

OF A COLLEGE

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WHEN an institution of higher education is closely allied to a school of sectarian theology, education usually becomes secondary to the dictates of the theological requirement. If a liberal education on sound lines is demanded by the school of theology, that will be given; if mass production is deemed essential or a lower quality product, to use a manufacturer's phrase, will satisfy the demands of the moment, the quality of education drops to a corresponding level. A good deal of time might be spent in developing these themes to advantage, but our real purpose is to state them as preliminary to a narrative of events which had a profound and far reaching influence on education in Nova Scotia in the past, and of which the end is not yet in sight.

Surely after the lapse of more than a century, the story of the College at Pictou can be told in an unbiassed fashion without arousing feelings of bitterness. It is most difficult to deal with facts and not introduce personages, and in some instances to reveal them in a less flattering light than their dead and gone supporters and friends would have wished them to enjoy. On the other hand, facts may be stated without offence which the mass of material substantiating them might give. With this in mind an attempt will be made to outline the background and setting, and let the facts speak for themselves as actors on the stage.

The first settlement at Pictou by Anglo-Saxons was in 1767 when a small shipload, chiefly from Pennsylvania and Maryland came in the wake of the settlers from New England who took up land in Nova Scotia following the expulsion of the Acadians. This group located west of the present town site, and were greatly increased in numbers by the arrival of the ship "Hector" six years later from Scotland, bringing the first of a stream of colonists which continued at intervals for more than half a century. However peaceful the original settlement might be considered the arrival of the Highlanders put a different aspect on the situation in the eyes of the ruling authority in Halifax. Some of the new arrivals had been "out in the '45", and few of them looked with unqualified approval on the House of Hanover. Almost as soon as they arrived trouble arose.

The Philadelphia settlers had taken up nearly all the available land with a frontage on the harbour, and the "Hector" settlers found that their lots were located inland. As there were no roads through the primeval forest and the only ready means of travel was by water this was a decided inconvenience. In addition it moved them from fishing grounds as a ready source of food, and put them in the midst of the "gloomy forest", which they regarded as an enemy rather than a friend. Accordingly they balked and would not settle on their lots. Food supplies ran short and in desperation the Scots took by force what was needed, promising later restitution. Word reached Halifax that the "wild Highlanders are in rebellion," and the Truro settlers were ordered to send an armed company over the hills to quell it, which they had the good sense to refuse to do. The return of the "Hector" to Pictou with supplies from New England and the intervention of Lord William Campbell, the newly retired Governor, who was still in Halifax, on behalf of his countryman, restored the situation to normal. For all that the government in Halifax continued to regard the northern half of the County with uneasiness, which was considerably increased at the time of the revolution of the American Colonies. From 1776 to 1783 feeling in Pictou among Scots and settlers from the south ran quite strongly in favor of the rebels, and only its isolation prevented the likelihood of more active participation, with discontented groups elsewhere. At least one prominent citizen who had come on the Hope was arrested in Saint John, New Brunswick on suspicion while returning from a journey to the colonies. He was brought to Halifax but was soon released. It is probable, however, that when the disbanded Highland regiments concerned were settled on lands in Nova Scotia after the war, the reason why Pictou was chosen for a large group was not so much to place Scots among compatriots as to inject a number of men whose loyalty to the Crown was presumably beyond question. In one sense it may have achieved its purpose, but in another it completely failed. Many of the newcomers were ill disposed to hard work, quickly sold their lands and spent the proceeds in the grog shops. Pictou became the scene of disordered uneasiness. Illiteracy was the rule rather than the exception, and it was not until long after the arrival of the Reverend James MacGregor that this was in a degree ameliorated. All things considered there was some slight justification for the ruling aristocracy in Halifax looking upon Pictou as an outlandish place breeding rebellion and disorder.

