

THE DALHOUSIE IDEA

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“Who now runs over ancient story for the purpose of reading deeds of arms, of fields marked by carnage; who now tracks the steps of the rude destroyer, who made battles his pride and pleasure and set up a false standard of worth before a misled people? Is not the object of study, rather, the progress of knowledge, the growth of art and science, and the elevation of nations in the moral and intellectual scale.”—*Joseph Howe.*

DALHOUSIE College was an idea prematurely born into an alien and unfriendly world, deserted by its parents, betrayed by its guardians, and throughout its minority abused by its friends and enemies alike. Its history cannot be dissociated from the struggle of democracy against monopoly and privilege in church and state: for the idea of Dalhousie was that of a college that would be open to all regardless of class or creed and, in contending for this idea among others, the champions of responsible government, most of whom were dissenters, had first to break the monopoly of an established church in religion, education and government before they could find place for the democratic principle of a career open to talent. In other words, the history of Dalhousie is the history, in part, of a complete change in the political and cultural outlook of Nova Scotia.

It was not inconsistent with eighteenth century views of education that higher institutions of learning should have been established in Nova Scotia before any adequate provision was made for elementary education or that those institutions should have been fostered officially in accordance with a definite political theory. During the French régime the interests of church and state had been inseparable and the priest or missionary who did not exert himself persistently to keep both the Micmacs and the Acadians in the French interest was promptly reprimanded and supplanted, if not amenable to direction. It was not unnatural, therefore, that when imperial sovereignty changed hands, the British Government should undertake to control both old and new inhabitants by both political and religious sanctions. Thus Church of England clergymen and schoolmasters, provided by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, were called upon to minister to the religious and cultural needs of the people and to educate them in the spirit of the British constitution.

But as both clergymen and schoolmasters were few and the field was wide, only a small number of the people profited by their ministry and still fewer children received the rudiments of an education. This was true both before the expulsion of the Acadians and after the arrival of the New England planters, notwithstanding the casual assistance given to the cause of elementary education by temporary and transient private schools in Halifax and by more or less illiterate itinerant schoolmasters in western Nova Scotia. The provincial government itself did nothing to foster education before the outbreak of the American Revolution, and its only educational enactment prior to 1780 was of a restrictive nature, imposing a fine upon any teacher who should teach without a license and absolutely prohibiting any Roman Catholic from teaching at all. The former regulation reveals the anxiety of the Established Church to supervise where it could not provide instruction and the latter reflects the bitter heritage of French and British rivalry for control of the Acadians. Both make it clear that when a grammar school was projected at Halifax in 1780 and an academy was actually established at Windsor in 1788, no adequate provision had been made for elementary education as a stepping stone to more advanced training and instruction.

Moreover no such conception of general elementary education had yet dawned upon British or European statesmen: but in their view, the dictates of charity and administrative efficiency alike demanded that a minimum of instruction should be given to the poor, while private schools should prepare children of the better classes for higher education and the public service. This was the view held by the government of Nova Scotia for more than half a century after the arrival of the Loyalists, although they had had the example of the New England colonies before them and could have learned from them the value of a general diffusion of education. But, though the legislature had tried to encourage general education by a system of bounties between 1808 and 1822, and had favoured universal assessment in 1826, they too were haunted by the ghost of administrative efficiency, and it was not until 1836 that a committee of the Assembly enunciated the theory that talents contributory to progress in the arts and sciences might be discovered amongst the children of all classes and that, therefore, the province could not afford to allow the majority of its inhabitants to remain in ignorance. Five years later, in attempting to introduce the New England system of free schools supported by general assessment, Howe gave eloquent form to this conception of education as the necessary basis for higher education, a healthy provincial

life and the founding of a provincial character. "If I am asked," he said, "what kind of knowledge I would cultivate here, my answer is, first give your civilization a base co-extensive with the Province, and let, if you choose, its apex pierce the highest heaven of imagination and art."

It was because Howe regarded the mental and moral cultivation of the whole people as the surest foundation for progress in agriculture, commerce and industry, and perceived the "capital of the mind" in the cottage of the peasant as well as in the castle of the nobleman, that he strove so valiantly for a province-wide culture and democratic self-government. But these two ideas, so inextricably interwoven in his own mind, were poles asunder from the official attitude of the second half of the eighteenth century although they were to dominate the second half of the nineteenth.

