



TO a procession of Dalhousians over forty years long, the sight of that hieroglyph is like the sound of "Archie"—it has the warm familiarity that is bred of affection. Almost exactly thirty-five years ago I studied how to make it, with the absorbing eagerness which a Freshman pours into any escape from "Alexander's Feast" or some other appointed and appropriate task. Such pious effort, I feel, should not be wasted, and in any case the graving of the sacred symbol must not become a forgotten art: I therefore propose to be its Old Mortality. It is done in one continuous stroke which begins on the M far out to the right. You sweep your pen to the left, then up and back to form the long flat upper loop; you finish the letter and quickly switch its tail to the left in that lower horizontal which drops down and is pulled around to make the initial flourish of the A; you stick the sharp point of the A thro' the upper loop and, after a quick down-stroke, you end by tucking the A's tail into its interior. Finally, you affix those two dots, being reverent of punctuation but more reverent of the demands of plastic form. Your stroke must be fair and fetis: it might be done to music *allegretto*. Such is the process.

No person who studied literature under Archibald MacMechan should forget the significance of a moulted feather picked up and cherished. That is my excuse for indulging in the fond frivolity above. I must leave it to others to raise a really worthy monument to his memory, and to perform those things

*prisco quae more parentum
tradita sunt.*

I am going to try to evoke that image of Archie which is very immediate to me here and now, and to present it familiarly to Dalhousians, especially those of my generation: what is written in the attempt can have little interest to anyone else.

The class of 1902, or most of it, first saw Archie on the morning of 16 September, 1898, when he elected to begin the session with an open lecture on "The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling". (Kipling as

negligible. But it would please his sense of fitness and rectitude to review their evidence and, what is more to my purpose, it would amuse him.

First, then, his lectures, taken singly, were not very notable or "brilliant"; and his public readings of poetry—he read aloud in class a great deal—were not impressive. He was a delightful companion, but his talk had little of that edge and flash which made Charlie Macdonald so formidably memorable. When he wrote long ago on George Paxton Young of Toronto, he made fun of his own philosophical capacity; apparently his notes of Young's teaching consisted mainly of the lecturer's "bob-tailed arrows". Of men and practical affairs his judgments were not always secure. His scholarship was far more than adequate, and based on a nobly catholic culture; in nineteenth-century literature it was even profound: but it was not overwhelming—he would have thought it tasteless if it had been so. Even his fine tastes had their limitations: there were aspects of Chaucer and Shakspeare and Swift from which he turned away as if afraid: you will remember, for instance, the difficulty he had in speaking of the first scene in *Lear*. And such diffidence is no longer fashionable even among scholars. You wonder how he ever did that doctoral dissertation on the "Relation between Hans Sachs and the Decameron": I never heard him so much as mention it; and a greater wonder is that he could issue intact from Johns Hopkins of the 1880's. There is the point, too, that he liked some (but not many) of the poorer parts of Tennyson; and I suspect he had little touch with the "moderns". Sometimes you smiled, sometimes you were irritated, being youthfully impatient, at those famous little affectations and sentimentalities and elaboratenesses. And you often felt he would have profited by larger and freer association with all sorts and conditions of men. The young barbarian from Cape Breton and The Island and Colchester County was likely to think there was not enough iron in his bones.

Well, *there* are the hostile witnesses—I think all of them—and they do not merit rebuttal. But the main question is still unattempted.

I think the answer must be that Archie achieved a personality fused and harmonized into a work of art—just as, in fact because, he made a fine art of life. You hear those phrases far too often: no doubt Mr. H. W. Fowler would enter them in his "retired list of *clichés*". But Archie did exactly what I have said. And the result is a figure in your mind that has all the characteristics of a great picture: it is shaped and proportioned and adjusted as Chardin,

say, would design and shape a still-life or a domestic scene. It is all of a piece: *everything in it goes with everything else in it*. In a paper now before me ("Neapolitan Days" from a late issue of this REVIEW), he supplies a phrase that might well be used to describe himself: "A small but choice example of the French school. . . . The subject suggested Watteau". He early recognized his "line" and the limitations which it involved, and he bent everything in his life to conformity with that line. His years were spent, consciously or unconsciously, in selecting his own proper materials and in passing things by that were not to the purpose. From the same paper I quote a bit of amusing and only half-conscious self-revelation: "He (the Neapolitan guide at Pompeii) was evidently accustomed to address himself to the average sensual man, and he never failed in his duty of calling my attention to any carnalities I was in danger of passing by". Not only the carnalities, but many of the severities of Shakspeare and Swift he simply *passed by*: not blindly I think, but humbly, because they were alien to his nature; and the kindlier realisms also of Chaucer and Fielding were put to one side, partly perhaps because he shrank from them, but largely because they did not suit his way. All this may sound as if he were too deliberate, too fastidious in shaping his tastes, and his teaching, and his life in general. There is no doubt he did shape them fastidiously and deliberately, but that he was unwise or excessive in so doing is denied by the perfection of the portrait that remains.

