

DALHOUSIE COLLEGE IN "THE SIXTIES"

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IN 1863 a new star appeared above the horizon. Some observers in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, London and other cities, when their attention was directed to the new luminary, probably shrugged their shoulders: "Only another *nova* which will presently burn itself out and retire to its pristine obscurity." But later, if their telescopes were turned in the direction of the new arrival, they found that it was no flash in the pan. Instead of fading, it was brighter than ever. And so it has continued, until, to-day, Dalhousie shines with a respectable lustre in the educational galaxy.

This paper is the result—all too imperfect—of an attempt, by one who was actively interested, to revive some memories of the days in the early sixties of the last century when Dalhousie was emerging from its rather ineffectual past.

As pointed out by Dr. Stanley MacKenzie in his admirable sketch, "One Hundred Years of Dalhousie", the College, though its "first beginnings" go back to 1818, did not actually begin work until 1838 when the Rev Dr. McCulloch, who had demonstrated his skill as an educator in the Pictou Academy, was appointed its head. Owing to unreasoning opposition and various difficulties not necessary to specify, the institution led a rather precarious existence reaching at times a state of suspended animation, so that in 1863 it was all but moribund. Then began an active movement in the Presbyterian churches to raise endowments for additional professors, in order that a provincial College worthy of the name might be established. The money necessary was supplied after a vigorous campaign. But as the College was a government institution, it was necessary to obtain the consent of the authorities to the needed change in the organization. Accordingly a committee of the Legislature was appointed to consider the matter. Hon. Adams Archibald, who was known as the "silver-tongued", was, if my memory serves me, chairman. The opponents of the scheme were numerous and influential, and they argued their side of the question with much vigour. Rev. George M. Grant, who had won distinguished honours at Glasgow University, and had eloquently and forcibly advocated the formation of a College which would

1. One of the three oldest living graduates of Dalhousie University. Dr. Lippincott graduated

be a credit to his native province, was chosen to represent those who favoured the reorganization. When the other side had finished, he took up their arguments one by one, and not only riddled them but painted such a glowing picture of the important services which a strong educational centre could render in the intellectual and cultural development of Nova Scotia that the committee promptly and unanimously decided to recommend the change; and the chairman exclaimed, "Why did you not study for the bar, Mr. Grant? If you had, you would have been without a peer in the profession."

Dalhousie College, thus reborn, held its first session in October, 1863, with Sir William Young, the eminent Chief Justice, Chairman of the Board of Governors. The principal, or president as he would now be styled, was Rev. Dr. James Ross, who was a sort of "Admirable Crichton" as his previous history showed. His knowledge was extensive and thorough. He lectured with lucidity on Logic and Political Economy.

Professor Lyall (Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy) made these subjects interesting by his delightful exposition. The effect was heightened by a personal charm into which entered an almost abnormal self-effacement and the transparent innocence of a pure mind. His absorption in his subject sometimes led him into neglecting the clock. On one occasion after he had exceeded by a few minutes his allotted hour, we signalled to each other to let him go on. When two hours had elapsed and dusk was closing in, one of the hungrier members of the class began to shuffle with his feet. The professor, much embarrassed, offered profuse apologies, and of course we gave him an ovation. But he was by no means without a sense of humour. Speaking of different racial types of beauty, and alluding to the Moorish taste for *embonpoint*, he remarked that "the Moorish belle did not walk, she trundled." Lyall had a highly poetic mind, and his analysis of different forms of poetry such as *subjective* and *objective* was illuminating; but it was in the discussion of graver matters, Metaphysics and the Theories of Morals, that he revealed most adequately his exceptional mental power.

Professor Charles Macdonald (Mathematics) came from Aberdeen University, where he took the highest honours not only in Mathematics but also in Greek and other subjects. About medium height, with a strong, well-knit frame, he was like most Scotsmen fond of walking, and every Saturday morning he could be seen starting for "a little run round the Basin", his swinging Highland stride evidencing his exuberant vitality. (I have been amused in

later years at the perfection which this stride was imitated by brainy little Japs keeping step with long-legged English scientists while they took in with every step deep draughts of knowledge). Macdonald's expressive face, with the handsome dark eyes dancing with kindly humour, indicated the nature of the man. He took a deep human interest in his students, and he was repaid with an unusual degree of affection. But he could be severe at times. One of the class, anxious for results, asked him one day when he was going to teach us "practical mathematics", meaning, of course, such things as land surveying, navigation, etc. He replied with a tinge of scorn, "Practical mathematics! You are here, Sir, to learn a modicum of *mathematics*". He was an ideal teacher, inspiring his pupils with somewhat of his own enthusiasm, and sometimes got remarkable results. It was little wonder, then, that he was very popular; but we would never have dreamed of speaking of him as "Charlie". Respect for our elders in that archaic age was so deeply ingrained as to preclude such familiarities. We know better now.

