

By HUGH MacLENNAN

ANYONE who has been given by his old university the kind of honour Mr. Godsoe and I have just received is bound to be in a somewhat emotional condition. Dalhousie is where we started and now we have come back home. Speaking for myself, I never wanted to leave home, not permanently. I left Nova Scotia in the depression in order to get work; I became for a while, in my own mind, a displaced person, and I passed my point of no return not beside the sea where I grew up but in the heart of a continent. It was not a sea-change I suffered; it was a continental change.

But I think that Mr. Godsoe would agree with me when I say that anyone born and raised in this province will always think of Nova Scotia as his basic home. Wherever he goes he will tell Nova Scotian stories. He will talk with relish of Senator's Corner on Saturday night and will make the name of A. B. MacGillivray famous in New York and Montreal. He will miss salt in the air, and above all he will miss the salty characters he knew when he was young. Often without knowing he is doing so, he will judge the vast, indifferent outer world by Nova Scotian standards, invariably to its detriment. No European aristocrat proud of his ancient lineage can be more snobbish than a deracinated Nova Scotian when he talks of his native province. He wants to come back at least once a year to touch the native rock and wipe his face in the cold sea water he once was hardy enough to swim in. A weight he did not know he carried tends to float away the moment he crosses the frontier out of New Brunswick.

Here lies his danger, for though it is not entirely true that you can't go home again, it is at least partially true. The emigrant Nova Scotian returning does well to remember that his countrymen have been growing too, that they understand that while he sees with the eye of memory, they look at Nova Scotia with a glance more intimate and critical and far better informed.

That is why I want to avoid being sentimental today. It is very flattering to receive an honorary degree from your old college, especially when it is obvious that you can't make any return for it. The temptation becomes enormous to sentimentalize on the past and to pretend it was only yesterday that you graduated yourself. The campus is still green and lovely,

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\*An address prepared for delivery to the graduation class of Dalhousie University at the Spring Convocation, May 17, 1955.

the ceremonies have not changed. But Mr. Godsoe and I have changed, and so has the world.

Today the *North Stars* fly from Dorval to the Eastern Passage in the time it takes a normal man to do half his morning's work. But when I was in my junior year in Dalhousie the *Spirit of St. Louis* spent the whole of a working day jogging at what then seemed incredible speed over the length of Nova Scotia on the way to Paris. When I was a student—this really dates me—there was a political institution in Canada called the Conservative Party. I had never heard of a man called Adolf Hitler or of a book called *How To Win Friends and Influence People*. Television, radar, inter-continental rockets, hydrogen bombs—in my college days only a handful of scientists were progressive enough to dream of these improvements. No, the world was different twenty-five years ago. It was closer to the past, both to the good and the bad things of the past.

That is another reason why it is so pleasant to return to Nova Scotia now, for this province is something of a constant. Possibly because of her island psychology, she has always dug in her heels against the modern passion for change for the sake of change. She has never lost her extraordinary coherence. In most parts of the province life remains understandable enough, religious enough, for a growing person to feel at home in it. It is this sense of coherence, this feeling that life is neither a tale told by an idiot nor a television program, that has produced the singular love we all feel for Nova Scotia. Twenty-five years ago—and it should be the same now—a Dalhousie student didn't have to make much effort to feel himself an heir to the long tradition of civilization.

But twenty-five years ago those of us who left Nova Scotia were startled to discover that a lot of people in older countries had become so bored with civilization that they wanted to change or destroy it or make it all over again. As I look back I thank God that the Nova Scotia I knew then was outside of the prevalent fashions. The roaring twenties did not roar here and the revolutionary thirties did not revolt. Huge corporations did not take over our lives and make us live in accordance with the queer ritual which prescribes that the boss shall ride in a Lincoln or a Cadillac, the controller in a Buick, the thirty-five year old executive in a Plymouth or a Pontiac and so on down the line. We didn't understand the difference between a sincere necktie and an ordinary one, nor did it occur to us that Christ and Socrates should be investigated by a committee of politi-

cians. We had not been taught, in those days, that it is frequently immature to tell the truth.

But I don't want to sound like a praiser of things past. You can still tell the truth in Canada without losing your passport, and no matter what has happened in the rest of the world, it is a plain fact that the Nova Scotia of twenty-five years ago was not as good a place to live in as the Nova Scotia of today. Nor was Canada.

The members of the graduating class of Dalhousie, 1955, unlike most of my class, can look forward to living and working in their own country. So far as I know they are not being told, as I was told, that if a young man wants to succeed he must leave home and go to the States. Whenever I am tempted to think it was only yesterday that I graduated from Dalhousie, I look around at Canada as it is now and recall what it was like then.