The official attitude at the close of the eighteenth century was still that of imperial supremacy and colonial subordination, and the only lesson learned from the American Revolution was a reactionary one, that too much liberty had been allowed to the American democracies. In salvaging the remaining portions of the empire in North America, imperial statesmen relied on the Loyalists who migrated to Quebec and Nova Scotia to overcome the democratic tendencies that had already manifested themselves there and to cooperate in maintaining these colonies in willing subordination. Hence a Loyalist bishop to make the established church a reality, a Loyalist college to train native clergymen, schoolmasters and public servants, and a select governor and council to control the representative assembly by a discreet use of the Royal prerogative. It is true that in 1758 the Church of England had been recognized by local legislation as the established church of Nova Scotia; but in the interval many dissenters had been induced to come to the Province by assurances of religious liberty, and these greatly outnumbered the members of the Church of England. Moreover, as some of these dissenters, both lay and cleric, had openly sympathized with the American Revolution, it seemed clear to imperial statesmen that the real enemy of British sovereignty was no longer French imperialism and Roman Catholicism but American democracy and dissent. The obvious course, therefore, was to conciliate the Acadians, relax the restrictions against Roman Catholics and make the British system more effective by strengthening the executive government and bestowing all official favour upon the established church. Thus church and state were to continue their Anglicizing efforts hand in hand. Favoured by its members in the executive government, the Church of England would exercise a rigorous

control over education not only by its direct teaching but also indirectly through the fact that all licences for teachers had to be approved by the bishop before being issued by the lieutenant-governor; and the Anglican college would prevent the youth of the province from attending American institutions of higher education and imbibing republican ideas at the same time.

Such was the origin of that system of monopoly and privilege which dominated Nova Scotia from 1787 to 1848, and against which a two-fold struggle was waged by democracy and dissent for responsible government and religious and educational equality. It is not improbable that the system would have lasted much longer if it had been administered less rigorously and the original idea of the widest possible comprehension had not been discarded. This is particularly true of King's College, which was cheerfully supported by the provincial legislature prior to 1802 and, in return, educated a number of ambitious dissenters as well as children of the established church. But, as Judge Croke foisted an exclusive charter upon it, just when the assembly was beginning to clash with the council on constitutional grounds, and the various dissenting bodies were beginning to develop a corporate unity, it was inevitable that the whole system should be attacked from all angles as soon as the protracted wars of the period had terminated and men's minds had turned to the problems of peace.

In the educational field the first move came from Pictou county. Here the friends of education, under the leadership of Rev. Thomas McCulloch, had organized themselves into a society for the promotion of liberal education, had collected funds for the erection of an academy, and, in 1815, had petitioned for an act of incorporation. Though all those who signed the petition were Presbyterians, they professed the most liberal views and declared that the proposed academy should provide education "for persons of every religious denomination who wish to improve their minds by literary studies."

A bill embodying these liberal principles was introduced in the assembly in 1815 but deferred until the following year. In 1816 it passed the assembly in its original form but on reaching the council it was amended almost beyond recognition, and when finally enacted, with a suspending clause, it transformed the proposed academy into a denominational institution well calculated to prevent all the dissenting bodies of Nova Scotia from rallying to its support. The original board of trustees was enlarged to include Presbyterians other than Pictonians; but all trustees had to subscribe periodically to an oath that they were members of the Church of England or professed the Presbyterian religion as declared in the Westminster

Confession of Faith, and the same oaths were to be taken by the masters or teachers of the academy. Though the friends of Pictou Academy saw that the council was on the defensive, fearful of opening the door to other concessions, and anxious to save face by keeping control of the new institution, nominally at least, within the established churches of England and Scotland, they blundered seriously in accepting these amendments: for they left themselves open to suspicion of having deserted the general cause of liberalism and dissent, or at least of having hinted that Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists and Roman Catholics would have to seek special privileges on their own. Thus the over-shrewdness of the council in Halifax and the short-sighted impatience of the Seceders in Pictou led unconsciously but inevitably to the multiplication of sectarian institutions of higher education in Nova Scotia as the only passable road to religious equality. It is true that the act of incorporation did not impose any religious tests or restrictions upon students of Pictou Academy, nor did the teachers attempt to influence their denominational leanings; but the fact remains that the institution was stamped officially as Presbyterian, and as Presbyterian only was officially tolerated. It is true that McCulloch still organized and led the other dissenters to demand equal rights with the Church of England as to marriage laws and the incorporation of congregations; but these demands also, though calling for united action in claiming a right, implied separate action in the enjoyment of that boon when won, and before that boon was won members of the Kirk and the Secession were waging internecine war within the Academy itself.