Professor Johnson (Latin and Greek) who came from Trinity College, Dublin, was in some respects the exact opposite of Macdonald:—fair complexion, blue eyes, ascetic type of face. He was distant and reserved. I understand that he became much mellowed as he grew older. But we did not know our Johnson. He was most thorough in his instruction. Idioms and other structural subtleties were analyzed with meticulous care. He was intolerant of vagueness and inaccuracy of statement. When the writer of an essay on the Romans with youthful rashness alluded to the founders of 753 as "naked savages", he was inexpressibly shocked and administered a deserved rebuke. Acting probably on the principle that an artist should learn to draw before taking up the brush, he did not dwell extensively on the literary and other characters, outside of purely linguistic, of the authors under review;—the majesty of Aeschylus, the refinements of Sophocles, the high poetic quality of Vergil or the genial philosophy of Horace; but it would be difficult to find his equal in imparting a knowledge of the languages as such. In the spring of 1870 the present writer found himself in General Custer's camp in Western Kansas when a young man fresh from Westpoint joined the regiment. On my admiring the motto *Spectemur Agendo* on his class ring, he asked me if I could translate it. Somewhat surprised I answered "Yes: let us be known by our actions", whereupon he exclaimed: "When did you graduate? I am a Bostonian and I know hundreds of Harvard graduates, and I have asked any number of them the

meaning of this motto and none of them could tell me". I replied laughingly that the Harvard Latin men might do worse than take a course under John Johnson of Dalhousie.

A notable addition to the Faculty was made in 1865 when James DeMille took the chair of History. With a commanding presence, a richly modulated voice and a facile flow of well-chosen English, he was an attractive speaker. His account of European history from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Napoleonic era was not a mere catalogue of unrelated events, military, political or other, but a philosophical review in which each event, in its proper setting, occupied its place, each following out of preceding events in a natural, logical sequence. The result was not a "still life" but a moving, living panorama, which a vigorous but controlled imagination rendered interesting in a high degree. His hearers always found his hour too short.

In his younger days he had travelled extensively in Europe, and the experiences then lived through provided the material for a number of works of fiction. The first of these, "The Dodge Club", written in his off hours at Dalhousie, a humorous sketch of the happenings of a party of sight-seeing Americans, had a very wide circle of readers. When the proof sheets arrived, the author found the illustrations, prepared by the publishers ((Harper Bros., N. Y.) unsatisfactory, and decided, like Thackeray under similar circumstances, to do his own illustrating. The Dodge Club was succeeded by "The Cord and Crease", "The Cryptogram" and several others, all very popular.

I cannot speak of Prof. McCulloch (Natural Philosophy) because he left Dalhousie before the routine order required my attendance on his lectures. Of Prof. Lawson (Chemistry) I can say little more because I, like most of my class-mates, was not as much interested in his subject as I should have been. Science in that remote era was a Cinderella not dreaming of the halcyon years to come: the atom was to us a mere hypothetical and quite negligible ultimate, instead of being, as now, a palpable analyzable entity and probably the key to the mysteries of the universe. It is not unlikely that our medieval prejudices were intensified by the fact that the star chemical man in our day was unable to demonstrate a proposition in Euclid if the letters were changed! Nevertheless Prof. Lawson's personality inspired universal respect, and his serious students adored him. The modern languages were taught first by Monsieur Pujol—soon replaced—and W. Liechti, a very capable man. These gentlemen were at that time styled tutors, not being accorded professorial rank.

So much for the Faculty. What of the students? Ours was distinctly not a mechanical age. True, we had the steam engine and the electric telegraph; but the telephone, the Edison lamp, the motor car, the airplane, the radio and the other appurtenances, now necessities of life, were still in the womb of the future. Still we were surprisingly happy, and we would have been more so if we had had the means of cultivating our bodies as well as our minds. For exercise we were limited to a walk round the Point, and we longed for a gymnasium. The old College building on the Parade seemed palatial to us, and in point of fact it was ample for the two score or more young men who entered it in 1863.

At the first Convocation in the spring of 1864, after the regular proceedings, reading of reports, distribution of prizes, etc., the President of the Board of Governors, Sir William Young delivered an eloquent address. Rev. G. M. Grant jumped to his feet and cried "Sir William has made a fine speech, but I am going to make a better one. I give a hundred dollars to start a College library". Other subscriptions followed, and thus was initiated the fine institution which justly bears the name "Macdonald Library".

Although the acquiring of an education was our main concern, we took a great deal of interest in public questions, and most of us attended the closing oratorical efforts by pro-Confederation leaders which, beginning on Monday night and continuing throughout the week, ended at midnight on Saturday with a memorable oration by Dr. Tupper. A large proportion of us also listened to Joseph Howe's Shakespeare Tercentenary address which the London Athenaeum pronounced the finest heard on that occasion by any English-speaking audience. But we missed a golden opportunity to listen at length to Howe's magic tongue and, as I believe, through our own fault. It had been arranged that he should give a series of addresses at the College on early colonial history. But the first lecture proved to be the last. The reason, I suspect, was that, when he began to speak, we whipped out our notebooks as we were accustomed to do, and this gesture was too much for the orator who naturally expected to see our eyes fixed on him, like the "great bright eye" in the *Ancient Mariner*.

Probably a majority of the entrants in 1863 did not look forward to the Bachelor's degree. The first fruits of the newly grafted and thus revitalized tree were Henry J. Chase and Robert Shaw, who, on account of superior preliminary training, were able to graduate in 1866. The former, after a long service in the ministry at Onslow, returned to California where he spent his declining years "with all that should accompany old age" and died in his

93rd year. Shaw, who was the most brilliant student of my day, studied law and rapidly attained to a high position at the Charlottetown bar, but his early demise cut short a most promising career.

The class of 1867 was composed of nine men.

ROBERT SEDGEWICK, Hon. Mr. Justice.

JOHN H. MACDONALD, Law.

SAMUEL MCNAUGHTON, Ministry.

DAVID H. SMITH, Bookseller.

EDWIN SMITH, Ministry.

JOHN J. CAMERON, Ministry.

JOSHUA C. BURGESS, Ministry.

ALEXANDER ROSS, Principal Academy.

J. AUBREY LIPPINCOTT, Medicine.

The last three are still living.