

HALIFAX REVISITED

JAMES SETH

Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh

THE Editor of this *Review*, in asking me to send him some reminiscences of my life in Halifax when I was professor of philosophy in Dalhousie University, was kind enough to say that he did not mean thereby to suggest that I had reached the age of anecdotage. It would have been quite pardonable if he had indulged in that supposition, for it is now thirty-five years since I first took up the duties of that position, my period of service having been from 1886 to 1892. Since I left Dalhousie, I have served for another six years in American universities (Brown and Cornell), and I am now in the course of my twenty-fourth year in the University of Edinburgh. Perhaps the natural inclination, in looking back over such a long period to the years of my earliest professorial experience at Dalhousie, would be to indulge in that anecdotage which is one of the marks of advancing age, and it would be easy to write an article composed of reminiscences. But I could not satisfy myself that such a paper would be worthy of the high standard set by the first numbers of the *Review*. I will therefore attempt something of the kind which I ventured to offer to the members of the Halifax Canadian Club in the address which I had the honour to give when I revisited the city in September 1919 to take part, as the representative of the University of Edinburgh, as well as in the capacity of an old Dalhousie professor, in the centenary of Dalhousie. What I then attempted was a comparison and contrast between the Halifax of the time when I was a citizen and Halifax of the present day, supplemented by some of the reflections suggested by such a comparison and contrast of "Then" and "Now." And I am glad of the opportunity to indicate how these reflections, more particularly as regards the relation of Canada to Great Britain, have been modified by further reflection and by the impressions derived from a pretty intimate intercourse with the members of the Canadian Club of this University which was organized just before the war by Dr. Gerald Grant of Halifax, and of which I have been from the beginning honorary president.

Any impressions I had of "Halifax Unvisited" were, I fear, of the vaguest possible description. I knew no one there except my predecessor in the chair of philosophy, Dr. Schurman, to whose kindness I owed my appointment, and whom I had known as a student, slightly my senior, at Edinburgh. Dr. Louis Jordan, who was minister of St. Andrew's church for some years, was also my fellow-student in Edinburgh and my class-fellow. But from neither had I derived any impression of Canadian or Haligonian life beyond the fact that that life was very much more stirring and "go-ahead" than that of the Old Country. Beyond that I was left to the resources of my own imagination. But the imagination does not readily work without more definite materials than I had at my command, and mine refused to paint a picture of the place or the people. My experience was therefore quite unlike that of Wordsworth and Yarrow, partly no doubt because I lacked the poet's imagination, but partly also because Halifax and Canada were too young to have gathered round them the halo of a legendary past. When I first visited Halifax, I had practically no preconceptions to undo; my mind was almost a *tabula rasa*, ready to receive the impressions produced by the place itself as it actually was in those far-off days.

I well remember my arrival on a Saturday morning early in October 1886 at the North Street station, where I was met after my long railway journey from New York by President Forrest and my host, Professor Gordon MacGregor. The warm welcome which I received from these two colleagues, and the delightful hospitality I experienced at the MacGregor home on Gottingen Street, made me feel no more a stranger in a strange land. That afternoon MacGregor and I looked in on Professor Alexander in his rooms on Spring Garden Road. We three, who were soon to become such good friends, had a long walk round the North-West Arm, and in the course of it met another colleague, also destined to become a very dear friend, Professor Macdonald, better known to generations of Dalhousians as "Charlie." Before the evening of my first day in Halifax, therefore, I had not only got a wonderful impression of the beauty of the surroundings of the city, but felt that I was already in friendly relations with several of my future colleagues.

The college opened the following week. The autumn convocation was held in the handsome hall of the Legislative Council. I was duly impressed with the dignity of the place and proceedings, and considerably perturbed by the loud calls of the students at the close for "Seth." In response to that imperious call I managed to say a few halting words, which were so kindly received that I felt

that the students' welcome was as warm as that of my colleagues. It was the beginning of an experience of the kindheartedness of my Dalhousie students, which was never clouded by the slightest misunderstanding from that day to the end.

Next day the regular work of the session was begun in the old building on the Grand Parade, which then occupied the site of the present City Hall. It was the last year of that old building; before the next session the new college, now called Forrest Hall, was ready for occupation. There was a certain charm about the old college, small and simple and unpretentious as it was, that never gathered round the new brick building to which we moved in the autumn of 1887. It also lent itself to "scrimmages"—a notable and characteristic feature of Dalhousie life in those days—much better than the new building; in fact I do not remember a single event of the kind after we left the Grand Parade.

