

SIR WILLIAM DAWSON

THE greatness of a university is inseparably connected with the lives of her illustrious men, the lustre of whose achievements is all pervading. From them it derives its best inspirations, and through their efforts in the various intellectual and practical walks of life, it establishes its strongest claims for public consideration and support. In the educational history of Canada, there is probably no institution for higher learning of which this is more conspicuously true than of McGill, between whom and her late Principal there were bonds of union and sympathy of an unusual character, and the effects of whose loss cannot be estimated adequately at the present time.

Sir William Dawson, whose death occurred on the 19th of November, 1899, was born at Pictou, Nova Scotia, on the 13th of October, 1820. He received his early training at the Pictou Academy, and later attended the University of Edinburgh, where he first gained that insight into scientific work which brought him celebrity in after years, and from which he derived many ideas relative to the higher university work, which were destined to become important factors in the future development of McGill University. Indeed, it may be safely stated that the entire system of lectures and short sessions, as they exist to-day, had their origin in the ideas thus gained during his career as a student in Scotland. Upon his return from abroad, and with a rare spirit of devotion to the work he loved so well, he threw himself with all his energy into the educational work of his province, and soon became a leading figure. In 1850 he was appointed Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, and was instrumental in securing the foundation of a Normal School. The success attending his administration of the educational affairs of the province during a period of three years attracted the attention of the Governors of McGill University when, at a very critical period, they were seeking a competent leader to guide the destinies and future development of a small and feeble institution which was threatened with speedy and absolute dissolution. He was selected as the one man who gave promise of bringing relief to a difficult and almost hopeless situation. Those who were brought in contact with him at that time as students were first of all impressed with his seeming youth and inexperience, but they were quickly made sensible of a latent power which was destined to be productive of great results. Even in those early years, his actions were dominated by that never-failing modesty which so distinguished him in after years—an attribute which generally accompanies a great mind.

While his work as an educationist may be said to have commenced as early as 1846, our interest centers chiefly in that career which commenced with his entrance upon the work of university life at McGill in 1854. Here he found