We must now turn to another portion of the backdrop which was of tremendous importance in what followed. The Established Church of Scotland was the Kirk, built body and bones on the Calvinism of John Knox, theologically speaking, but here and there retaining certain practices from its contacts with the Church of England. One of these was the right of the Laird to nominate the minister of the local congregation, or at least so influence the picture that his choice determined the "call". In time a considerable group of Presbyterians in Scotland took issue with this practice. They demanded that the members of the congregation, rich or poor, should have an equal voice in the matter. Eventually they broke away from the Kirk and became known as the Secession Church of Scotland. In its turn the Secession Church divided on the question of the Burgess Oath. This oath which was required of every Burgher, made it necessary that he subscribe to the Christian religion as practiced by the Church of Scotland. As the "Church of Scotland" meant the Kirk, though the Secession took place on a basis of church government rather than of theology, many objected and formed a group known as "Antiburghers". Those who agreed to take the oath were "Burghers." When Dr. MacGregor arrived at Pictou twenty years after the settlement he found such a degree of religious illiteracy rampant that no thought of any sectarian differentiation entered his mind, or if it did so was promptly suppressed by the needs of the situation. He was a missionary in the true sense of the term, and was more concerned with introducing the essential elements of spiritual truth to a starving multitude than in reviving sources of difference of which the majority were fortunately ignorant. In Scotland he was a member of the Secession Church and an Antiburgher; in Pictou he was a Presbyterian minister from Scotland, long sought and eagerly welcomed.

One other scene must be briefly reviewed: the Government at Halifax, and closely allied to it the Church of England in Nova Scotia. By legislative enactment the Church of England had been created the Established Church in the Province. Measures of toleration were extended to dissenting groups with the exception of Roman Catholics who for many years after the settlement of Halifax were not permitted the open practice of their religion. The Governor, appointed by the Crown, was surrounded by a group almost without exception members of the Established Church. It was considered that only in that body could there be an unquestioned measure of loyalty to the

Crown so necessary in those times of trouble. Windsor soon became the aristocratic resort of influential citizens of Halifax who built homes there and considered them as country seats to which they could retire from the disorder and uneasy living of the Capital. In those days education in England was regarded as a privilege of the well-to-do or of the ruling class, and this conception was readily carried across the seas. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find that the first attempt at higher education in Nova Scotia should be the foundation of King's College at Windsor in 1789. After its reactionary Charter was granted in 1802 it would only graduate those who were willing to subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England. To satisfy "the hungry sheep" of Halifax a grammar school was begun, but the provision by way of accommodation and grants left no doubt as to where the sunshine of approval shone.

With all this in mind we come to the year 1803, a date of great significance in the history of education in Nova Scotia and one can say with justice in all Canada. In the autumn of that year a ship deposited the Reverend Thomas McCulloch, his wife, his goods and chattels in Pictou. He was on his way to Prince Edward Island where he had been sent as a missionary of the Secession Church. By this time, however, Pictou was a small but thriving town on its present site, and had been eagerly awaiting a chance to have a minister of its own. With this in mind the people painted such a picture of possible hardships awaiting a person who tried to cross to the Island at that season of the year, that McCulloch was persuaded to remain the winter in Pictou. With commendable zeal the townfolk secured a lot and began to erect a church with such speed that in the spring when all danger of storm and tide had vanished it was not too difficult to induce him to remain. This chance of Fortune really suited McCulloch admirably. He was not a pioneer at heart like MacGregor. Travelling through the forest by horseback or on foot, spending the night in the open by a small fire, eating the meal that chance provided or doing without, were not part of a life that he could face with equanimity. MacGregor accepted all these as a matter of course in the service of his Master; McCulloch considered them "privations" and repeatedly referred to these and lesser inconveniences in that fashion. To contrast the two men is to regard them as persons of different personalities, the Highlander and the Lowlander; the son of the hill and the heather, the son of the city and the close. Each was content in his own right.

