

MURRAY AND MORTON: MARITIMERS IN WESTERN CANADA

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“THE people of the Maritime Provinces have never been ardent unionists,—political, ecclesiastical, educational or commercial.” This is the opening sentence in an article written by Dr. Walter C. Murray for the *DALHOUSIE REVIEW* in 1922.* The writer, then President of the University of Saskatchewan, expressed an opinion which suggests a paradox in Canadian national life. The Maritimers within their own tiny provinces have had a long tradition of particularism and sectarian strife, but outside those provinces many of them have become the strongest exponents and leaders of broad national unity. How can one explain this paradox?

It may be that, living in an environment of particularism whose roots reach deeply into Scotch granite, English and Irish soil, and into Roman marble, their public men are particularly sensitive to symptoms of latent strife. They become well trained in the arts of arrangement and compromise. Through hard, practical experience they learn that only fundamental and simple principles can stabilize the shifting layers of sentiment. Thus the Maritimers receive a schooling which gives them special qualifications when they emerge in the broader fields of Canadian activity.

Then, too, within the comparatively narrow circumference of the three sea-board provinces there exists the possibility of a close acquaintanceship between public men. As in England or New England, it is not difficult for men to come together frequently. Public affairs are conducted on a more intimate personal basis than elsewhere. The exchange of opinion and business is with men and individuals, rather than between officials and offices. The Maritimer is thus accustomed to think first of men, and even of their family connection, rather than of their position or official title.

Dr. Walter C. Murray was a Maritimer. He was forty-three years of age when he came to Saskatchewan as President of the University. About half of his life was spent in the provinces by the sea. Thus he brought with him, as a fully matured scholar and public man, the outlook of his early environment. He had,

*Murray, W. C.—College Union in the Maritime Provinces, *DALHOUSIE REVIEW*, Vol. II, p. 410.

of course, great and distinguished gifts of mind and character which were wholly individual and personal. But over and above these was a certain technique of management which some of us associate with the public men of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick facing eastward, not westward, on the restless, misty and cold Atlantic.

Walter Charles Murray was born in Studholm, New Brunswick, in 1866. He attended the Collegiate School in Fredericton, and in 1886 he graduated from the University of New Brunswick. As holder of the Gilchrist Scholarship, he proceeded to Edinburgh University, at that time the holy Mecca of scholasticism for Maritimers of Scottish and Presbyterian origin. For three years he submitted to the rigorous discipline in philosophy which distinguished that ancient university. In 1891 he received his M.A. degree with first class honours in philosophy. The same year he returned to lecture in philosophy and economics at his home university in New Brunswick. The following session he accepted the George Munro chair of philosophy at Dalhousie University. For the next sixteen years Halifax was the scene of an intense activity which embraced all phases of academic and public life. He gathered about him a group for the purpose of discussing philosophical problems. He interested himself in educational matters, helping to select and compile a series of readers for use in the schools. He published a book on *Studies in Mind Growth*. He contributed to the study and writing of the history of the provinces. For three years he was an alderman of the city. He was at all times a devoted member, and became an elder, of the Presbyterian Church. In 1907 he was appointed a member of a special committee to study the question of Church Union in Canada. No one was a more tenacious and skilful advocate of a United Church of Canada, the consummation of which was one of the momentous developments in contemporary Canadian history. In offices great and small Dr. Murray showed the same joyous enthusiasm and love of people and affairs. Not the least of his concerns was his long time secretaryship of the Maritime branch of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club. His many activities brought him into contact with an ever-increasing circle of individuals and families.

In these opening years of the century, while the ebb and flow of life was following traditional lines in the old eastern port of Halifax, a new Western Canada was coming into being with

remarkable swiftness. In 1905 two new provinces had been formed, and a river of immigration flowing from Eastern Canada with tributary streams from Great Britain, Europe and the United States was spreading out over the western prairies. The whole institutional life of new communities had to be expanded or created. On April 3, 1907, the Legislature of Saskatchewan passed an Act which provided for the setting up of a state university which should be as completely non-political and non-sectarian as possible. On August 30, 1908, the Board of Governors, provided for by the Act, appointed Dr. Walter C. Murray as president of its university, which existed as yet only on paper.

It is given to few men to become founders and creators of institutions whose life will be counted in terms of centuries rather than years. Dr. Murray accepted the opportunity in a spirit of high courage and enthusiasm. He was well acquainted with university life in Eastern Canada, in Great Britain and in the United States. He had, however, no ambition merely to imitate or transplant any of these institutions. Guided by his knowledge and experience, he set forth to create a new foundation which would meet the unique situation in Western Canada.

