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# TWO PRESIDENTS, TWO CULTURES, AND TWO WARS: A PORTRAIT OF DALHOUSIE AS A MICROCOSM OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY CANADA.

For some time I have wondered to what extent a president might impose on his university those educational ideas which he considered to be of first importance; in other words, how much of the direction taken by an institution represents the personal bias of the head, and how much derives from the social forces of the times. Over a period of 35 years we had at Dalhousie two presidents in succession who held markedly different views about what was of first importance for education, and it is of some interest to compare the direction of their aims.

A. Stanley Mackenzie (1911-1931) had been a professor of Physics, and Carleton Stanley (1931-1945) had been a professor of Greek. To Mackenzie the important thing was to establish the research outlook among students; to teach them how to find the latest information, how to conduct experiments, and how to evaluate them; or as Francis Bacon said, to "put nature on the rack and interrogate her". The other culture is represented by the idea of great books and great ideas: the best that has been thought and said by the wisest of men throughout the ages.

Mention must be made of a personal difference between the two men. Mackenzie possessed considerable administrative talent and was able to give permanent effect to his policies. Stanley, by contrast, was an academic theoretician who had little idea of how to bring the substance of a speech or an article into practical application. Consequently, very little that was tangible survived from his efforts, and we must judge the outcome of his choices by theoretical standards. His administrative inadequacy eventually led the Governors to remove him from office.

Our two presidents were the first to hold the office who were not

Presbyterian clergymen. Dalhousie's relations to religion have always been shrouded in ambiguity. The college has presented itself as a secular institution, but Christian. Within the faith it was non-denominational, but Protestant. And finally it was non-sectarian, but Calvinist. Neither of the two presidents attempted to clarify or define the anomaly; they simply let things alone which, in hind-sight, turns out to be the best thing to have done. The trend of the times has been for colleges, most recently Catholic colleges, to shed, as quietly as possible, their historical religious affiliations.

Mackenzie and Stanley were both academic aristocrats, that is to say they favoured good education for good students, rather than mediocre education for the much larger numbers of poor students. Both men were talented and devoted teachers whose influence on their students was lifelong.[2] Both, in their practical belief in equality of opportunity for women, were, by local standards, a long way ahead of their time. It is perhaps not unrelated that neither of them was "collegiate". Dalhousie has always been agreeably free from the schoolboyish "college spirit" which is the bane of so many small colleges. Neither of the two presidents attempted seriously to evoke 1-2-3-u-pi-d-ism, because both were primarily interested in scholarship.

## II

And now to say something further about the career of Mackenzie. He was a Nova Scotian and had been a student at Dalhousie, and had subsequently taken his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University, which was considered by many people of that day to be the best graduate school in North America. Subsequently he taught for some years at Bryn Mawr and returned to Dalhousie as a professor of Physics. He was called to an important chair in the United States and after one year away came back to Dalhousie as President.

When he returned, he had the problem of looking over the quality of education at Dalhousie and estimating what we would call the priorities. The Arts part of Arts and Science was, by the standards of the day, reasonably effective, and so was the Law School. There was one good department of science, his own department of Physics. By far the most shaky educational element was the Medical School. Here is Mackenzie's succinct description of the Medical School fram a paper given to congress on medical education:

> Frequently it has happened that an enthusiastic and able body of medical men have conceive, gestated and accouched an infant school for the training of men for their profession, and have brought the child to the stage at which they can no longer nourish it, and have then laid it on the doorstep of the university of the community.[3]

The years before the first World War were difficult ones for bad medical schools. Over the continent United States examining bodies were forcing hundreds of the old, proprietary, physician-operated medical schools out of business. It seems certain that they would have closed out the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine, except for two things; one was that it was the only such college in this part of the continent, and the other was their confidence in Mackenzie's intention and ability to put it on its feet. Mackenzie, for his part, had two tasks: one was to set up modern medical science departments within the school, notably physiology, biochemistry and pharmacology; the other was to establish relationships with the hospitals and make appointments so that effective control of teaching was provided at the clinical level.