So McCulloch became the minister of the Harbour Congregation. The great man of the town was Edward Mortimer, a merchant prince who was beginning to make a fortune in the lumber trade with England. He furnished a building site for the home of the new minister, and probably contributed largely to its erection. When a grammar school was planned he provided the site for it also. Its first headmaster was the new minister. Religion and education took root in Pictou simultaneously.

It soon became apparent to MacGregor, McCulloch and their few associate ministers that if they were to build up a church in this new land it must be by their own efforts. Not that aid was lacking from Scotland, but it was unsteady and uncertain. Few young men of education were possessed of the pioneer spirit. There was only one answer to the problem: they must produce a native ministry. To do this they had to work from the ground up, educationally speaking. The grammar school was doing good work, but the scope of its curriculum was limited to reading, writing, mathematics, and the rudiments of Latin and Greek, along with history and a thorough grounding in English. For all that, the native mineral was good and the planners were soon in a position to look forward to a small group of students in theology. One would have thought that the urgency of the demand would have led McCulloch and those working with him to start these young men in theology as soon as they emerged from grammar school. Many today start with no better preparation. Apparently such an idea never occurred to them, or if it did was instantly dismissed. The Presbyterian Church had a tradition of scholarship in its clergy as both its keystone and its corner. Without it they were determined not to build for they knew that their structure would surely fall. Religious controversy in those days was both frequent and fearsome. It was a combat of knights in armour. It was bang, cut, hack, and stab, without fear or favor, and the winner was usually the one with the keenest blade of pen and the toughest armour of education. In those days, too, the man on the street looked up to the minister not only as a father in the Faith but as a man of learning. There was nothing to be gained by turning out a "half baked" product under such discerning eyes.

The prospect, however, of giving the necessary college education was a poor one. Teaching was the easiest part of the problem. McCulloch had secured excellent training in science as well as in the liberal arts. As a teacher he was outstanding,

and associated with him were others of lesser though respectable learning. The greatest drawback was a financial one. The district was still poor. Merchants, like Mortimer, were wealthy in kind but not in money and what they could secure had to be constantly used to maintain their credit abroad. To approach the Assembly with a proposal to set up a theological seminary was so doubtful as to be discarded at once, and even if it had succeeded would never have passed the Governor and his Council. The Legislature was their only hope, so to that body they went with the following proposal:

The Church of England had its college at Windsor, a degree-granting institution supported liberally by public funds. The people who did not subscribe to the doctrines of that church far outnumbered those who did in the Province. Why not let this majority have a little college of their own? They wouldn't ask to grant degrees like the College at Windsor. They wouldn't ask for as much money as the Government gave to King's. Just a little money, and a little college for the Dissenters. That was all they asked.

Meanwhile as an earnest of good faith they were circulating a subscription list in Pictou. No mention was made of a theological course in its heading; what was said by the canvasser is unrecorded. Considering all things the response locally was very encouraging. Somewhat later a subscription list was circulated in Halifax and was well received. Several prominent members of the Church of England contributed as did also the Earl of Dalhousie.

The humility of the petitioners and their expressed purpose to set up an institution that would in no way be a rival to King's gained them friends and supporters, and in the course of time the Assembly voted them money which was with great hesitation granted by the Governor and the Council of Twelve. That august body felt it might overlook any threat to King's that this little college might raise, but the idea of educating potential traitors to the Crown did not appeal to them in the least. They were beginning to feel that the pen might be mightier than the sword. So in granting the college at Pictou a charter it was limited in its curriculum, it was to have no power to grant degrees, and its trustees and instructors were to take an oath attesting their loyalty to the Crown and Christian faith as often as required.

McCulloch and his friends were in no way discouraged by this treatment. Once they secured a certain income they

not worried about anything else. They had no idea of tipping King George off his throne, and while taking the oath was humiliating, at the same time it was all in a good cause. Who in Halifax was going to know what was taught in the college? As for the degrees—well, a way would be found. In 1816 the Charter was granted. In May 1818 college teaching was started with classes in a private home. Building of a four room, wooden structure was completed same year. The course was an excellent one. Besides the Classics and Hebrew, History and Philosophy, Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, as fundamental science was then known, were taught. Following completion of this course Theology, which had been interspersed up to this point, was completed.

