

GEORGE MUNRO "THE PUBLISHER"

By A. J. CROCKETT

XII

Munro's Benefactions to Dalhousie.

AS has been already said, when Munro went into business for himself he spent the first ten years in launching and building up his family paper "The Fireside Companion." The starting of such a paper was no small venture, requiring courage, energy and the expenditure of money. Giving it his personal attention, these years were years of unremitting toil. Munro was physically robust but the drain on his energies brought on a severe illness in 1876 which threatened to be fatal. He recovered but found it wise to husband his strength and watch carefully his physical condition. What he needed was a prolonged period of rest and quiet. However, he took no vacation until three years later, and in that year, 1879, spent a long holiday in Halifax.

Here he had many old friends and here lived his brother-in-law, the Rev. John Forrest, the minister of St. John's church. The two had long talks together discussing matters of church and state, education, higher education and education for the ministry. Inevitably they discussed Dalhousie of which Forrest had an intimate knowledge and a deep interest.

In 1863, when Dalhousie was reorganised, its Act provided for representation on the Board of Governors of any body of Christians that would endow a chair in the university, and the right of these bodies of any individual or group of individuals to nominate the professors for such chairs as they should endow. The United Presbyterian Church closed its college at Truro and undertook to pay the salaries of two chairs at Dalhousie while the Church of Scotland undertook to support one. These two bodies united in 1875 and the new body, the Presbyterian synod of the Maritime provinces, had nominated Forrest as its representative on the Dalhousie Board. As a member of the Board of Governors, Forrest could speak with an intimate knowledge of Dalhousie and its difficulties.

Dalhousie had passed through many vicissitudes and in 1879 the situation was far from cheering. Its invested funds brought in only \$3,000 a year. Rentals brought it another \$600 but income from this source could easily disappear. The provincial grant of \$3,000 had no permanence. In 1875, when this grant was given, the Act embodying it limited it to a period of five

years and this period would soon expire. There was no certainty that it would be continued. The institution was financially embarrassed and unable to pay anything but meagre salaries. Arrears were "constant, unfailing and abundant," the future dark with uncertainty.

In Munro, Forrest had a keenly interested and sympathetic listener. At the end of one of these conversations between the two when Forrest had spoken long and earnestly on the needs of the college and, in particular, of the need of a new chair of Physics, Munro, who seemed absorbed in thought, looked up and quietly remarked, "If you will find the man for the chair of Physics, I will find the money." The man was found and the chair filled. This was the beginning of a new era for Dalhousie. The crisis was over and hope took the place of fear.

Munro not only endowed the chair but endowed it generously. In 1879 Dr. James Gordon MacGregor, a graduate of Dalhousie, was installed as professor of Mathematical and Experimental Physics and at a salary of \$2,000. Later he was to succeed Professor Tait in Edinburgh University. In the following year, 1880, the chair of History and Political Economy was endowed by Munro who nominated Forrest for the post at a salary of \$2500. He was later to become Dalhousie's president. Two years later, in 1882, Munro endowed the chair of English Literature and Rhetoric in which Dr. Jacob Gould Schurman was installed at a salary of \$2,000. He was later to become president of Cornell University. Such salaries as these at that time were unheard of in Maritime institutions. In 1883 Munro endowed the chair of Constitutional and International Law and nominated Dr. Richard Chapman Weldon for the post. In time Dean Weldon's name was honored from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In 1884 Munro endowed the chair of Metaphysics, to which he transferred Dr. Schurman and nominated Dr. W. J. Alexander for the chair of English Literature.

Munro's benefactions flowed in a steady stream. Besides endowing tutorships in classics and mathematics, from 1880 on, he provided exhibitions and bursaries to stimulate the high schools and academies in the Maritimes. Altogether he gave to Dalhousie benefactions amounting to \$350,000, gifts without parallel in British North America. Dalhousie's future was assured. Munro had saved her. "What a blessing," said Principal Grant of Queens, "that he came along when he did! He has saved Dalhousie, and he deserves every honour." The time was auspicious for the Government was about to withdraw its annual grant to all the colleges and "though Dalhousie might

have continued to exist as a college without additional revenue, as a university it could not have existed without Munro."