Modern medical schools are expensive, and their expansion usually requires some raiding of other university sources. Mackenzie had to make savings in other faculties, notably Arts and Science. This brought repercussions, predictably from the humanities, but also from his old department of physics where great protests arose that these new life-science enterprises were not really hard science and had no right to be built up at the cost of more important disciplines. Within the medical fraternity there was little obstruction to the sciences, although they were not considered very relevant to real medicine. But when Mackenzie came to upgrade the quality of clinical teaching it was a different matter. Now it was the corns of the old practitioners themselves which were stepped on as the first of the new boys was marched into the guild. He was H.B. Atlee, and the protests and resignations were so ominous that the President decided to send him to spend the first year of his appointment on leave in London while Mackenzie himself dealt with the threats at home.

One other decision by Mackenzie may be cited to indicate his point of view. Toward the end of the twenties a sum of money, large for those days, came in for disposal by the President, who used it to establish the first subscriptions to scientific periodicals. This was the beginning of the university's modern science library, and, predictably, it

aroused considerable wonderment, to put it mildly, from professors in the humanities.

It might have been expected that Mackenzie at the end of a career, most of which was spent at Dalhousie, and which culminated in two decades as president, would have made some general assessment of his stewardship. But his *Annual Reports* had emphasized facts, statistics and public relations, and even in his final year he offered no summing up. From the 1930-31 *Report* we learn that:

> 1.4 per cent of the students came from Hants County compared with 2.5 per cent twenty years ago; the California Fruit Growers Exchange sent a reprint to the Dental Library; on the occasion of a dinner [tendered to a benefactor by the Governors] Dugald Mac Gillivray presented the university with a menu card autographed by every person present.

Mackenzie was, in my view, one of the greatest presidents Dalhousie has had. His contribution has been underestimated, perhaps because, as a scientist, he was not in the habit of echoing in public speeches the great thoughts of literary men and philosophers of the past. More important perhaps is that he was one war ahead of his times. As a leading member of the small group which established the National Research Council he was responsible for inaugurating the pattern of science which has molded Canada ever since. What he did for Dalhousie after the First World War had become, by the end of the Second World War, the recognized and fashionable direction for a university to take.

III

Carleton Stanley, who succeeded Mackenzie, was educated at Toronto and at Oxford, where he took first class honours in "Greats". He taught briefly at Toronto, spent a few years in business, and was, at the time of his appointment, Professor of Greek at McGill and assistant to the Principal.

In contrast to the verbal reserve of Mackenzie, Stanley offered in his *Annual Reports*, a variety of personal opinions and the text of many of his convocation and other speeches. As he said:

> It has been my custom to look beyond day-to-day happenings and to attempt to see our activity in its relation to life; to the social scheme of things; to the first principles of human thought and conduct; to world politics which condition any university's effort.

We have noted that Mackenzie's idea of strengthening the library was through subscriptions to technical scientific periodicals for research

specialists and their students. Carleton Stanley preferred rather to buy books in the humanities which were expected to promote general literacy. Soon after his arrival he founded the Dalhousie Book Club which was to make purchases in those areas that fell between the requirements of departments. I was made secretary, an unfortunate choice of an innocent. I undertook to invite suggestions from faculty members and also to examine the most economical source of newish books—those recalled from the *London Times* lending library. Approval of the young secretary's procedures waned rather quickly and vanished when a recommendation was transmitted, which had come in from a science professor, to purchase a book on how to buy a used car. Following my demise the President personally selected all books. We learned gradually that his aim was to impress a general cultural framework on the faculty, and that to do so was taken to be an appropriate function for a president. This he did, not with the dogmatic aim of, say, the head of a church college, but from a genuine belief in the superiority of his own classical background. As head of the university he carried in fact the responsibility of a philosopher–king.

Stanley was very much interested in the life sciences. He felt that biology had been treated as a disreputable science, having been the first to disappear during the decline of the ancient learning and the last to emerge after the Renaissance. This, he thought, was because the life sciences impinged on religious and moral questions, as well as mental activities and bodily functions, which were kept out of sight during periods of prudery. Wishing to eliminate prejudice and raise the life sciences to their rightful place, he proposed to establish an honours course in Greek and Biology. The students were to do all the classics of science in their original tongue and in the rest of their time to come up gradually into modern biology. The proposal was successfully resisted, but it gives one the shivers to think about it even now.

