

CHAPTER XXI

A Great and Good Institution: The Presbyterian College, Montreal.
The Rev. Dr. MacVicar.

During my mission work in Montreal in the winter of 1870, walking one day on St. Catherine Street with a city pastor, a friend of mine, we happened to pass by Erskine church. That friend, knowing the interest I always took in matters relating to education, asked me:

“Would you not like to see the class of students for the ministry which the Rev. MacVicar and Rev. Gibson are teaching?”

“I never heard that there was such a class of students in Montreal,” I answered.

“Yes, there is one,” said my friend. “Rev. MacVicar is so much impressed with the insufficient number of ministers for the Protestant population of Quebec that he is determined to teach all the young men who have a desire to consecrate themselves to the ministry. As there is no college and no place for such a work in Montreal, he has gathered his pupils in the basement of Erskine church.”

When inside the basement room, I found it small, low, badly ventilated, badly lighted. But, if the material aspect of this newly improvised class-room was as humble and poor as it could be, it was not so with the appearance of the teacher.

Nothing could be more pleasant than to look at his honest face. He was the very personification of health, strength, intelligence, and Christian enthusiasm.

No king on his throne ever looked more happy than the Rev. D. H. MacVicar, in that very first hour that I made his personal acquaintance. His high stature, nearly six feet, his

broad shoulders, fine and perfectly well-formed chest, his splendid forehead, the evident dwelling-place of very high intelligence, all the fine and regular but stern lines of his face, were telling me that I was in the presence of one of those few men whose marble statues will some day adorn the public places of their grateful country.

After saluting me in that gentlemanly manner which is his own, he continued his lesson. It was the explanation of the Binomial Theorem of Newton.

When young, the study of mathematics had not only been a pleasure to me, but it was a real passion, and I felt so pleased and so full of admiration for his ease and lucidity in explaining the most difficult parts of that remarkable problem that the sweet remembrances of my college days were revived within my heart.

After taking leave of the Rev. Mr. MacVicar, I said to my companion, "I am filled with admiration for the high capacity of that young mathematical teacher. Sooner or later the Protestants of Canada will acknowledge his unparalleled capacity. Such a treasure of learning and zeal will not be left in the low and obscure basement of this church."

"The Rev. Mr. MacVicar is surely an able mathematician," answered my companion, "but his enormous ambition will destroy him. Do you not know that his dream is to have a large Presbyterian college in Montreal? We have already enough, if not too many, of these institutions for the small means of our young and struggling churches. The theological colleges of Kingston, Toronto and Halifax are as much as Canadian Presbyterian Churches can support. Even Mr. MacVicar would see this if his unquenchable ambition were not blinding him. He evidently aims at being called 'the founder of the Montreal Presbyterian College.' But he will be disappointed. I am very sorry for that, for I like him; he is one of our best working men, full of zeal and piety, but his ambition is almost boundless, and it will destroy him."

"Allow me to differ with you," I answered. "If there is a

thing that is needed in Montreal, to-day, it is a college where our Christian young men will be prepared to spread the Gospel among the French population of this Province of Quebec, as well as among the English speaking people. A battle must be fought, to-day, in this province, of far more importance than the battle of the Plains of Abraham by the soldiers of the Gospel, if they want to be true to themselves and to the God who gave them the vast regions of the Dominion of Canada. The ambition of the Rev. Mr. MacVicar is a noble one. It is the grand ambition of a true Christian. I hope and pray that the day will soon come, when, in the very heart of this Roman Catholic province, there will be a Presbyterian college, which will be as the lighthouse from which the blazing light will show to the mariners how to save the ship from the rock concealed under the perfidious waves of the stormy sea. I would give up, this very day, the blessed evangelical work in which I am engaged among my Roman Catholic countrymen, if I had not in my heart the hope that, before long, there will be a Protestant college where the more intelligent of the young men, whom we bring to Christ, will be trained to preach the Gospel. Before long I will be in my grave with the few evangelists who are helping me and whom I am helping in this precious part of the Lord's vineyard; and who will take our places if there is no college where new recruits will be trained to continue our evangelical work? Surely Mr. MacVicar is too poor to build that college, but the God who has put into his heart the noble and holy ambition of raising it, is rich enough to do it. The gold and silver of the whole world are His and there are enough noble and rich Christian men to do that blessed work, when the hour appointed by the providence of God will sound from the clock of heaven.

And, blessed be the Lord, that great and glorious work is already done.

Come and see it! and tell me if it does not look like a miracle. Yes! come and see the magnificent Montreal

college—look at its elegant steeple, pointing to heaven, where dwells the God whose will is that “every man should be saved through the preaching of the Gospel!” See the vast and magnificent rooms prepared for the happy young men whom the Good Master is calling to work in His blessed vineyard! See the beautiful and vast chapel whose walls resound with the hymns of praise of those to whom it has been said, “Go and teach all the nations . . . Lo, I will be with you to the end of the world!”