Thus in fighting to the bitter end against religious and educational equality, on the imperial principle of *divide et impera*, the council from both political and religious motives brought upon itself a politico-ecclesiastical attack that ultimately led to its downfall. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the most tolerant and discreet member of the council who, objecting to the "Babel system of education", advised that amendment to the first Pictou Academy bill which pointed the way to that very system, though in a different sense. He later advised conceding to dissenters the right to marriage by license and to incorporate their congregations, not because of a positive belief in religious equality but rather on grounds of expediency, as jealousy of the privileges of an established church tended to unite all other sects against it. Perhaps a decade of bitter experience had taught him to prefer wisdom to consistency and to see that the true influence of any established church could not be extended by conferring political privileges upon it while withholding them from dissenters.

It was at the beginning of this active struggle by dissenters against monopoly and privilege and almost at the moment when the council had succeeded in side-tracking a similar proposal from Pictou, that Dalhousie projected his idea of a liberal non-sectarian college into the political arena, and this idea clashed with both the exclusive Church of England college at Windsor and the freer but now essentially Presbyterian Academy at Pictou. To the Council another college was obviously superfluous and nothing but their deference to the high-standing of the lieutenant-governor or their preference for the capital in contrast with Pictou as an educational centre could have induced them to support the project. Moreover, Dalhousie himself had not quite thought out all the implications of his magnificent gesture, especially in relation to the existing politico-ecclesiastical system. His later administration in both Nova Scotia and Quebec proves that he was far from democratic in either temper or policy and that he had no thought of furthering either political reform or religious dissent. Perhaps his idea was but a momentary flash of insight later to be dimmed by interested counsel, or perhaps, as a member of the Church of Scotland and of Edinburgh University, he instinctively contemplated transplanting to Halifax that Scottish system, which he knew, in order to take care of those students who were excluded from the English and Oxford system that had been transplanted to Windsor. Certainly he did not see, what is obvious to all now, that in choosing an ex-officio board of governors, the majority of whom were products and exponents of an exclusive imperial system, members of the established church and governors of the church college, he was making it impossible for men of honour to serve two masters, and men of "salutary prejudices" to be candid, unbiassed and whole-hearted in seeking the good of Dalhousie College. Further the member of the official group to whom Dalhousie was most attached and with whom he maintained an intimate correspondence to the close of his unhappy sojourn in Canada was Michael Wallace, a Loyalist, a member of the Church of Scotland, a friend of Judge Croke and the only member of the council who supported that autocrat in his arbitrary attempts to rob the assembly of its legitimate powers, a defeated candidate in Pictou against whose inhabitants and Dr. McCulloch in particular he cherished an ineradicable dislike; and his influence was persistently used in defence of the existing monopolistic system.

From all this it is obvious that Dalhousie himself was partly to blame for the early failure of his college. Had he been dominated less by his intimates, both before and after he left the Province, he

could have formed an alliance with McCulloch and won for Halifax and Dalhousie College all the energy and resourcefulness of that able man who twenty years later was called upon to inaugurate teaching in this non-sectarian college, though linked with two professors from the Church of Scotland, the church that had done all in its power to wreck the institution for which he had given his best thought and unstinted labour throughout a quarter of a century. That such an alliance was possible is beyond reasonable doubt and that it would have been a fruitful alliance is equally sure. McCulloch, having done some service to the established church, had been invited to join that church and to share in its honours and rewards; but he resisted the temptation preferring rather to serve his own people in poverty with a clear conscience. As a good clergyman and a great educator he had seen that imported clergymen were not adequate to the needs of Nova Scotia, and to meet these needs his early efforts were directed; but, if Dalhousie had been allowed to rise to the height of his own ideal, he would have made McCulloch the principal of his college in the beginning, and thus secured both a scholar who knew his constituency and a loyal supporter of the liberal arts around which law, medicine, and theology could have been gathered in due course.