When I was a student we all felt proud enough to be Nova Scotians—in fact we prided ourselves on all of our own worst faults. But for the larger nation to which we belonged we had hardly any feelings at all, for the simple reason that we knew next to nothing about it. It was fashionable then for all the provinces to waste their energies bickering with one another instead of combining in a common effort. We seemed unable to take Canada seriously, and so long as we refused to do so, the cream of the nation did not take it seriously either, and flowed in a steady stream across the border.

The picture today is very different from this. During the war years, largely in the Canadian Army overseas where men from all the provinces mingled together, the idea was reborn that Canada not only had a future, but one which involved more than the usual inventory of raw materials in which American millionaires might be persuaded to invest their money. The change in the spirit of Canada since 1940 has been so great that to those of us who remember the old spirit, it seems miraculous.

Those who graduate from Dalhousie today are not entering a partial colony as I did when I was their age. They are already living in a country which has gone a long distance toward disinfected, if not eradicating, the world prejudices which for years hindered her growth. Some of you here this afternoon will see Canada a nation of forty million people. You will see her cities, year by year, shed the raw Victorian uglinesses which still disfigure so many of them, just as you have seen Halifax in the last decade remove so many of hers and disclose the lovely lines given her by nature and the original builders. You will

see the art, the literature, and possibly the music of Canada come of age and be recognized all over the world, because each year that passes, some of the puritan iron melts out of our hearts. You will see a genuine Canadian idiom, not the feeble imitation of the American idiom which passes for Canadian speech in so many of our magazines, come into a use which other peoples besides ourselves will recognize. Inevitably a lot of foolish, raw and jingoistic things are being said these days—and not all of them are being said in Toronto—but the awkward age is one through which every human being and every nation must pass. Twenty years hence it will lie behind us, and I envy the people who will be entering middle-age at that time. The future is even larger than our drum-beaters say it is. To enter a career in Canada now can be like stepping out onto the floor of an elevator. . . .

I don't want to sound like a propagandist, even though what I have said is probably true. Now I suppose I should make some gesture toward discharging the customary duties of a convocation speaker and talk directly to the important people here—the graduating class.

One thing I assure the graduating class I am quite unable to do, and that is to offer you any advice. I'm not going to tell you to keep in mind the lessons you learned here, to work hard and stay sober and keep out of the divorce courts. I'm not going to promise that if you do all these things, and keep on doing them steadily for twenty-five years, and if luck stays with you all the way, you'll have a chance of becoming half as wise as myself. The truth of the matter is that very few people get wiser as they get older. They simply get more cautious, like Mackenzie King.

There is still another reason why I know that advice from me to you would be superfluous on this or on any other occasion. From my experience in recent years at McGill, I have a suspicion that you are a lot more mature than I am myself. I know McGill is not Dalhousie. It is in the heart of Montreal, a debonaire city whose former mayor, Camillien Houde, once defined humour to me as the art of telling the truth, especially about your own motives. But Dalhousie students can't be too much different from the ones I know in Montreal, and the latter I have come to know rather well. They are the most delightful people I ever met in my life, and for the past four years I have been receiving an education from them. Their attitude toward their parents' generation seems astonishingly wise and justified. Instead of resenting us for the mess we made of the world, they

feel sorry for us. They think we're too competitive. They think we drink too much and worry too much about sex, but at the same time they assume that we can't help ourselves because we had a bad time in the depression and were neurotics anyway. They know they are far better adjusted to the world they live in than we are. They take it for granted that there is nothing you can do about science and politics except to make the best of them. In all seriousness they seem to me to do the will of God with complete naturalness, and they don't take it for granted—as I did when I was their age—that God is a Scotchman. Some of them consider the lilies of the field; they take no thought for the morrow, they toil not, neither do they spin nor gather into barns. Others again do the will of God as Plato understood it: they have achieved within themselves a singular harmony. The men among them seem at ease with the now recognized fact that women are the stronger sex, and the girls are no longer afraid that no man will marry them if he suspects they have any brains in their heads. Indeed, for the first time in history, more engagement rings are worn by intelligent girls than by dumb ones, and surely this is proof of an increase in the intelligence of the men, for there is not one engaged male student out of fifty who doesn't intend to put his bride out to work at the earliest opportunity. I find this new attitude toward life admirable in every possible way. It will mean a vast decrease in duodenal ulcers, spastic backs, and migraine headaches, and it should cause serious hesitation to any young medical student contemplating the practice of psychiatry. When faced with even the possibility of having to give advice to a generation like yours, I quail. I couldn't even try doing it without laughing.

