothing should have been studied with greater care than this dictator of success or failure for man and nation, and yet few things had been more shamefully neglected.

To Cochran this neglect of education was remarkable when one realized that the foundations of a solid society were dependent upon the values inculcated through education. The happiness and well being of a society were dependent upon the practice of religion and morality, and the key to that morality was education. "Religion itself, or what goes by that name, when it lays hold on the minds deeply sunk in ignorance, becomes nothing but superstition or enthusiasm." As important, education was the lynch-pin of stability in society. "The more enlightened the people are the more they are inclined to submit to the laws; the more they will prize a steady government."

Nova Scotia was typical of the neglect of education. Coming under British rule in 1710 it did not possess a single grammar school until the Halifax Academy was established in 1788, and the seminary in Windsor in 1789. Yet this was not enough:

To hear that learning is cultivated at Windsor or Halifax will have but little influence, it is feared, on the bulk of the people in the remote parts of the Province. But if schools were erected in their neighborhood, however small at first, the force of example would prevail with many to give their children a liberal education, who otherwise never would have done so.

Such a system must be dependent upon state aid. Cochran cited "colleges" in the United States composed of a single instructor dependent upon the meagre and uncertain tuition of his students. Under such conditions the only people who would teach were those

unsuited for teaching. The profession was thus relegated to a rather contemptible pursuit, one out of which the ambitious advanced into other more lucrative professions, and into which the incompetent inevitably drifted. In order to reverse this trend one had to attract into teaching young men of talent and dedication:

It is only by placing at the head of such institutions men of talents, experience, and industry united that this can be effected; men of liberal education, and honourable principles; men who do not take up the profession, just as they are passing to another; but who look to it as the business of their life; who study to excel in it; who are constantly endeavoring to improve it; and who depend on the success of their exertions, in their arduous duty, for all the reputation they expect in this world.

In order to have such men, Cochran stated bluntly, one must pay such men. A profession as important as teaching "should hold forth advantages equal to what can be reasonably expected by a man of abilities, in any other liberal profession." The author feels that it would be better to have no grammar schools whatever "than to commit them to men of contemptible qualifications and indifferent character." For Nova Scotia he proposed that the legislature pass an act establishing several grammar schools throughout the province, granting to each an annual income sufficient to induce talented men to conduct them.

The involvement of the state in education was essential simply because education differed from other pursuits. Many callings, many trades and professions, fulfill an immediate need for the members of society, and thus the individuals of society support them through payment for their services. The individual's needs for these services is only intermittent, and therefore their fees are accepted with little cry. There is another class of profession, however, although "profitable to individuals yet are not likely to be encouraged by them, in that degree which the interest of the state requires. Among others, we may place in this order, the clergy, and the instructors of youth." Both are essential to the success and welfare of a society, yet neither has the immediate demand on the individual of other callings. Both, therefore, must be supported by the state.

In addition to sufficient salaries, Cochran stressed the importance of raising the level of respect for and status of the profession in the new world. In a province with limited resources such as Nova Scotia, the monetary support from government could be overwhelming: "...and yet it is highly important that the teachers be men of abilities and liberal

education, it behoves the public to endeavor that their situation be rendered more agreeable by paying them the proper deference and respect."

A man or a profession will rise or sink to the level at which he or it is esteemed. If a man's profession is highly respected he will strive to attain and retain that respect. If it is held in contempt, he will, as naturally, practice it contemptuously and contemptibly. Society in general, and the progress of the new British North America in particular, was too dependent on education to grant its practitioners anything but high respect and esteem.

On this note Cochran ended the article, one of the several he hoped to publish on education and its proper foundations in the British colonies.

The anti-American, pro-British tone is the most obvious reflection of Nova Scotia in the late Eighteenth Century. The author had nothing but praise for Britain's generous system of support to education and the high degree of respect given to educators, pointing to the rich endowments of their universities, and to the respect shown for educators in that land where "several of the Bishops both in England and Ireland have been raised from being instructors of youth, in one shape or another, to be Lords of Parliament." In comparison he had little but contempt for the American system which downgraded the teacher to that of menial servitude.

To Cochran this difference among all of the others was the most glaring between England and the new world:

When a man passes from the British dominions in Europe to the British colonies, now independent states, in America, many deviations of character and manners, perhaps none will strike him more than the different estimation in which the conductors of education are held, in one country and in the other. If he is surprised at the meanness of their colleges, or the undignified and shabby appearance of their professors, he may perhaps attribute it to the poverty or frugality of the country. But he will be unable to divine upon what principle, or by what policy, in such a country, persons of that description are little less than despised.

The essay was ahead of its time in both its ambition for education and the realism of its proposals for attracting talented people. To the writer, the very fate of the province and of the new British North America depended upon the willingness of the government to put substantial amounts of money into its system of education. Since

education could not, by its nature, be of great private concern, and since it was essential to both progress and the preservation of stable government and sound religion, the state must move to foster a system of learning that would ensure those ends. This meant the extension of institutions of learning among the people and the ample endowment of these institutions by the government to ensure a high calibre of teaching.