However, despite his blundering as to means and his wavering as to ends, much credit is due Dalhousie for the inspiration of his conception, the enthusiasm with which he strove to found his college and the matchless language in which he set forth his idea. Governors might prove faithless to their trust, politicians might put obstacles in its way, and inertia might delay its full realization; but, once the idea had been released under such high auspices, it was to stand forth for all time as a challenge to the existing order, an ideal standard for liberal minded men and the hope of the future. It is significant that in his correspondence and addresses on the subject the essential principles on which Dalhousie College has since expanded are duly set forth.

In his original letter to Lord Bathurst, December 14, 1817, he states that he and his council are unanimously agreed on the proposal of a seminary similar to that of the University of Edinburgh, which would distribute its benefits to every class of society and in no degree interfere with any establishment already formed here. "A seminary for the higher branches of Education is much wanted in Halifax—the Capital of the Province—the Seat of the Legislature—of the Courts of Justice—of the Military and Mercantile Society".—"Such an Institution in Halifax, open to all occupa-

tions and sects of Religion, restricted to such branches only as are applicable to our present state, and having the power to expand with the growth and improvement of our Society, would, I am confident, be found of important service to the Province."

In this letter the needs and the advantages of the capital as the seat of Dalhousie are briefly sketched but in a joint letter from Principal Baird and Dr. Brown of Edinburgh these advantages are amplified fully, supplying at once an answer to the superior claims of the country over the town and to the problem of future expansion from a college into a university. "By attaching the institution to the Capital," they wrote, on August 1, 1818, "you secure, in addition to all other objects, the exclusive advantage of calling forth as soon as the demands of the Country may require it, a body of volunteer Labourers in three of the learned Professions whose desire of usefulness and distinction will be sufficient to engage them in preparing a course of public instruction, on some branch of science, connected either with their own immediate pursuits, or their favorite private studies." These advantages of the capital as a university site are such as would naturally occur to an administrator seeking to organize classes of instruction for students. It remained for Howe, in 1843, to elaborate the advantages which the students themselves would derive from attending a university in the capital: "If a boy is intended for a merchant, he is surrounded by merchants and warehouses and ships, and may, while pursuing his studies, acquire a fund of valuable knowledge bearing on his peculiar pursuit. If he is to study law, all the courts are open to him and all reserved points are argued here before the assembled judges; the pulpits are filled by able divines; libraries, reading-rooms and institutes offer constant stores of information. If he cherishes a martial spirit there are military exercises every day; if the navy attracts him, there are men-of-war to inspect; if he has a taste for mechanics, for art or music, he will see and hear more to cultivate and refine his ear and his taste in Halifax in a month than any country village can offer in seven years."

It was in the following brief address on May 22, 1820, when laying the corner-stone of his college that Lord Dalhousie first announced to the general public his matured plan, his motives and his high hopes; and embodied his idea in unforgettable prose.

Before I proceed in this ceremony, I think it necessary to state to you, gentlemen, the object and intention of this important work; I think it necessary to do this because I have never yet made any public declaration of the nature of the Institution I am here planting among you, and because I know that some part of the

public imagine that it is intended to oppose the college already established at Windsor. This College of Halifax is founded for the instruction of youth in the higher Classics and in all Philosophical studies; it is formed in imitation of the University of Edinburgh; its doors will be open to all who profess the Christian religion; to the youth of His Majesty's North American Colonies, to strangers residing here, to gentlemen of the military as well as the learned professions, to all, in short, who may be disposed to devote a small part of their time to study. It does not oppose the King's College at Windsor, because it is well known that college does not admit any students unless they subscribe to the tests required by the Established Church of England, and these tests exclude the great proportion of the youth of this Province. It is therefore particularly intended for those who are excluded from Windsor; it is founded upon the principles of religious toleration secured to you by the laws, and upon that paternal protection which the King of England extends to all his subjects. It is under His Majesty's most gracious approbation of this institution that I meet you here today, and as his humble representative I lay this corner-stone of the building. I here perform an act which appears to me to promise incalculable advantages to this country; and if my name, as Governor of the Province, can be associated with your future well-being, it is upon the foundation of this college that I could desire to rest it. From this college every blessing may flow over your country; in a few months hence it may dispense those blessings to you whom I now address; may it continue to dispense them to the latest ages! Let no jealousy disturb its peace; let no lukewarm indifference check its growth! Protect it in its first years, and it will abundantly repay your care!"