A psychologist—Archie would comply with him in a polite but rather superior manner—would probably have much to say about what he might have been if things had been otherwise. I have no psychology whatever: but it is almost too obvious that many of Archie's enthusiasms were a fine reflection—or is this what they call a "sublimation"?—of what he would have wished to be. His passion for ships, for naval history, for battles, for Kipling, for football—all this points to a thwarted desire for activities which physical infirmity denied to him. I remember watching him examine, in microscopic detail, an old cannon on the grounds of the Parliament Buildings in Victoria. He meticulously explained every mark on the object, how it was loaded, what particular branch of the services it was made for, when and how it was shaped: he even knew how much the damned thing weighed. The spate of information—I would wager it was accurate to the minute and the ounce—poured silently out from my off ear while I held and savoured the wistful eagerness of the voice itself. Long ago he told me about coaching a football team in an Ontario high school, and he smiled

benignly when I was shaken with sudden rude laughter. "Well," he said, "there was no one else to do it. But the team won!" And this is the only time I ever heard him commend himself.

Perhaps he was lucky, after all, to have been lame. However romantic his tastes and desires were, however much they may have been an "escape from real life", at any rate he curbed and reduced them into a personality that stands out with the restraint and quiet salience of classic art. His enthusiasms were high, but never fanatical. His tastes never contradicted one another, they blended. He knew what he liked and precisely why he liked it. His culture was rich but never flamboyant; his temper finely mixed, a little too finely, but never brittle or febrile. And the manners in which these things found expression were all of a piece with the things themselves: cordial, generous, touched with elaborateness, touched ever so slightly with effusiveness even, but never overstepping complete and high decorum. He loved to tell of a Samaritan who lifted and fitted a drunken man into his carriage with extreme care and who, having got the reins into the wobbly hand, was told, "Sir, you are just too damned officious". Archie's kindness never embarrassed even the sober.

Such integrity of growth and result accounts, I suppose, for his astonishing changelessness, even of appearance. Four years ago when I last saw him, he was stouter, greyer than in 1898, but uncannily the same. You might have been listening to the Kipling lecture of thirty years before, or drinking tea with him over the oriental chess-table covered with the Indian tea-cloth. Everybody said "Archie is always the same", and it was literally true. You always knew how he would look and talk and act, and you would have felt aggrieved if he had been different. And, as with those "small but choice examples of the French school", you were always discovering some proportion or adjustment, some nicety of feeling, some fineness of shade, that you had not observed before and that fell into exact place in the whole design. You remember even those little sentimentalisms with a sort of aesthetic pleasure. Who but Archie would talk of Tennyson's habit of "luscious periphrasis"? Who else could go into careful rapture, in Archie's way, over Browning's *Women*? And those "Library Notes", dropping like gentle rain upon desperate editors of *The Dalhousie Gazette*, each of them headed by a "quotation" from the learned works of one Mecanius! Sentimental? Perhaps. Victorian certainly. For Archie was proud of being and remaining a Victorian, and he was equipped with an armoury of definite reasons for his pride. He would modestly say that he was "of that period"; he left it for others to add that he

was "a very fine specimen". Like the Greater Victorians, for instance, he was "ethically sound" (a favourite phrase of his), even though, as he would admit, ethically limited in their fashion. And like them, he knew, he *knew* his Vergil, his Dante, his Goethe: latterly he unashamedly knew his Kipling. Even if the last name seems a bit tarnished now, for our purpose it makes a bright spot of colour in Archie's portrait. Somehow, T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley (who do not like each other anyhow) would not have made harmonious shapes and tints on that canvas. His Lands were not Waste, and his Brave New World remained to the end the world of Ferdinand and Miranda.

The effect of his scholarship and teaching may perhaps be guessed from the portrait I have tried to sketch. As I have said, his knowledge of nineteenth-century literature was very great, and based upon an ample foundation of European culture. The editions of Carlyle remain, after the lapse of many years, the only ones worth much consideration. But I think few people remember particulars of what Archie taught them, though they do remember with startling vividness the teacher's ways and self. What does remain is something vaguer, no doubt, but far more important: a pressure unobtrusive and gentle, but constant, consistent, and in the right direction.