The interest of Munro in education in his givings is noteworthy from two standpoints, first in the calibre of the men selected for the chairs he endowed, men of such calibre that in their own fields they could hold their own with any as shown by their later records; and second, that the whole of the sums given were devoted either to teaching or to assist worthy students. The system of competitive bursaries and scholarships, which he inaugurated, stimulated students throughout the Maritimes. It brought students to the Pictou and Halifax academies and indirectly affected every high school and academy. Indirectly it affected other institutions. This may be seen by observing the lists of Acadia graduates and the substantial increase in their numbers not long after Munro's gifts to Dalhousie.

Munro's example had other repercussions. (In 1882, for example, Alexander McLeod of Halifax bequeathed \$65,000 to Dalhousie. His gifts caught the imagination and, to quote Principal Grant of Queen's when he heard of them, "were such as to take his breath away:" and as Dr. Robert Murray at the Dalhousie convocation in 1896 remarked, "The munificent gifts of George Munro to Dalhousie helped to arouse the wealthy men of Montreal to the duty of relieving McGill in the distressed condition into which that institution had fallen some years ago".

Munro's interest was real and personal and went farther. He not only kept in touch with the university, following its proceedings and the fortunes of its alumni, but it is a remarkable fact that he was so interested in the students that he kept himself informed as to the attainments of all the undergraduates and not merely of the "Munro" students. Throughout it all Munro was quietly self-effacing. He sought no honors and refused a seat on the Board of Governors.

As I close this inadequate account of Munro's gifts to the cause of higher education in Nova Scotia I go back in thought to the Dalhousie convocation of April 29, 1896. This was usually held in the Academy of Music. By tradition this was the students' day and was often boisterous and noisy and exuberant, with pranks and laughter. This convocation was different. Munro was dead and the function was quiet, dignified and fitting and held in the Law Library.

Professor "Charlie" MacDonald presided in the absence of Professor Forrest and after opening with a prayer in Latin said:—

"To many here he was perhaps little more than a name, a name distinguished only by a college holiday.

But to others of us, who were personally acquainted with Mr. Munro, the humble-minded Christian man who combined plain living with high thinking, the loss amounts to a personal bereavement. His generous and effective zeal to advance the cause of education has other records besides those of this university and this province; and his name and his deeds will live among Nova Scotians long after our places shall have been effaced and our names forgotten."

XIII

Munro's Death: His Friends.

In 1896 Munro died at the age of seventy-one, in full possession of all his faculties, happy in his private and public life and after a long and successful career. He had left the city early in April for his summer home in the Catskills to prepare the house for the coming season. He had retired in 1891 and was in his usual good health and free from the cares of the business he had established. On the morning of his death he left his home after breakfast and started for the place where he had some men at work. He had walked only a short distance when he fell dead on the road between his own house and that of his next-door neighbor, the Rev. Dr. Howard Crosby, who predeceased him a short time before.

They had been long friends and neighbors and had much in common. Dr. Crosby was professor of Greek in the University of the City of New York. He had many interests, was the author of a number of religious works, and was a member of the American Committee for the revised version of the Bible. This explains how it came about that Munro was the first man to obtain a copy of the advance sheets of the new revision and so enabled to publish the complete revision of the New Testament as No. 1,000 in the Seaside Library on the same day that the revised edition was to appear.

Munro was buried in Greenwood cemetery in the city of New York and his funeral service was conducted by the Rev. Dr. John Hall, his pastor and friend, assisted by the Rev. Dr. McCracken, Chancellor of the University of the City of New York. Only the family and intimate friends were present and Dr. Hall took as his text, "And I heard a voice from heaven and it said unto me 'Write'." When the message came to John in the isle of Patmos, printing was unknown until centuries later and books were written. In our day the appropriate word

"print" would perhaps more aptly convey the idea, and Munro's life was spent with books, not writing but printing them. He was not destined to preach but he had a worthy mission fulfilled in the work of his printing presses.