In the light of his experience in the Maritime Provinces, he wholly approved of the non-sectarian principle contained in the University Act, that there should be only one non-theological degree-granting institution in the Province of Saskatchewan. At the same time, he fully appreciated the traditional spiritual ties between church and university. In a Report which he made to the Senate in November, 1908, he expressed his opinion as follows:

It would be an error of the first magnitude for our University to cut itself off from friendly relations with the theological schools of the province. While the University should adhere rigidly to the non-sectarian policy, it need not be indifferent or antagonistic to the religious interests. A community of theological colleges clustered about the University will not only receive much, but will also contribute much to the life of the University.*

In the Report of 1908 a general programme was set forth, which fully indicated that the new president had the imagination and vision to plan on a large and generous scale, since

*Murray, W. C. *The University of Saskatchewan*. Trans., R.S.C. Section II., 1941, p. 109.

that programme supplied the guiding lines which to a considerable extent are still being followed.

In his first year Dr. Murray began to acquaint himself with the leading people of the province. This was not a matter of superficial acquaintanceship, but a cultivation resulting in a warm exchange of mind and spirit. He quickly singled out the old pioneer and missionary families; with his fellow Maritimers a bond already existed; other public men found a ready response in his sympathetic understanding, shrewd observation and chuckling humour. While political, religious and local ties were not overlooked, the consciousness of these ties melted away in his presence. In the solving of difficulties Dr. Murray always relied on a personal interview, an informal chat or even a word or two, in preference to the written communication or bald telegram.

On September 29, 1909, the first class of seventy students began university studies in temporary quarters. None of the students in these first years will ever forget the unobtrusive but personal attention which he received from the president. He knew all the students by name, in many cases he knew their family connections and background; always he was interested in their general welfare as well as in their academic progress. The tradition which he then established, he maintained when the number of students doubled and tripled. Even when it finally became twenty-fold, and it was quite impossible to maintain the personal contact with all students, graduates were constantly amazed that Dr. Murray should remember them and even be able to recall some of the circumstances connected with their university career.

If the relations in these early days with the students were close, the ties between president and tiny faculty were those of almost family intimacy. In selecting members for his staff he was careful, in addition to personal qualifications, to have diverse educational and social backgrounds represented. Among the early appointments were people like Arthur Moxon with Dalhousie and Oxford training, George Ling with Toronto and Columbia academic experience, Alexander Greig from McGill, C. Jack MacKenzie from New Brunswick, W. G. Sullivan from Trinity College, Dublin, W. P. Thompson from Harvard, John A. MacDonald from Prince Edward Island, and John Bracken from Ontario. To unite such as these into a harmonious faculty was Dr. Murray's special delight. His

personal approach to their problems almost invariably won their loyalty and even their affection. The nucleus from the Maritimes was a special support to him in times of critical decisions. Only once was his reliance on the good faith and good will of members of the faculty seriously misplaced.

In Eastern Canada beauty is lavish in her gifts. Dr. Murray grew up in a province where graceful elms throw cool shadows over sleepy streets, where ranges of hills rising from the fruitful valleys of numerous rivers are covered with varying shades of green in summer and spattered with splotches of red and gold in autumn. To one as sensitive to beauty as he was, the contrast on coming to the almost bare prairies must have been striking. Here beauty must be created and cultivated by the deliberate design of man. Thus Dr. Murray insisted that the new university campus should be beautiful in design and consistent in its architecture. The lovely stone buildings which were erected are always a matter of delightful surprise to one who has travelled hundreds of miles over bare prairies dotted with unpainted wooden buildings. But such architectural achievements must be limited in an extensive province in the process of establishment. So the president turned his attention to another form of aesthetic expression which might be widely cultivated with minimum expenditure and equipment. Under his fostering care the musical festival became a province-wide institution. It would be hard to estimate the amount of good and medium talent which has thus been encouraged, or the number of hours of thrill and delight which have relieved the monotony of the long evenings of a somewhat inhospitable climate amid somewhat drab surroundings.

Only three graduating classes had been sent forth from the University of Saskatchewan, with the beaming benediction of its president, when the 1914 War burst on the world, sending its eddies of fury even to remote places like the prairie university city of Saskatoon. Not only did university students rush to enlist, but the little faculty which Dr. Murray had so carefully chosen and cherished was shattered when its young and ardent members hastened to join the colors. When Frank Underhill enlisted, the department of history disappeared. In this emergency Dr. Murray called to his assistance a former friend who had been a professor of church history at Pine Hill College, Halifax. This friend was Arthur S. Morton. Responding

immediately, Mr. Morton became professor of history and librarian at the University of Saskatchewan in 1914.

