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Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE GREAT DEBATE.

No. I.

AN ABSTRACT WITH EXTRACTS.

I call it "The Great Debate," partly on account of its length, but chiefly because of the principles involved and the interest excited on the occasion. It will be found that this was no temporary excitement. The question is not yet settled. The agitation is only begun. It will be resumed with augmented vigour and persevered in till a prosperous issue is secured. Those who have engaged in this contest are not of the fickle or fearful class. Fully convinced of the justness of their claims they mean to continue to press them on the attention of the Legislature, and to evoke the expression of public opinion by the employment of such measures as may tend to arouse discontent and indignation, and eventually to destroy the sectarian monopoly. Let that be clearly understood. Our motto is "No surrender."

Forty-nine petitions were presented to the Legislature during the session. They were sent from the following places:—

Bridgetown and Annapolis. Port Williams and Chutes Cove. Sackville, Halifax Co. Little River and Leicester. Mahone Bay. Kentville and New Mines. Lower Horton. Hantsport. Truro. (two). Barrington. Great Village. Digby Township. Gasperaux. Onslow Township. Antigonish. Brookfield and Forest Glen. Beaver River. St. Mary's, Guysboro Co. Brookfield, Caledonia, Kempt. Ragged Islands. Sable River, Shelburne Co. Guysborough. Hants County. Lower Aylesford. Albion Mines. Lake George, Deerfield. Bridgewater. Wolfville. West Cornwallis. Digby Neck. Liverpool. Milton, Queens County. Canning, Cornwallis. East Cornwallis. Morris Town. Nictaux and South Wilmot. Middleton and Wilmot. Weymouth. Lower Granville. New Albany, Springfield and Dalhousie. Windsor. Lunenburg and La Have. Westport. Aylesford. Mire and Cow Bay C. B. New Germany. Kempt and Black Rock.

There was also a petition from the Governors of Acadia College. The prayer of the petitions was thus expressed:—

"Your Petitioners, therefore, pray your Honorable House to take these premises into consideration, and to amend the said Act, so that it may not operate to the disadvantage of any religious body or public Institution in this Province.

"And your Petitioners further request that your Honorable House will demand payment of the debt due by the Governors of Dalhousie College, and appropriate the funds thence arising, or the interest of the same, in furtherance of Education, in connection with the Collegiate Institutions existing in the Province."

On the 23rd of March the subject was brought before the House by Mr. LONGLEY. That gentleman's speech was every way worthy of the occasion. He gave a succinct and clear account of Dalhousie College, tracing its history from the beginning, and dwelling at considerable length, as was needful, on the negotiations which issued in placing the College in the hands of the Presbyterians. He showed the injustice and unfairness of that arrangement, and concluded by moving that:

1. The Act passed at the last session of this Legislature, entitled, "An Act for the regulation and support of Dalhousie College," be repealed, and the College with its endowments and funds be otherwise appropriated.

2. That there be required from the Governors of Dalhousie College the payment of the £5,000 loaned from the Provincial Chest, agreeably with the condition upon which said loan was made."

The PROVINCIAL SECRETARY followed. His speech was lengthy, elaborate, carefully prepared, and somewhat defiant. He professed at the outset to be embarrassed by the consideration that he was about to take a position which would place him in antagonism to many of his friends and political supporters; but the embarrassment speedily vanished and the

honourable gentleman found himself quite at home on Presbyterian ground. His object was to show that the whole affair was conducted in an open, public manner, with no wish for secrecy or concealment; that the design of the Presbyterians was to invite other denominations to share with them; that Professors had been brought from other countries and that it would be a breach of faith to repeal the Act. He concluded in the following manner:—

"Sir, the hon. member for Annapolis has intimated that this agitation against Dalhousie College will be continued until its walls are razed to their foundations, and that those who endeavour to sustain it will be buried beneath their ruins. Let me tell him, sir, that, attached as I am to the great party with which I am connected—possessing, as I may confess I do, some fondness for public life, I would infinitely prefer the fate which he threatens to the highest post my country can offer, if it must be purchased by an act so unpatriotic, so unjust, as the resolution which he has moved would involve."