Stanley's point of view about what students, including science students, should read, was developed in one of his convocation addresses quoted in an *Annual Report,* where he offered his reading list:

> I call university graduates illiterate who have not read at least some of the books which give a man some inkling of the fabric of European civilization. On the side of history, politics, law, for example, a man is illiterate who has not read Thucydides' *History,* Aristotle's *Politics,* Hugo de Groot's *Law of*

*Nations,* Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe,* Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire,* and at least some of the work of Maitland or Vinogradoff on jurisprudence. In the same way a university man is illiterate in mathematics who does not know Euclid's *Elements,* the extant writings of Archimedes, the work of Napier on *Logarithms,* that of Newton on *Fluxions,* and so forth.

For me this whole sequence about books posed a great dilemma. Why can we moderns not act like the Greeks to bridge the gap between the classics and the sciences? As Stanley's book list indicates, the operational difference between the two cultures is that in the arts old books are considered to be the most valuable, while in science one is supposed to hunt out the latest thing. Stanley did not recognize this difference, and he wanted to build a science education around the history of science.

One wonders how many of the faculty of that day, or of our own day, could win a pass on the President's test. But the question remains: are we to believe that the Greeks could have passed, and if so how? We are justified in assuming that the best students today are as intelligent as those of past times; that differences in supposed performance are not merely mechanical (e.g. the problem of learning Greek as a preliminary); that the Greeks who approached the genius level in perceptive capacity were as rare as their counterparts today; and that the existence of "the classics" as we know them, was not yet recognized.

I suggest that in the fifth century B.C. what we call today the classics were the manuscripts being written by the scholars in the Academy. I suggest further that the scientists of today are therefore in the same position as the Ionian Greeks: they are writing the classics of science. Should we ever come, as we may soon do, into an age when science ceases to be productive, then the new scholastics may well be producing masses of reports about experiments without originality. In that day our science, the science of the present, the discoveries which we are making now, will come to be looked upon as the last word, "the fabric of western civilization".

## IV

And now I should like to mention briefly the transition of Canada from dependence on British influence to dependence on American influence, and then to relate the national sequence to educational

events within Dalhousie.

At the time of the first World War, Canada was essentially a colony of England. The Dalhousie assumptions are evident in some lines taken from a poem by Professor MacMechan on the opening of the Memorial Tower on the North West Arm, which commemorated an anniversary of the attainment of responsible government in Nova Scotia:

> These stones were laid in loyalty; these walls
> Were reared in bond of world-wide empery;
> 'Twas England's gift, deliberate, unconstrained:
> And England's daughter all the world to tell
> How dear she prizes such a gift divine.
> Has made this tower an everlasting sign.[4]

(As for the relationship with the French element, although few had ever heard the doctrine developed, our outlook was in accord with longstanding British policy. It was assumed that the French language would gradually disappear and that the Quebecers would gradually abandon their semi-neutral position and become actively loyal to the Crown.)

When war broke out and the students joined up to fight for their king and country, the Arts and Science faculty was cut in half, and the professional faculties suffered almost equally severe losses. The enrollments during these critical years are not without interest.

| YEAR | TOTAL STUDENTS | ARTS AND SCIENCE STUDENTS |
|---|---|---|
| 1914-15 | 308 | 163 |
| 1915-16 | 245 | 140 |
| 1916-17 | 179 | 81 |

As a special contribution on the medical side the university recruited for overseas service a stationary hospital. Mackenzie, together with the presidents of Acadia and Mount Allison and one or two others, divided the province and visited all the towns making speeches to raise money for this enterprise. All the events of this period seem, by the standards of today, to carry an unexpectedly large component of British enthusiasm.

For those of my generation the greatest public events have been the two world wars with their vast and unpredicted outcomes. Within

Canada there was an assumption of nationhood beginning with the First World War. As our national beliefs of that time were tragically and radically overtaken by history, the ties with Britain began to loosen, at first unconsciously, later by political design. Our two national parties realized (one overtly, the other covertly) that the road to power carried the condition of withdrawal from the Empire to a component of the American Empire was also largely without conscious design. More recently there has been a development of some concern about our condition of servitude, and the initiation of some efforts (not very effectual) to combat it.