It is difficult to understand, after reading this clear-cut exposition of his purpose, how Dalhousie could have been so shortsighted in his choice of governors for his college. Had he been able to read the signs of the times aright he would have chosen representative men from different parts of the province and from the various religious bodies which had appealed to him for equality of status with the Church of England. It was they whom the council had prevented from rallying around the standard of Pictou Academy, and it was their children who were excluded from Windsor. But just as the Council at that time had declined to consider a more representative character for themselves so they were content with a family compact control of the new college, and as it later transpired this control was to be purely negative: or as Howe said, in 1843, "It appears to have been the fate of this institution to have had foisted into its management those who were hostile to its interests, whose names were in its trust, but whose hearts were in other institutions. These, if they did nothing against took care to do nothing for it; their object was to smother it with indifference."

But, if Dalhousie could hardly have been expected to rise above the spirit of his age in choosing a board of governors, he is certainly open to just criticism for having proclaimed a college on the model of Edinburgh and immediately deserting that model by seeking a principal in England. Exactly a week before he made the eloquent address, quoted above, he and three of his advisers wrote to Professor Monk of Cambridge, asking him to choose a principal capable of teaching classics and mathematics and preferably a clergyman of the Church of England. Such action can mean only one of two things: either Dalhousie himself did not see the full significance of his own words or he was already being overruled by the Church of England members of his council. Be that as it may, nothing came of this effort to provide a one-man faculty for Dalhousie College, and no further effort was made to do so during the next decade.

In the meantime Dalhousie became governor-general of Canada, the college building was completed by Lieutenant Governor Kempt with money granted or loaned by the legislature, two abortive attempts were made to unite King's and Dalhousie colleges, and the patience of those who looked for a college in the capital was so nearly exhausted that they began to consider other means of providing higher education for their children. Pictou Academy, which had continued to regard itself as the equal of King's College in all but imperial and provincial favour, had begun to attack the executive government on political grounds and had appealed unsuccessfully to the imperial government to override the local government and procure it a permanent endowment equal to that of King's; but divided counsels in Pictou itself had enabled the council in 1832 to reduce the academy to a combined common and grammar school, although it received a grant of £400 a year for ten years and retained Dr. McCulloch as principal. The Baptists had founded an academy at Horton, with provincial aid, and the Roman Catholics had secured a provincial grant in support of a separate school in Halifax and were considering academies in Arichat and Antigonish. Thus the whole atmosphere was charged with potential sectarianism arising from resentment against Church of England influence in the council, and it was under these circumstances that Howe made his first move for responsible government through the famous twelve resolutions of 1837.

When this first effective attack on the council had resulted in an instruction to the lieutenant-governor to separate the legislative council from the executive and to make both representative of the different economic and religious interests of the province, it was

hoped that the various dissenting bodies could still be united in support of Dalhousie College and that the rising sectarian spirit could still be exorcised. To this end steps were taken first to unite the resources of Pictou Academy with those of Dalhousie by transferring Dr. McCulloch and part of the provincial grant to Halifax. A bill to effect this transfer was introduced in the session of 1838 but did not pass without opposition. It at first was opposed by most of the Anglicans, the members of the Church of Scotland and some of the Roman Catholics, and therefore could not have been carried without the support of the Baptists. To obtain this support assurances were given to the latter that Dr. Crawley would be appointed to the staff of Dalhousie under Dr. McCulloch and in this faith the bill was passed.

It now looked as if Dalhousie was about to begin its work in earnest, with the whole-hearted support of the Presbyterians of the Secession at least, of the Baptists, the Methodists and the Roman Catholics. But once again this bright prospect was to be dimmed by the old ex-officio board of governors. Notwithstanding the compact with the Baptists, and the clear wish of Dalhousie that this institution should be essentially non-sectarian, a small majority of the Rump board insisted that the professors other than McCulloch should be members of the Church of Scotland.