Dr. Hall was a close friend. Another was the Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, whose name was a household word at that time all over the continent. When Munro first went to New York he united with the church of which Dr. Cuyler was pastor. Speaking publicly after Munro's death, Dr. Cuyler referred to "my dear old friend, Mr. George Munro, the publisher." Munro was rich in friends who were numbered with the great, the wise and the good. The men and women who worked for him were among the truest. As an employer he called out their loyalty and fidelity to a wonderful degree. They were fellow workers, friends.

For years Munro was first at the office and every department got his attention and received its impulse from his personal exertions. He did not demand or expect unreasonable hours from those he employed. He worked harder and longer than they and never required work of anyone he himself was unwilling to share. It became a saying that the Munros never change their employees, that "they seemed to have absorbed something of the kindly spirit and quiet energy of the founder of the house and their refined courtesy is a reflex of the manner of the true gentleman and Christian, George Munro."

Such a man will ever have the best of friends.

XIV

Conclusion.

In what has been written something has been said about the world Munro worked in, about the men who were his associates, and about the quality of the work he did, about the books he published and their character and purpose. Little or nothing has been said about his home and family life, rather it is with Munro, the publisher, with which we have been concerned. "By their works ye shall know them" and by means of his work, by this brief narrative, the reader may gain some clear idea of what manner of man Munro was. It is by what men do that we learn to know them and Munro becomes manifest in his work. He has been blamed for much he never did and has taken the blame for much to which he was definitely opposed and remained silent.

True he worked for Beadle and Adams when they were publishing their cheap wild Western stories but this is to be said,

that during its first decade of publishing in New York it was a thoroughly respectable connection and the publications were approved by some of the greatest and best people of the time. Nor has this appraisal changed. In 1950 the London Literary Times, a critical journal of the highest type, dealing with the "cheap multiple publishing" of Beadle and Adams, described their books as "cheap, rapid, sensible, thoroughly respectable, thoroughly third class fiction."

Many have identified Munro with the "Old Cap Collier" series published by the Munro Publishing House, Vandervater street, New York. It was a pardonable error. The real publisher was Norman L. Munro, who followed his brother to New York, worked for a time in his plant and in 1883 started a series of his own, the "Old Cap Collier." He found a printer to print his series and opened an office on Vandervater street opposite his brother. The copyright was in his name but the print stating this was too fine for the ordinary reader who did not bother or care to read the fine type. Norman's publications met with a good deal of criticism, the editor of Beadle & Adams was specially annoyed and concerned and could not understand "how anyone could read the terrible stuff" which was "trashy to the limit." The deterioration of the Beadle series had already set in before Norman's day.

From all the facts it seems clear that the Beadle & Adams firm was on the verge of losing its better qualities and might soon be content with lower standards and that this determined the time of Munro's leaving, along with Irwin Beadle to form their own partnership and publish books of a higher standard.

As for the rest little need be said. The monies given by Munro for higher education came from his earnings from "The Fireside Companion" or from his transactions in real estate. His business abilities were signal, as Dr. Robert Murray, the editor of The Presbyterian Witness, put it at the Dalhousie convocation, "Business was his play and his passion and he brought to bear upon it such sagacity, such keenness of vision, such skill in devising his plans and such promptitude in their execution as would in other fields have won battles or founded states."

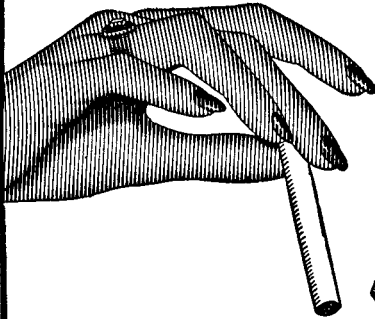
But Munro coupled with this a fine character and the highest ideals. One of the New York papers, on the day of his funeral, wrote that no one, judging only from his quiet, unobtrusive bearing, his modesty and self-abnegation, could possibly infer his true character, and added: —

"I have often met Mr. Munro on his way to and from work, and never left him without having been impressed by evidences of his integrity, sterling worth and all-around personal excellence. He made a great deal of money and spent it freely in worthy channels. . . He was a very good man."

What more can any one add, except this, that the modern apartment house which he built in New York, the first in the city, he named "Dalhousie" and the summer home in the Catskill mountains, which he loved so well, was called "Pine Hill."

(This is the last of a series of four articles on George Munro. — Ed.)

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