For several years all went well. With grudging irregularity grants were made by the Government, and friends of the college helped as best they could. McCulloch complained unceasingly about the pay, but as he was Professor of Theology for the Synod of the Lower Provinces, for which he was paid a substantial sum, had his son under him as a paid teacher, and took paying private pupils into his home for board and education, he could not be said to have suffered as compared to many of his associates. During these years he began with his sons those remarkable natural history collections of which so much has been written. The students of the Academy, as the college was called, wore scarlet gowns like the undergraduates of McCulloch's own University of Glasgow, and began to feel the substance of their education when three of the more affluent went to Scotland wrote the examinations of the University of Glasgow and secured the degree of Master of Arts without difficulty. The graduates in Theology found ready acceptance in the wide, barren field. Not all the students who graduated from the Academy took theology. Some read law, some went farther in science, and others pursued useful lives in the business life of the community. Everything considered the friends of the institution could feel a measure of honest pride in its accomplishments.

By the year 1824 a small black cloud on the horizon grew suddenly larger by the arrival in Pictou of the Reverend Kenneth John MacKenzie. For many years the Secession Church had held the Pictou field undisputed. Finally a minister of the Kirk came who settled in the eastern part of the County. He was not given to strife, and it is unlikely that he would have attempted to hamper the work of the Academy, had not Mac-

Kenzie arrived on the scene. The latter was dismayed to find the strength of the Secession Church and horrified to learn that its ministerial needs were being so effectively supplied by the college in Pictou. For the first time the names Kirk and Anti-burgher were heard in the Town. The fight was on, though in the new world the terms were meaningless. The Kirk party posed as the friend of the Government. After all, they represented the Established Church of Scotland. The Seceders were radical nobodies, which many of the Council of Twelve had long suspected. The Council lent a willing ear and in spite of friends, the grants, never certain, soon became non-existent.

It was not McCulloch's nature to stand meekly by. He was a fighter, especially with the pen. Not a little of the good will of influential members of the Church of England for him came from the fact that he had taken up the cudgels when Dr. Stanser, the Rector of St. Paul's, Halifax, had been worsted in controversy with Bishop Burke of the Roman Catholic Church. The new champion had belaboured his opponent so violently that if he did not win at least he had the last word. One of his former students and a firm supporter was Jotham Blanchard, a Pictou lawyer who was also editor of the Colonial Patriot, published in Pictou. Quietly at first and then with more vigor the Patriot attacked the Council of Twelve. What Blanchard did not think of, McCulloch supplied. It set people meditating, and not the least of them a young man in Halifax by the name of Joseph Howe.

The attacks of the Patriot did not endear either McCulloch or his College to the Council, and its opposition to the institution itself became manifest, stimulated wherever possible by the Kirk. In desperation the Academy decided to carry its case to the home Government in England. To prepare the way an overture was made to the Synod of the Secession Church in Scotland to support the hands of the brethren overseas, which it did with enthusiasm. A Memorial to Lord Godrich, Secretary of State for the Colonies was prepared outlining the history of the college and its difficulties, and sent in the care of Jotham Blanchard to London. The Council had evidently gotten wind of the visit and had sent a letter on its own account. Blanchard was kept cooling his heels for awhile in London, and when he did secure an audience was soundly scolded. So much for face saving. The College had a good case, and the Council a very poor one. The Council was privately admonished and told to

reverse its attitude concerning grants of money, and Thomas McCulloch was told to abate his ire towards his Majesty's representatives, and also to make peace with the Reverend Kenneth John MacKenzie. To the first of the admonitions McCulloch agreed with the greatest cordiality, but the second he opposed with equal acrimony. To do him justice MacKenzie did not appear to expect it. The battle between Kirk and Antiburgher proceeded without respite.