Yet the document is very much a product of its times, mirroring the myriad and clashing influences of the period. It bore the stamp of the Loyalist's bitter heritage, yet it was also heavily scored by the age of Enlightenment's optimistic concept of education and its potential.

The scars of the revolution are also revealed in Cochran's fear of the rabble-rouser, his insistence that the more enlightened a people are through education the more they will dismiss the demagogue. Thus

...it highly concerns our rulers that as many as possible should be capable of judging for themselves in such matters: They should know what influence a turbulent and designing man, or set of men may acquire over an ignorant multitude; and they should remember that such men will seldom be wanting. On the contrary, when liberal knowledge shall be generally diffused, the artifices of such persons will be easily discovered; the true value of laws and government will be understood; and they will be supported upon the disinterested principle of public good, against all who may attempt to pervert or thwart them.

Little good could be said of that ignoble, blood-drenched experiment to the south, and less evil said of that Britain for which the Loyalists had sacrificed their all. "Let the people of Nova Scotia keep ever before their eyes the excellent model of the mother-country. Let them remember the rock from which they were hewn. Let them, on the other hand, avoid the errors of their neighbours."

The goals cited for education typify those of a Tory member of the establishment. To Cochran one of the major values of education was "its political effects in rendering men tractable, and attaching them to the laws". It was a means of shoring up the existing political and social structure, and of suppressing the threat of radical change. "The more enlightened the people are the more they are inclined to submit to the laws; the more they will prize a steady government." Learning was thus to be a weapon in the preservation of the *status quo*, of orthodoxy in religion and submission to government. Such views are to be expected from leaders who had witnessed and been seared by the conflagration of the revolution.

This elitism, however, was over-shadowed by the author's desire to broaden the base of education and to extend it beyond the privileged few. "In order to diffuse it among the people at large, education should be brought home to their doors, as far as the circumstances of the country will admit." And it had to go beyond the affluent. "Establishments for education should extend to the benefit of the poor as well as to the rich." The elitism, moreover, pales beside the author's dismissal of *laissez-faire*, and his demand for government intervention on a large scale in such critical areas as public instruction.

This, oddly, was also part of the Loyalist heritage, what Horowitz calls the Tory touch. One victor of the American Revolution was the Calvinist free enterprise concept of society, with its emphasis upon individualism and limited government. A part of the losing ideology which made the trek to Nova Scotia with the Loyalists was a feudal fragment, a remnant of an organic, corporate concept of society, one less individualistic, and more amenable to state intervention in society to a degree unacceptable to the new nation to the south.

What is surprising, however, is to find in a Nova Scotian of Tory leanings the Lockian attitude expressed in his introductory paragraphs. Discussing Nova Scotian society and education during this period, D.C. Harvey has stated that "In this system there was no room for Condorcet's idea of progress." Yet the author of "A Plan of Liberal Education" has accepted the very basis upon which Condorcet's idea of progress was founded, the concept that man was born with no innate characteristics, and that his soul was *tabula rasa*, a blank slate:

Some difference of mental powers we may suppose to be produced, by the more or less perfect organization of men's bodies. But the effect of this is less than is usually imagined. . . . Considering the innumerable channels through which instruction may reach the mind, and how little its operations are watched, or understood, we may safely assert that it is sufficient to produce the utmost disparity that we observe among men.

Expressed here are the basic assumptions of the Enlightenment upon progress, that since man's soul held no innate characteristics, what moulded him was the impression made upon his mind after birth. The natural corollary, reached by the Enlightenment Philosophes, was that through systematic education one could influence, and to a degree control, the impressions made upon the mind, and thus ensure progress. That he should hold such opinions and express such views reveals the

author as a man not only of his province, but of the broader world of the Eighteenth Century, a man who had, even in Nova Scotia, read and absorbed many of the ideas and assumptions of the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment.

There was, of course, an immense chasm separating this Nova Scotia educator and the *Philosophes*, both in their aims and in the extent to which they would pursue them. But the foundation of their assumptions differed little. Their visions of society might vary radically, but the means of achieving these visions were identical: education.

Both sought to create new worlds, and both saw in education the mould of their new societies. But where the Enlightenment, especially in France, looked back in anger, and forward with a zeal that would usher in the French Revolution and the modern age, the Nova Scotian Loyalists looked back with a sense of loss, and forward with fear and foreboding. One wished to destroy the existing social structure, while the other sought to preserve it and entrench it. Where the Enlightenment would overturn an old and corrupt society to build anew, the Nova Scotian sought to transplant the old in a strange and alien setting, and to build in this harsh land, with the mortar of the past, a good, and perhaps a great, thing.