That college, whose foundations were laid in 1872, is situated on a most beautiful spot, on the flank of the mountain whose foot is washed by the waters of the majestic St. Lawrence river, and whose top is crowned with the grandest public park. From the upper part of the college, your vision will embrace some of the most magnificent scenery the world can give you. At your feet is the mighty St. Lawrence river, rolling its deep and rapid waters as far as your eyes can see. Count, if you can, the splendid steamers or other ships arriving from Europe, or starting with their rich cargoes for the different parts of the world. Will not your mind be filled with admiration at the sight of the marvelous Victoria Bridge, two miles long, spanning the giant river from the top of its twenty-four piers, each one hundred feet high?

If, from the top of the upper part of that college, you raise your eyes towards the south, you will see the vast and rich plain, cut in two by the beautiful Richelieu river; and you will have to admire the mountains of Rouville, Bel-oeil, St. Pie, which look like giant sentinels to watch over the grand destinies of Canada. Now let your eyes survey the nearer prospects and you will see, a little to your right hand, the princely palace of the Canadian Pacific R. R. station; listen and you will hear the thundering cars, which, night and day, are in motion to pour the incalculable treasures of Asia and Europe into the bosom of each other. Look again and you will see a part of that marvelous steel chain which binds the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans together, holding them as

prisoners to the feet of our dear Canada. It is that marvelous railroad, 4,000 miles long, which is destined to make only one nation of all the people of the globe. Yes, it is through that marvelous Canadian Pacific R. R. that the divers nations of Asia, Africa, the Islands of the Sea and Europe will now shake hands and embrace each other with the fraternal embrace of peace, common interest and Christian love, on the very spot where you stand.

From those marvels of the work of God, so well blended with the marvels of human intelligence and industry, go and see the library—and there you will not be less filled with admiration at the number of the rare and precious books that it contains, from the magnificent edition of the church fathers to the Codex Siniaticus.

The value of that college library, though so young, is already more than \$100,000, given by the generous citizens of Montreal, and others. The college has already endowed chairs to the amount of \$300,000, given by Joseph McKay, Edward McKay, Robert McKay, Hugh McKay, James McKay, Mrs. Redpath and several unknown Christian benefactors.

The whole value of that splendid college is almost half a million of dollars, the fifth part coming from Mr. David Morrice. And that you may better appreciate the noble character of the English Protestants of Montreal, let me tell you that at the same time they were erecting that monument of their Christian zeal and intelligence, they were giving three millions of dollars for the endowments and princely buildings of McGill University, which are only a few rods from the Presbyterian college.

Now, from the material survey of that Christian and so noble an institution, let us spend a moment with the one who is the soul and the inspiring spirit of the whole—the Rev. Dr. D. H. MacVicar, born in Dunglass, Argyleshire, Scotland. He came to Canada in 1836. He studied in Toronto Academy, Toronto University and Knox College. His first charge, when a minister, in 1859, was Knox Church, Guelph;

his second was the Free Church, Côté Street, Montreal. He became thus, the successor of the eloquent Donald Fraser, who was called to London, England. In 1868, in the humble basement of Erskine Church, he began to gather and to teach the young men who desired to consecrate themselves to the holy ministry.

He was moderator of the session of Côté Street Church when that congregation moved to the west and built the splendid Crescent Street Church, which may be called the first grand monument of his zeal and Christian ambition.

It is to his indomitable energy and zeal, after God, we owe the grand success of the French Canadian Evangelical Society, of which he has been president from its foundation.

His remarkable business capacity and vast literary acquisitions caused him to be chosen as one of the Protestant School Commissioners, which board he has served twenty years, and of which he is chairman. He was sent as a deputy to the Pan-Presbyterian councils held in America and Europe.

He has been considered one of the ablest teachers in all the branches of theology and philosophy, and has lectured in other departments, such as classics, ethics and pedagogics. In McGill University, he lectured on logic a whole session. He has occupied the position of Moderator of the General Presbyterian Assembly, and there has never been an important subject discussed in those assemblies where his eloquent voice has not been heard and listened to with a profound interest.

He received the dignity of D. D. from Knox College, Toronto, and McGill University conferred on him the honorary title of LL. D.

Besides the immense details of his various duties as principal, and professor of systematic theology of the Montreal Presbyterian college, he has written several learned treatises on Arithmetic, as well as a large number of very able articles for "The Quarterly Review" and other public periodicals

For two years he fought like a giant against the infamous theft of the \$400,000 given by the government (Mercier) to the Jesuits.

But I would have to write a volume, instead of a short chapter, had I to say all I know about the zeal and Christian labours of Dr. MacVicar.

However, I will not omit to say that several times his great learning, eloquence and zeal have so much attracted the attention of the rich congregations of New York and other parts of the United States, that large sums of money have been offered him if he would consent to leave his position in Canada to go and work among them. He has always refused these mundane inducements. He preferred to be poor with his own people rather than rich in a strange land.

Dr. MacVicar has understood that there is something more precious and desirable than gold or silver, and he was not mistaken. The 250 ministers of the Gospel who have already come out of his college, with the view of preaching the Gospel, are treasures worth more than all the gold which the mountains of California and Australia have given to the world. The splendid Montreal Presbyterian College is a gem to the crown of Dr. MacVicar more precious than all the pearls and precious stones in the crown of the Queen of England. Through that grand Christian institution, Dr. MacVicar has become one of those shining lights which cannot be put under the bushel, but stand on the candlestick, that men may see it and glorify the Father which is in heaven.