I always feel that I was a member of the "old brigade" of Dalhousie professors. Johnson and Macdonald, who by their thorough methods had once for all established the standards alike of teaching and of examination, were still in the plenitude of their powers, and a meeting of the little Faculty or Senate when "Charlie" and "Johnny" were in "form" was a thing to be remembered. The present distinguished president was then only a "Munro Tutor", and no other member of the present Faculty of Arts had as yet entered upon his duties, though Professor MacMechan joined the Faculty during my time in succession to Alexander when the latter went to Toronto, and Judge Russell was already a member of the Faculty of Law.

I have the pleasantest recollections of the social life of the city and of its abounding hospitality. One of the things that especially impressed me, indeed, was the amount of time and energy that was devoted to social entertainment and amusement. Men, as well as women, seemed always to have the leisure required for the rather exacting demands of "Society" and, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to me that the claims of business were secondary to those of pleasure. The life of the city was not nearly so strenuous and "go-ahead" as I had expected. In this respect it contrasted sharply with the life of the Old Country as I had known it even in Edinburgh, which is supposed to be a city of considerable leisure and rather lacking in business enterprise. One read in the newspapers of the doings of that higher "Society" in which the officers of the Navy and Army were the leading figures, and which seemed to be a perpetual round of gaiety and excitement. The fact that Halifax was the Canadian headquarters of the Imperial forces seemed to have the most far-

reaching effects upon the "social" atmosphere of the place, and I suppose made it different from that of other Canadian cities even at that time. To me it seemed, with other causes, to produce that "old colonial" feeling which was, as I thought, so characteristic of the place. I found myself in a "New England", which reproduced with a new emphasis and consciousness all the prejudices and prepossessions, the customs and ideals, of the old land. The ambition of Halifax, as I knew it in those days, seemed to me to be not so much to develop a new life of its own, a new social type, as to reproduce the life of old England in the New World across the seas.

The loyalty of the people to the British Crown struck me as even more intense, or at any rate more articulate, than that of the Old Country itself. There were indeed mutterings of discontent with the "colonial" position, and suggestions in certain quarters of exchanging the unsatisfactory relation of dependence upon the mother country either for independence or for annexation to the United States. The project of Imperial Federation was beginning to be talked about, but the idea of any such readjustment of the relations of the Dominions to the mother country as has since been realised, would have been repudiated both by those who were satisfied with the *status quo* and by those who felt that the manifest destiny of Canada lay in one of the other directions indicated above. But, when it is remembered that those were the days of Sir John Macdonald and Sir Charles Tupper, it will be seen that neither of the latter alternatives belonged to the sphere of "practical politics".

Although I had made one or two hurried visits to the old city since I left in 1892, I had not seen it for twenty years when I revisited it in September 1919 for the Dalhousie centenary. I once more approached it, as I had done for the first time in 1886, by land, this time by way of the beautiful Annapolis Valley which I had a great desire to see again and the loveliness of which in the September sunshine impressed me more than ever. As I left the United States behind me, I felt that I was no longer in a foreign country but among mine own people. A hundred things reminded me of home, and when I arrived at the new station in South Street and at the hospitable house of Mr. and Mrs. George Campbell on Young Avenue, that impression was abundantly confirmed. Yet it was "another" Halifax to which I had returned. This was due not merely to the passage of the years and the absence of so many of my former friends and colleagues. Nor was it merely that Halifax too had been through the war and bore sad traces of its part in the great struggle. It was because in the meantime Halifax and Canada had not stood still, but had moved rapidly and far, and the whole atmosphere of

the place had changed. The "old colonial" feeling had disappeared, and in its place there was a new consciousness of partnership in a great Canadian nation. The old attachment to English customs and ideals, the old effort to reproduce the life of the Old Country, had disappeared; and when I ventured to speak to the Canadian Club of what I conceived to be the truer and larger meaning of the old word "England", and to plead for the retention of the dear old name hallowed by so many associations, I felt that I had struck a false note, to which my audience made no real response, though they were too courteous to hint at their dissent. Nothing could have brought home more clearly to me the changed attitude of the people towards the mother country. The more I reflected upon this little bit of evidence, and the more I saw and heard during my week's visit to Halifax and during my subsequent stay in Toronto as the guest of my old Dalhousie colleague, Professor Alexander, the more convinced did I become that a new political consciousness had developed in the interval that separated "Then" from "Now." In that interval Canada had grown to be a nation, and its whole life was dominated by its new consciousness of nationhood. The new-born nation felt that it had a life and a destiny of its own to achieve, and that that life and destiny could not be a mere reproduction of England's, but must be the result of the new reactions to the new conditions. Since my return to Scotland I have seen a good deal of the Canadian students who are studying at this University, and an address which I gave to their Canadian Club was followed by a discussion of the relations of the Dominion to the United Kingdom which had to be adjourned to another meeting, so great was the interest in the question. This frank interchange of views confirmed me in the belief that the impressions which I received during my Canadian visit of 1919 were fundamentally correct.