Here is how Professor Geroge Grant described our present political position:

> Our very form of life depends on our place as second class members of the western industrial empire which is centered in the USA. By 'second class', I do not imply a low status, because it is much nicer to be a Canadian than a Brazilian or a Venezuelan, or for that matter an Englishman.[5]

## V

It may be useful here to review the developing attitudes toward the two cultures before going on to frame the American influence in our university setting. To begin with, here is Mackenzie writing on the value of research as an educational instrument:

> If every college fostered research and every student were thus brought into contact with the living and growing organism of science, the idea of research would be ever in his mind as an agent of final reference in all operations and difficulties. We do not ask for science in place of the liberal arts, but science along with the other factors of the basis of knowledge which goes to the acquiring of the true art of living.[6]

"...agent of final reference in all operations and difficulties." This view of Mackenzie, which I quote from a paper given in 1918, represents perhaps the zenith of our faith in the beneficence of science. By the second World War doubts were beginning to appear, beginning with the moral scruples about the use of the atom bomb, then the fears of the outcome of nuclear fallout, and of the side effects of atomic power stations. We have today grave doubts about our survival in a seriously polluted world, and about the destruction of the environment generally, not to mention aesthetic values. If we add the increasing public perception that a great deal of research is trivial and repetitive,

the charge against science becomes serious indeed. Here once more is Professor George Grant, this time speaking for the value of having our students contemplate great ideas:

> Tnere is nothing phonier in our universities than the exaltation of scholarship as an end in itself. Scholarship has always been a means through which men could come into the presence of the most serious questions. But when the thought that there are such questions becomes dim, research becomes little more than an excuse for avoiding the ardours of teaching.[7]

Grant seems to envisage the best-that-has-been-thought-and-said culture as the moral conscience and judge of science. From the great ideas of the past we can set up standards from which we may accept or reject the technological enterprises of our time.

Turning to Stanley, during the late '30s he was speaking strongly about the threat of Hitler and of Fascism, and how its inroads had destroyed the traditional freedom of European universities. He thought that North American universitites were the last best hope for the retention of the ancient values of civilization. From this it could be derived that the universities, as the citadels of culture, might remain pacifist even while others fought.

When war broke out in 1939, Stanley called the student body together and told them, in effect, that they were the civilization everybody else was fighting to maintain. The most important thing for them was to go on with their studies. He had courage to speak out as he did at a time when the whole propaganda machinery of the state was turned on to work young people up into a desire to enlist. It is noteworthy that he was not arrested or even denounced as would have happened in the earlier war. But by this time many people felt as he did, and Canada was sub-consciously shedding the "daughter-am-I-in-mother's-house" outlook. But eventually the social pressure did bear down on Stanley, and he began to affirm the importance of the classics to the war effort, for instance in de-coding expertise.

The differing attitudes of our two presidents towards the Empire and towards war can scarcely be traced to their respective cultures. Mackenzie was a product of his times, with the appropriate point of view. Stanley, with his negative view, was ahead of his own time, perhaps closer to our time. In a future war the university would best gain popularity outside with a positive leader who fell in with official

attitudes. Which would be better in the long run for the survival of academic ideals is a matter of opinion. My own opinion, and I believe that of most students, would favour the negative.

We have noted the increasing influence of the United States on Canadian affairs generally; it remains to consider the special effect on the academic program of the university. This takes two forms, one of which is the origin and continued growth of the lesser professions, lesser, that is, than law and medicine. These include such imports as library studies, business administration, social work, and the like. The other is the great rise of the social sciences, notably sociology, and some aspects of economics and political science.

To the American influence must be added the world trend toward planning, which does not seem to have a particular national origin, being associated with fascist countries and communist states, as well as with those which have governments like our own. Planning leads to a tendency for the university to be managed by the state with a view to the solution of problems of national or provincial concern. At the national level one thinks in the first line of the maintenance of the unity of the country; this has changed with time from railways through highways to radio, television, and most recently satellites. Another of the great problems deals with the maintenance of the environment against the inroads of technology. The tendency of people to live under increasingly crowded conditions offers a third example which includes problems of public health, psychiatry, noise, urban transportation and the esthetic problem of deprivation from any green landscape.

These problems have in common that they are multiciplinary and not susceptible to attack at the departmental level. Thus their intrusion invites increasing stress between the institutes created for their solution and the traditional departmental system of the university. Hitherto the scholars themselves have initiated the projects on which they wanted to do research and have made application to federal committees of peers. Now the initiatives are passing to the planners within federal agencies.

Increasingly the decision as to what the universities will be assisted to do, or even permitted to do, is moving from federal to provincial agencies. This trend has already gone some distance in Quebec and Ontario and is beginning to be seen in Nova Scotia. Thus the provincial politicians enter the scene in their new role of philosopher-kings who

are guiding the academic community. Who will be their advisors? Obviously, I think, the new social scientists whose importance is steadily increasing in the universities. They are not yet equipped to fill such a role, but over the next generation they will acquire increasing stength and confidence.

