

# THE VARSITY.

*A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.*

VOL. XVII.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, JANUARY 27, 1898.

No. 13.

## THE LIFE OF BISHOP STRACHAN,

FIRST PRESIDENT OF KING'S COLLEGE.

### II.

All his life, one might almost say, Bishop Strachan had been interested in education, but it is from 1837 to 1852 that his efforts in that direction are of especial interest to us; for that period saw the establishing of a Provincial University—an event which is in no small measure due to his untiring efforts.

We will now consider, however, the educational question, which had for a long time interested Bishop Strachan and upon which his life had so great an influence.

In the year 1807 the "Grammar Schools," which were provided for under the charter of 1797, were established, chiefly, it would seem, from the strenuous efforts of Dr. Strachan in this direction; and when he was appointed to a seat in the Executive Council he determined to use his influence towards the establishing of the long-projected University.

The act of 1797 had provided 500,000 acres of "waste lands," which were in the present state of the country almost valueless; so Dr. Strachan succeeded in inducing the Government to ask the Imperial authorities to exchange this land for the more saleable property of the crown reserves; and in order to be sure that the matter should receive the attention it deserved, he proceeded to England in 1826 to state his cause, and returned in 1827 eminently successful from his standpoint of view at least.

The amended charter provided for the exchange of the lands and the establishing of a college at or near York, to be called "King's College," with the style and privileges of a University. It moreover stipulated that the professors should be members of the Church of England, and subscribers to the thirty-nine articles. Thus the proposed *national* University was to be *denominational*, and also to be governed practically by the Church of England. Throughout the transaction, of course, the Doctor's hand is easily discernible.

The charter met with a very cold reception in Upper Canada, and was opposed very vigorously by many, who maintained that a national institution should in no wise be sectarian. Dr. Strachan argued that the Church of England was established by law in Canada, and since religion should form the basis of every youth's education, the proposed institution ought beyond a doubt to be under the control of the State Church; he also pointed to Oxford and Cambridge, where both the professors and students were required to be subscribers to the thirty-nine articles of the Common Book of Prayer.

From the time of the granting of the charter till 1837, a fierce controversy waged between the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly as to whether the new University should be sectarian or not; the former said it should, the latter maintained it should not, and it was not till 1837 that the two houses compromised and sent a joint memorandum to the Governor, which expunged the most objectionable features of the former charter, and left it almost non-sectarian.

This compromise was agreeable and the building of King's College was commenced on the present site of the new Parliament Buildings. In the meantime, however, studies were proceeded with at the old Parliament Buildings under the presidency of Dr. Strachan.

In 1843 one wing of the new college was completed, and studies were begun there on the 8th of June of that year, with Bishop Strachan as president still.

The charter of "King's College" was still objectionable to many who desired the complete secularization of the institution; but the attempts at changing the constitution were personally objected to by Bishop Strachan at the bar of the House. However, in spite of all he could do an Act was passed in 1849 which completely secularized the college, changed the name of "King's College" to that of the "University of Toronto"; and under that name it has continued to flourish and be of untold advantage both to the Province and Canada at large, and one is tempted to say of the United States also; for the graduates of Toronto University have brought, and are continuing to bring, their benign influence to bear upon the students of most of the universities across the line.

We must here leave the consideration of our University and follow the subject of this sketch, who now severed all connection with the University, whose first president he had been under the name of "King's College."

Foiled in all his zealous endeavors for the establishment of a sectarian University under the auspices of both the State and the Church of England, Bishop Strachan, at the age of seventy-two, addressed a pastoral to the members of the Episcopal Church calling for subscriptions for the founding of a sectarian University. This pastoral was well responded to, as was also an appeal to the Church in Great Britain, with the result that Bishop Strachan succeeded in the founding of a University after his own heart in Trinity University, but only after a trip to England in 1856, when he obtained the charter and a large amount of money from subscription.

This is also characteristic of the man, and is a grand example of tenacity of purpose and indomitable courage, for when he undertook this vast enterprise he was seventy-two years old; and yet he was eminently successful, and the University which he was instrumental in establishing has had a great part in the education of the young men of Canada.

Bishop Strachan was by this time well advanced in years, but was still active and took a keen interest in public affairs. He was especially interested in the question of the Clergy Reserves, which had in him a most energetic champion. In spite of all his efforts, however, to obtain a decision favorable to his church, the last great disappointment came to him when the matter was settled contrary to all his desires.

His tremendous vitality maintained him in good health until he was about eighty-two, when his heavy burden of years began to tell upon him; added to his age also in 1865 came the affliction of the death of his wife, and it was observed that he was never the same man after.

Bishop Strachan continued to preach until some few months before his death, which occurred on the 1st of November of 1867.