At this point the tactics of the Kirk changed. It had attacked the Academy before the Council in a fashion that while deeply appreciated had secured nothing for that group but burnt fingers. By this time the Council was having its own troubles with Howe, and was not disposed to listen to vituperations alone against the college by the Kirk. The next attack was deadly in that it was strictly constitutional. It will be recalled that in order to secure a charter the college had agreed to give itself "a little name", as McCulloch put it, and to limit its curriculum. As long as its only opponents were in the council this did not matter much, for while they might call it an Academy, those at home could think of it as a college. But now the Kirk seized upon the Charter and insisted that its terms be followed to the letter. By what right, said they, was Government making grants to an institution which openly flouted the authority under which it operated? Why were they, the Kirk of Scotland, subjected to the humiliation of having to go without a theological college of their own while under their very noses the Antiburghers were conducting one supported by public funds. There was sufficient color of right in their demands that they had to be listened to. Slowly but with stubbornness they pressed their point: Make the Academy Conform to the Terms of its Charter! And at length they won! They won in an unworthy cause, but it must be admitted they won on legal grounds. The result was that the Government turned to give its support to Dalhousie College, and left the college at Pictou to continue its existence as little better than a good grammar school on a small annual grant. To Dalhousie, in 1838, came Dr. Thomas McCulloch, and the life of the Pictou College known as an Academy was for the time over.

Its existence was not in vain. Had it only produced three of its graduates it would have been worth the effort. From its four rooms went out John Geddie to give a lifetime of service to his Master in the South Seas. Of him it was said on Aneiteum, "When he came there was not a Christian; when he left there was not a heathen." From it went Jotham Blanchard, Nova Scotia statesman and friend of Howe whom he aided without

reserve in his battle for responsible government. Also from its doors went William Dawson to continue his studies in science overseas, return to become the first Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, a foremost geologist of his day, and later as Sir William Dawson to be the Principal of McGill University. But in addition to these in the twenty-two years of its life it produced the man who was to become the second President of Dalhousie, and a host of men who adorned nearly every field of public life in Nova Scotia. Of these the greatest group were the clergymen who accepted the challenge for service gladly and made Nova Scotia the very hub of the Presbyterian Church in Canada for a century.

The victory of the Kirk gave it little satisfaction. It had only temporarily subdued its rival which soon after established its school of theology at Durham in Pictou County, later going to Truro, and ultimately to Pine Hill at Halifax.

The battle of the Sects in Pictou had another far reaching consequence. The Presbyterian Church was left without a college of its own, and its pre-theological students had to secure their liberal arts education in a variety of places. Nearly twenty years after the death of Dr. McCulloch the Governors of Dalhousie College offered it to the Presbyterians as a means to guarantee its continuance. Their reply was revealing, founded as it was on the bitter lesson of the past: "We shall not take over Dalhousie College, but we shall support it so long as it remains non-sectarian, according to the wishes of its founder." This promise they faithfully kept. In the future they saw that a college attached to a school of theology may attract friends, but by the same process may create bitter enemies. Whether they were right or not is a verdict for tomorrow.

Prior to his death and while the early attacks of the Kirk and of its other enemies were threatening the existence of the Academy, Rev. James MacGregor said, "I have such faith in the institution that were it killed I know it will rise and live again." And not only did it rise and live vicariously in Pine Hill and in Dalhousie, but a later and more appreciative government made grants which transformed it into the finest seat of secondary learning in Nova Scotia. It became known as the "Cradle of College Presidents," and its graduates at the present time are greatly enriching our way of life in all fields of endeavour. Following the celebration of its one hundredth birthday in 1916 its friends established the Pictou Academy Educational Foundation to foster its ideals and promote its welfare. Perhaps the prophesy of James MacGregor may yet reach complete fulfilment.