And now, those enthusiasms that he moulded so perfectly into his own shape—how much they have meant for Dalhousie and Nova Scotia! The two names, of course, are as one. For surely no other institution is quite so typical of the Nova-Scotianess of that province as is Dalhousie: on the one hand, of its independence, its fibre, its matter-of-factness, its hatred of sham; and, on the other (publish it not in the streets of Askelon), of its almost too too solid self-satisfaction, its—er—er—tendency to stubborn argumentation, its apparent ability to get along without many of the civilizing arts. The virtues—who has exhibited and fostered them so proudly as this man from Toronto? And certainly nobody I can think of in the whole of Nova Scotian history has done so much to mitigate the—shall we call them the asperities? He loved Dalhousie and Nova Scotia and adopted them: they fitted exactly into his picture, supplying just the right balance and weight to the whole composition.

I remember another scene from the autumn of 1898. The Munro Room—a large hideous place, with "class-pictures", to the right of the third-floor passage, lit with dolorous gas-jets. The evening before the first game with the Wanderers. Dalhousie had done little winning for years. It was what would now be called in

the West a "pep-meeting", but it could not have had that name then, or Archie would never have appeared. He arrives, the correct minute late, and is introduced to a dense crowd. He rises. "Gentlemen", he says, "I do not wish to be rude and inhospitable, but what I have to say to-night only Dalhousians can hear; and I must ask all others to do me a favour and withdraw". An awful silence follows; the Munro Room becomes an antre vast and desert idle. No one moves. Archie repeats his sentence. Another black pit of silence. Then half-a-dozen men get up and go out. One of them has a fiery red head that acquires a bluish aura as he passes under the gas-jet.

The speech that followed was a corker: Archie would deprecate the word, but there simply is no other. He was right—it could have been delivered only to Dalhousians; it was very quiet, very grave, very elegant, almost solemn as I remember it; it made you feel you were a citizen in no mean city and that outside were—well, those things that the angel told St. John were outside. I have never quite recovered from the feeling. Among other things there was some surprisingly acute comment on the game of Rugby and how Dalhousie should play it. No one will ever persuade me that Archie did not turn the trick of victory (it was a near thing) on the next afternoon. It was merely stupid to laugh, years later, when he said he had coached a football team.

The occasion was of course unusual; and perhaps it was frivolously unimportant in itself. But it brought characteristics of Archie into relief: the touch of melodrama that goes with ships and fighting; the sound feeling which was brave enough to ask withdrawal; the genuine and controlled enthusiasm of the speech; the perfection of the manner.

As I read the paper before me and look at the monogram on it that is reproduced at the head of this writing, the Perfect Portrait rises before me again. The love of the sea is here, and of the romantically picturesque; the fine easy humane air; the fastidious epithet, the deliberately chosen "concrete detail"; the domestic touches; the allusiveness; the pleasant little elaborations of phrase; the kindness; the style not powerful but full of grace; the eager youthful interest—they are all here as they were all there thirty-five years ago. "The main currents of the heady fight"—I heard that phrase first in the English lecture theatre in the autumn of 1899, and I remember the voice pausing over another line in the same passage: "Like bubbles on a late-disturbed stream". "Brooding on the face of the still blue water", he writes: and I can see Archie sitting in his pew by a pillar to the right of the right aisle

in Fort Massey Church. "Mrs. Sindbad"—one of the Many Names, the well-remembered names. "Decorated with such a Greek profile as Leighton used to draw": even that egregious academician performs a useful service in this portrait. *Kennst du das Land*: Archie first told me about this song and Beethoven's music for it. And of course the inevitable Tennyson supplies an "acanthus-wreath": "I plucked a leaf and put it in my hat for a memento"—bless him, he would.

The paper must be one of his last: its first part is headed "See Naples. . . ."; the third, "The City of the Dead". I suppose he may have known, and I am sure he would never say so in any other way but this. The last sentences are these: "The friendly cool wind blew thro' the open window. Just outside was a small field of green, heavy-headed wheat swaying constantly, in rhythms of infinite grace, a sight I could not tire of watching. The Dance of the Wheat was as memorable as that sudden view of the high, remote, mysterious, purple hills". The Sower of Wheat, he too is very memorable, and he made memorable the place where he sowed it. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem.

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