The war has no doubt done much to give definiteness to the views of Canada, as well as of the other self-governing Dominions, as to the meaning of that hitherto vague entity, "the British Empire", or, as we are now learning to call it and to think of it, "the British Commonwealth". The fact that the Dominions signed the Peace Treaty as independent powers or sovereign States, and did not simply authorise the United Kingdom to sign in their name and on their behalf, was the first explicit recognition of their new status, and a further explicit recognition of it was given in the position assigned to the Dominions alongside the mother country in the League of Nations. But these official acts were simply the recognition of the *fait accompli*, the culmination of a movement that had been long maturing. The war itself did much to reveal to the con-

stituent elements of the Empire their essential solidarity, their community of interest. But it at the same time immensely accelerated the pace of the process of national development in the several Dominions, and forced upon them the question of their relation to Great Britain and to one another. It became clear that the only ground on which the Dominions could consent to stand alongside Great Britain was that of common interest, and that never again could they be expected to take part in a war to the declaration of which they had not been parties.

Lord Bryce has remarked that the Annexationism of forty years ago has quite died away as a policy on our side of the line, nor do I suppose that there is now any serious talk of separation from Great Britain. But there certainly is a wide-spread demand for independence, and, except as regards foreign policy, independence has already been achieved. The proposal for a separate Canadian embassy at Washington has raised the question of diplomatic independence. Mr. Lloyd George's statement, quoted in the July number of this *Review*, that we continue to speak of the "British Empire" only "for historical and sentimental reasons", is a striking recognition of the change that has taken place, and "imperial conferences" of the premiers of the various Dominions and the United Kingdom seem to have quite superseded the ideal of "imperial federation". It is for the Dominions to say what their relation to Great Britain and to one another is to be, and the most likely forecast would seem to be a more intimate League of Nations, a League of independent States rather than a single inclusive State, the bond being that of a common interest and a common loyalty to the Throne, a common inheritance from the past and common ideals of political freedom and representative government.

The new tide of national life made itself felt in all directions. Halifax was no longer the sleepy old city which I had known so well; it seemed to me to have entered upon a new and more strenuous business career. The splendid ocean "terminals", which were approaching completion, reminded one of the commercial activity of New York; they were a striking contrast to the old wharves of my youth. I had the pleasure of meeting many of the leading business men of the city in the Halifax Club and at one of the luncheons of the Rotary Club, and I was much impressed by their keenness and enthusiasm. It was peculiarly gratifying to me to see the imposing new Dalhousie which is rising on the splendid Studley site, and to witness the enthusiastic devotion of the citizens to the University. That devotion has since been signally proved by the results of the campaign for additional endowments. The

new hostels for both men and women students will supply a need which was sorely felt in my time, when there was absolutely no provision of the kind. From what I saw during my visit, and from what I have since heard from President Stanley Mackenzie, whom I had the pleasure of seeing in Edinburgh last summer when he was a delegate to the Congress of British Universities, I feel certain that Dalhousie has entered upon a new period of prosperity. She has now the means of realising those high ideals which she has long entertained. In the success of her recent effort I see the evidence at once of the increased resources of her friends and of their increasing loyalty to the University. Such a result would have been inconceivable in my time.

The whole aspect of the city had changed for the better since I knew it. The old wooden side-walks, always more or less out of repair, had given way to fine asphalt pavements, and handsome stone buildings had taken the place of the plain frame structures which were then so numerous even in the central streets of the city. The North End in particular had altered quite beyond recognition. Nothing interested me more than the inspection which I was privileged to make of some of the new houses which have taken the place of the streets destroyed in the Halifax disaster. A better bit of town-planning could not well be imagined, and the houses themselves are most attractive. That so much should have been done, and so well done, in the short time that had elapsed since that sad event, was a further confirmation of the impression otherwise received of the new energy of the old city. For although, like all who come to Canada from the old world, I was struck, even in my time, by the absence of poverty as I had known it at home, Halifax was then a city of many "mean streets", and among the meanest were those which have now disappeared from the North End. The South End was, even in my time, a beautiful district, but it has now extended very much, especially in the direction of the incomparable "Arm". Round the Bedford Basin, too, there seemed to have been much new building. Halifax is indeed "beautiful for situation", and it was gratifying to see how the city had risen to its unique opportunity since "Then".