What I shall try to do instead is something simpler and more pleasant—it is merely to congratulate you on having obtained your degrees and on having at last reached the place where your real education can begin. It is a privilege to attend Dalhousie and an achievement to graduate from Dalhousie. But the real fun lies before you.

In spite of politicians, propaganda, bankruptcy, losing your job, not being able to find the job you want, alcoholism, arthritis, and technological extravaganzas like space platforms and rockets to the moon—in spite of all these ills that North American flesh is heir to, life can be wonderfully interesting and exciting so long as you continue to learn. I'm not going to pretend that the pleasure of learning is stronger than the pleasure of whisky or making love, but there is one advantage it has over

every other pleasure in the world—it never lets you down so long as you keep it up. It can enter into anything you do providing you are not afraid of it. There is only one thing that can crush it entirely, and that is fear—fear of losing your comfort, of not conforming to the oafs; fear of being led into hard work you hoped you could avoid, fear of criticism if what you have learned turns out to be different to current fashions, fear of the unknown itself. Many of the greatest discoverers have not been exceptionally intelligent men, but there has not been one of them who was not an exceptionally brave man.

Dalhousie and this whole province of Nova Scotia have been rare seminaries for the development of the pleasure of learning, and the record proves it. I think that as time passes most of you will discover that the best of our people have been quite as remarkable as we boast them to have been. Joseph Howe really did give birth to the idea of the British Commonwealth, and Roddie MacDonald really would have won the middleweight championship of the world if he had kept in training. The four Nova Scotians who served in the cabinet during the last war may have lacked a certain finesse which their chief possessed in abundant measure, but neither they nor their country is any the poorer for that. All of us have our favourite personal Nova Scotian, and quite often he turns out to have been a teacher. On an occasion like this I couldn't stand here in good conscience without expressing my own lifelong gratitude to a great Dalhousian, J. W. Logan, who taught me honour classics here and who taught me the meaning of manhood in the old Sackville Street Academy, and gave to me, as he gave to nearly three generations of Haligonians, a sense of the wonder of being able to learn, of being able to belong to the story of civilization.

But of Nova Scotians dead and gone perhaps the rarest of all was that old seafaring man from the North Mountain, Captain Joshua Slocum, who was the first human being to sail alone around the world. It is not the mere fact of his achievement that makes him memorable, though that was extraordinary enough; it is how he did, and the kind of man he was. As Slocum went to sea in early childhood, he never had a formal education. But by the time he was fifty, when steam drove sailing ships off the oceans, he had become not only a man of many resources but a learned one as well. He turned the cabin of his little sloop into a library, and there he would lie—day after day, week after week, month after month for more than two years—reading the world's classics while his tiny ship drove along on course with her helm lashed. Within the record he left of that famous voyage, Slocum

defined the meaning of education as truly as it was ever defined by Socrates. When alone in the middle of the Pacific, not having seen land or a ship for weeks, he produced the following, which is great literature in its unconscious symbolism:

"The sun is the creator of the trade winds and of the wind-system all over the earth. From Juan Fernandez to the Marquesas I experienced six changes of these great palpitations of sea winds and of the sea itself, the effect of far-off gales."

And then this great sentence:

"To know the laws that govern the winds, *and to know that you know them*, will give you an easy mind on your voyage around the world; otherwise you may well tremble at the appearance of every cloud."

Slocum lived, of course, in the world. He sailed alone around it before it became certain that one day human beings would break loose from the atmospheric envelope and wander in pressurized cabins among the planets and stars. But when these voyages are made they will be neither as fruitful nor as enjoyable as his. No matter how far the spacemen go, or how fast, it is unlikely that they will ever discover what they are searching for, because what they were searching for will lie behind them on the earth. Even in spatial silence their ears will miss the sound of the wind in trees. Even in the middle of nothing there will be moments when their eyes will yearn for the outline of a promontory thrusting out into salt water. For the scientists of our century have discovered and proved a strange paradox. Power resides in the universe and in the atoms that compose it, but it is only on this apparently insignificant planet that circumstances permit conscious life to exist. The earth and the living things in it, not the blind power in matter, are the highest forms of creation.

Perhaps in your generation, after three centuries of ardent search for the source and uses of power, it will seem more interesting to turn back to a quest much older, and to search again for the meaning and the use of life.