While Mr. Morton was born in Trinidad in 1870, the salt of the Maritimes was in his blood. His father's family had come from Scotland and settled in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, while his mother's people were merchants of Halifax. His father, Rev. John Morton, had been in ill health. He was given a trip to Trinidad by a member of his congregation in Bridgewater, N. S., who sent ships with dried cod to the West Indies. As a result of his trip, the father became interested in missionary work among the Hindus in Trinidad and took up residence there. After receiving his early education in Trinidad, Arthur S. Morton received a scholarship which enabled him to study at the University of Edinburgh. Here he came to know the students from the Maritimes and in particular the Falconer brothers, Robert and James, and Walter Murray.

After receiving his degree from Edinburgh, Mr. Morton went to New Brunswick and became an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. For some years he held pastoral charges in New Brunswick, but he was finally appointed lecturer in church history at the Presbyterian College in Halifax. His interests were in scholarly research, and he spent some time doing post-graduate work, chiefly in the British Museum in London. His special field of interest was the Roman Empire, Middle Ages and Reformation period. It was this special historical training which appealed to Dr. Murray when he appointed him to the history staff in 1914.

Mr. Morton had other qualities to recommend him. He had the same approach to human problems as had Dr. Murray, inasmuch as he emphasized the importance of individuals over offices and preferred always to deal informally and directly with people. Both men showed endless patience and persistence in arriving at understanding with those whose influence or decision was of importance. But whereas Dr. Murray rejoiced in the wide arena of public affairs, Professor Morton preferred the seclusion of library and archives. Both realized the continually intrusive power of history and tradition, but to Dr. Murray the contemporary scene was vivid and close, illuminated by the paler radiance of the past, while to Professor Morton the past was clearer in its illumination and the present was only partly understood through the reflection coming from the past.

In their long association with each other in Saskatchewan, which lasted for over thirty years, they operated in the closest harmony. A background which was common in its academic training and experience in the Maritimes was enlarged by an almost perfect knowledge of each other's temperament and methods. In the field where their activities overlapped they gave each other constant support and help. In the remaining fields each man pursued his own way, with no interference or gratuitous suggestion from the other.

The conspicuous success of Dr. Murray in establishing the university brought him into spheres of activity which soon became national in scope. In 1916 he became a member of the Canadian Advisory Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. In 1920 he was made a Trustee of the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching. He became a member of the Dominion Commission regarding the Property of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1926. The Dominion Government appointed him a member of the Commission regarding Dominion Civil Service in 1929, and a member of the Royal Commission on Transportation in 1931. Numerous lesser trusts he discharged with unobtrusive efficiency and wisdom. At the same time his university responsibilities were being enlarged with the greatly expanded work of that institution.

In the meantime Professor Morton had devoted himself to the study of the history of Western Canada. Antiquarian research regarding the old Trading Posts formed the background to the study of wider movements of trade and settlement on the prairies. While Dr. Murray was laying down surveyor's lines for the future Canadian West, Professor Morton was recording the old lines which had once been the basis for hope and enterprise. A series of articles and books constituted the architectural monuments of Professor Morton's activities.

In 1937 Dr. Murray retired, having been showered by tributes too numerous to mention here. It was characteristic of him that he decided to remain in Saskatoon. He continued to interest himself in civic and church matters, and was the friend of people, great and obscure, who availed themselves of his wise advice. In 1940 Professor Morton, who had already received recognition of his works of scholarship, also gave up his academic work. Characteristically enough, he continued to devote his energy to historical studies as Provincial Archivist. In their comparative leisure the two friends were now thrown much

closer together. In their last years they collaborated in the writing of a history of the university they had both served so well. It is to be hoped that this history will be printed in the not too distant future.

On January '26, 1945, Professor Morton passed away quietly, and some two months later, on March 23rd, Dr. Murray was released by death from a long, hard illness. For those who have known them both during their long association in Saskatchewan, it is difficult to become adjusted to their absence around the university campus.

The distinctive contribution of Maritimers to Canadian life at large is their sense of people and intimate social connection, or the essential human nexus in institutional life. This sense has been sharpened in the traditional rivalries and in the restricted area of Maritime society. In the broader field of Canadian life the technique of management based on this social view tends necessarily to give way to more formal arrangement and rules based on general principles and theories. It is to be hoped, however, that Canada will be spared entire reliance on the cold rule of political logic by the continual interjection through Maritimers of the warm equation of the endlessly varied human personality.