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL said that "he found himself placed in the most painful position in which a man could be situated—that of being compelled to give a vote contrary to all his inclinations and all his feelings, and all his interests. It would be to him one of the most heart-felt gratifications imaginable if he could be for a moment emancipated and enabled to take the side of his hon. friend and colleague, (Mr. Longley,) and deal with the question as he thought it ought to be dealt with. He was, however, compelled by the action of the House at its last session to oppose the motion of his hon. friend, because he did not see how it could be carried without involving consequences of a most serious nature."

He regretted extremely that this controversy had "unhappily grown up." In former years he had fought the battle of denominational Colleges, and he was "proud to look at the results" of that conflict. If he had supposed that the Act of last session would be regarded with such dissatisfaction he would have resisted it, or endeavoured to make it innocuous by amendments; but it was hurried through the House very quickly and did not receive the consideration that was due to it. "It was introduced, little or nothing was said about it, and it finally passed as one of the most insignificant measures. It passed in fact without his knowledge, for he had intended making some amendments, but when he enquired for it, he found that it had actually gone through. He was very sorry that so much feeling had been excited but "now, the thing was done—in fact consummated, and any other course than that he felt obliged to take would be inconsistent with the very fundamental principles of legislation as well as justice."

Mr. ARCHIBALD made a few remarks, but nobody could hear him.

Mr. TOBIN said "ditto" to the Provincial Secretary and the Attorney General about the "breach of faith" which would be committed if the Act were repealed.

Mr. BILL that the Council of Public Instruction should take up the case.

The debate was then adjourned. It was resumed on the 29th of March.

Dr. HAMILTON observed that Dalhousie College belonged to the Province, and that therefore the House possessed full authority to legislate upon it. Denominational Colleges were preferred in this country, and had proved highly successful. The petitions that had been presented showed that the people were desirous of preserving their own Institutions, and that they complained of the position given to Dalhousie College, as inconsistent with impartiality. Those petitioners, he maintained, ought to be treated with respect. If they were not, he feared that serious consequences would ensue. He concluded by moving in amendment to the motion of the Hon. Provincial Secretary, "that Dalhousie College with one-fifth of its revenues be given to the Presbyterian bodies and the remaining four-fifths of the funds held by the Governors be equally divided between the Episcopalians, the Baptists, the Wesleyans, and the Roman Catholics."

(The Provincial Secretary had moved in amendment to Mr. Longley's resolutions, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the whole on the state of education in the Province.)

Hon. Mr. SHANNON said that he was an Alumnus of King's College and a governor

of Dalhousie; that though "his affections might linger around the halls" of the former, "he was never an advocate of denominational Colleges." He thought that "gross misrepresentation" had been practised in getting up the petitions. In his opinion, Dalhousie College did not belong to the Province, but to the Governors. "For forty long years it had stood a disgrace, doing nothing, perfectly useless;" and "he saw with regret the attempt that was being made to destroy it at the moment there was a prospect of its being put in order." He adverted to the various efforts that had been made in former years, but fruitlessly, to get it into operation, so that at length it "died out." He felt greatly interested in the present revival of the College. The students and Professors had come down from Truro, and eminent gentlemen had been obtained from Canada, one of whom "was already doing a great deal of good in the way of teaching the young men in the various drug stores, that most useful of sciences—Chemistry." It appeared to him that the opposition sprang from a spirit of revenge, excited by the rejection of Dr. Crawley in 1838. He illustrated this remark by reference to a fact in Venetian history; and asked whether vindictive feeling did not still "burn in those who would now see Dalhousie a heap of ruins?"

The ATTORNEY GENERAL expressed his entire dissent from these observations. Dalhousie College did not belong to the Governors; they were only trustees. The fund by which it was established was placed in the hands of the Earl of Dalhousie "solely for benefit of the people of Nova Scotia, and the purpose for which it was to be used was the Education of the people. The Earl of Dalhousie was nothing more than the instrument through which this benefit was to flow into the Province of Nova Scotia."

He repelled the insinuation that there was any vindictive feeling in the matter. Mr. Shannon should "bear in mind that he must deal with this subject fairly—that there were important interests and prejudices that were largely at stake in the matter. Various denominations in the country believed that in the appropriation of the funds in question an injustice had been done them—that whilst Dalhousie was called Provincial it was in reality sectarian—that it was largely Presbyterian in its character. He (Mr. Shannon) should remember that not only the Baptists, but the ministers of his own denomination, the Wesleyans, were warmly interested in this debate. The Wesleyan newspaper took the same view as did the petitioners, and condemned the legislation of last year with great ability. His hon. friend should feel that there was no little reason for the sentiment that had grown up." At the same time he would not consent to disturb the legislation of last year, and he closed by "expressing his belief that the several collegiate institutions of the country need not fear the re-establishment of Dalhousie. He was of opinion that they had their own separate and proper work to do—and that was more particularly to afford facilities for education to those large masses of our youth in the country who could not be brought to attend a College in the metropolis."