By its action it betrayed its trust, made Dalhousie a denominational institution as the old council had made Pictou Academy, and forfeited its only chance of preventing the rise of denominational colleges. Within the next two years the Baptists had established Acadia, the Roman Catholics St. Marys, and the Methodists a school in Halifax soon to be reinforced by a college at Sackville, and the Dalhousie idea was submerged until responsible government had been completely won and a new board had been appointed that would deal honestly with the well-understood wishes of the people. But long years were to drag out in bitter controversy before that boon was achieved, and during those years denominational colleges had become so firmly entrenched that nothing short of a miracle or a catastrophe could be expected to move them.

The act of 1841, which provided for a representative board of seventeen members and laid down the principle that no religious tests would be imposed upon either teachers or students, was in the eyes of all other than members of the Church of Scotland too much like locking the stable after the steed had been stolen; and this new unwieldy board was not more competent than the old. Under it McCulloch, broken in body and in spirit, struggled on with an uncongenial staff and a small student body, until his sudden

death in September 1843. Two years later, Dalhousie College was closed, not to be opened again until April 1849. In 1851 the permanent grant of £400 sterling to King's College was repealed and that college placed on the same basis as other denominational colleges with an annual grant of £250 currency. This may be regarded as the date when the last vestige of Anglican monopoly in government, religion and education was removed and the democratic principle of a career open to talent firmly established. At the same time the old imperial system had been supplanted by local self government, and henceforth Nova Scotia was free to govern itself as well or as badly as it chose.

In education the attempt to force uniformity from above in the exclusive Anglican mould had failed because of the objections of democracy and dissent to monopoly and privilege; and the attempt of Dalhousie to provide for all who had been excluded by the old system had also failed because of the tortuous diplomacy of the ex-officio board of governors whom he had chosen to implement the idea of non-sectarianism. The immediate fruit of both these attempts, imposed upon Nova Scotians from above, was more vocal and more highly organized sectarianism insistent upon complete equality in status and in provincial aid. The question of the future was this: will these people of themselves see the weaknesses and the cost of so many denominational colleges and will the idea of one strong free college emerge from their own leaders and seek fulfilment? It was in the hope that such an idea would ultimately emerge that the new board of governors was appointed in 1848 and that Howe tried to make peace with sectarianism in 1849, by recognizing frankly the merits of denominational colleges in the transition period but pointing ultimately to the Dalhousie idea of a free, combined, provincial university, situated in the capital. "As respects Dalhousie College," said he, "I have always relied, under good management, upon the resources which spring naturally from its central position in the bosom of the metropolis." . . . "All I ask for Dalhousie is to be left alone, or if moderate grants are given in aid of the higher branches of learning, that it should, if it qualifies, be permitted to participate. If it is put into operation without any needless aggression upon other institutions, or any revival of denominational hostility and bitterness of feeling not only will many Churchmen, Methodists, Baptists and Catholics send their sons to its classes, attracted by their cheapness and efficiency, but young men who have been trained at Sackville, King's, Acadia and St. Mary's will go there to finish their education."

Under the changed conditions Howe proved to be the true interpreter of the Dalhousie idea. When Dalhousie did finally go into operation unobtrusively as a college and had proved its worth, it gathered around it members of the learned professions, and became a real university, to which not only members of different denominations but graduates of the denominational colleges have come "to finish their education."

But, contrary to the hopes of Howe, denominational colleges have persisted long after the reasons for their establishment have ceased to exist, and college union seems to be as difficult as Church Union. The old arguments of providing for one's own children or one's own locality are now seldom heard; but each denominational college strives to draw to its fold students of any faith and from any part of the province; and new grounds of support are constantly urged: loyalty to traditions built up in days of struggle, keeping faith with benefactors who were strict denominationalists, and respect for vested interests of towns in which the colleges were built. Thus, while the entire political and cultural outlook of the province has changed during the last hundred years, and an educational system has been formulated to provide by regular stages for the selection of talented youth from all sections of the province and all ranks of society, the number of denominational colleges has increased rather than diminished and competition amongst these colleges for students has become proverbial. There is, therefore, still great need that the Dalhousie idea shall not be lost sight of: the idea of a liberal, comprehensive, non-sectarian institution, which imposes no religious tests upon professors or students, stands for intellectual and moral honesty, and may "expand with the growth and improvement of our society."