For the managerial point of view I will quote from some remarks by Omond Solandt, Chancellor of the University of Toronto and a former President of the Science Council of Canada:

> We must evolve some system of guiding people to where opportunities will be available. A student will have to be closer to the top of his class to receive support for a field that is oversupplied than if he is going into a field where there is a shortage.

In another place Solandt amplified his view:

> Probably the governments will have to come back to the universities and say: The people you are training are not quite the people we want. We regard the beginning surplus of Ph.D's with satisfaction. That is what we have invested our money for. Now that we have got the plan going, let us evolve some system of subject restraint.[8]

What kind of university people must we imagine will best respond to Solandt's brave new academic world? Surely it will be those managerial types who know best how to deal with the philosopher-kings downtown and who know how to write projects which will meet the requirements of plausibility. We may look in future for the elevation of the managerial class, and perhaps for some little discomfort and lack of favour for those imaginative scholars who are not sufficiently adaptable. But great as are the rewards for those who can adapt to the new managerial role, there will be some subtle disadvantages too. John Kenneth Galbraith has commented on his experiences with Government:

> The temptation to surrender to organization is indeed very great. While a military organization compels it, civilian agencies have more persuasive means. Accept the approved belief and you are, as they say, effective. Being effective means you are called in for conferences, consulted with deference, even respect, on actions to be taken. If, however, you insist on the uncomplicated truth, you are not effective but a problem to be handled. You do not participate; you are told afterward.[9]

In conclusion, let us revert once more to the problem raised in the opening paragraph. Given that the university expects its president to exercise power, what direction should power take in the academic future of our planned world? We seek, I suppose, economic survival and academic survival. Which of the two presidents would best serve the university in the projected future? On the economic side there is no doubt: Mackenzie with his practical ability would succeed, Stanley would fail.

But if the decision about economic survival is clear what about the defence of the academic citadel, a much more subtle matter? Is a scientist more likely to be biased against great books than a classicist against research? I think not. Mackenzie, in his time, took over a university whose weakest part happened to be the life-science profession of medicine, and he used his talents to strengthen this field. In other times the first demand for the exercise of presidential power might have been in a quite different direction.

The deepening problem of the future is likely to be the development of a dialogue between the academic community and the planners. The negotiating position between government and university is not unlike that between capital and labour, with nearly all the initiatives so far coming from government, while the university attitude has been largely negative, a slow yielding to unwelcomed change.

In my view the first necessity of the future will be to assemble the talents of our local philosopher-kings, with a view to defining the academic as well as the economic position to be taken at the bargaining table in the unending negotiations with the planners downtown.

The boundaries of the academic position are instinctively recognized by scholars of whichever culture, and one cannot assert that either of the persuasions is to be preferred over the other in a leader. The difference between a background of physics and Greek is immaterial in a future where the imprint of society's needs is to be accentuated by sound administration and adapted to a format acceptable to those who will have to operate the brave new world of learning.

**Footnotes**

1. The final lecture in a series to commemorate the official opening of the Life Sciences Centre, Dalhousie University, delivered May 2, 1974.

2. Stanley's influence as a teacher was recently praised at the installation of one of his pupils, M.O. Morgan, as President of Memorial University, See: Gillingham, A. *Convocation Address,* Memorial Univ., April, 1974. Gillingham himself was another of Stanley's pupils.
3. Mackenzie, A. Stanley. 1926. *Problems in Medical education.* Proc. Congress Med. Educ., Licensure, Public Health and Hospitals, Chicago. Amer. Med. Assn.
4. MacMechan, Archibald. *Late Harvest,* Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1934. The lines are from *The Memorial Tower,* on p. 36.
5. Cited from Hayes, F.R., *The Chaining of Prometheus: Evolution of a Power Structure for Canadian Science.* Univ. Toronto Press, 1973. See p. 100.
6. Mackenzie, A.S. *The war and science.* Presidential Address. Trans. Roy. Soc. Canada, Sect. III, Series III, vol. 12. 1-6. 1918.
7. Cited from Hayes, F.R. *The Chaining of Prometheus,* p. 158.
8. *Ibid,* pp. 158 and 162.
9. Galbraith, J.K. *Economics, Peace and Laughter.* Signet paperback, 1972. See p. 248.