Mr. ARCHIBALD protested against the assumption that Dalhousie is now a Presbyterian Institution. Many of the Presbyterians, he said, preferred a denominational College, and were therefore opposed to the removal from Truro. For his own part, he was of opinion that it would be far better to concentrate the funds of a small Province on one Institution than to divide them among several. He hoped that Dalhousie would succeed in the end. He would regard any interference with the Act of last session as a breach of faith.

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY thought that the Act of last session ought not to have been placed on the Statute Book; but being there, he could not consent to its removal. Those who now had charge of the interests of Dalhousie should have a fair chance to try the experiment of establishing it on a proper basis.

Mr. PARKER could not understand why this cry was raised against Dalhousie. A great deal had been said lately about the importance of a union of the Colonies. It appeared to him very important that all the

denominations should unite in establishing a Provincial University.

The PROVINCIAL SECRETARY delivered another long speech. He had listened in vain for any semblance of argument on the other side. Instead of argument he had heard threats and insinuations. Insolent language had been used by the Press. But the members of that House (and he expatiated largely on their excellent qualities—they were the very elite of the merchants, the farmers, the lawyers, and the physicians of the Province!) would not be influenced by such attempts, nor would their measures be moulded by any pressure from without.

He complimented Mr. Tobin on the "liberal and patriotic sentiments" uttered by him. They were creditable to the denomination to which he belonged and to the constituency which he represented.

He acknowledged that the denominational Colleges had been very useful; but he wished to see all the denominations united in supporting Dalhousie, and thus advancing the interests of education throughout the Province.

The petitions, he observed, had emanated to a large extent from the Baptist denomination. He regretted this, and he regretted it the more "because that denomination—with whose pale he had been born and educated—had always stood in the vanguard of education, and had from the personal sacrifices it had endured in the maintenance of its educational Institutions, won the admiration and esteem of all. He had too much respect for the honourable character of the men connected with the Educational establishments of this and the other denominations of the Province to associate them with the resolution of the member for Kings, or to imagine that they would be parties to an act of spoliation, and then be participators in the spoil."

He endeavoured to prove that the Presbyterians "were not receiving an undue proportion of the public funds;" and he thought that the very best thing that could be done would be for the Baptists, and Methodists, and others, to combine their resources and build up Dalhousie.

Mr. CHURCHILL said that any attempt to make Dalhousie a universal Institute would be a failure: It would be better to divide its funds among the existing educational institutions of the country.

Mr. LONGLEY addressed the House in reply. His speech was at once temperate, firm, and forcible. He observed that the main objection to the Act of last session was that it placed the Presbyterians in a position which involved injustice to other denominations. He showed that the agitation on this subject was shared in by all the other denominations, and that it was utterly unreasonable to expect that they would forsake their own Institutions for the sake of Dalhousie.

"We have been told," Mr. Longley said, "that we have on the table a number of petitions to which are attached the names of men who do not understand the question. I admit there may be many of them who do not appreciate it in all its relations, but if they did fully understand it their feelings would be only the more excited, and instead of forty petitions there would be double the number here. I am satisfied that if the matter is allowed to remain open, when we all meet here again next winter, there will be ten petitions where there is now one. But we have been told again and again that the men who are agitating this question, and are interested in the action of the House, are incompetent to consider it in all its aspects. I venture to say that there are men connected with King's College, with Sackville, and Acadia, as competent as those who are now associated with, and labouring within Dalhousie College, and I say this without any wish to disparage them in any respect whatever. Yet these men are among those who take the deepest interest in this question. I go further and I take the liberty of reminding the Provincial Secretary that there is a name attached to one of the petitions which at least he would be inclined to respect, and the circumstance of its being appended ought to some extent to influence him from applying to one at least of these documents the harsh expressions which he has ventured to make use of on the present occasion. That man, I believe, is as competent to form a just opinion, though he may not have passed through a regular college course, in reference to the great question of education as connected with the interest of the country, and as well prepared to say what are the sentiments of his own denomination, as the learned Provincial