

## DEANS OF MCGILL.:

## ALEXANDER JOHNSON, LL.D., VICE-PRINCIPAL AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS.

The Acting Principal of McGill is, as is well known to its students, a graduate of Dublin University, in consequence of which fact he is rarely spoken of in the College Halls by his official title.

In his University career, it was to classics and mathematics that he paid the most attention and in which he achieved his greatest success, obtaining a senior moderatorship and gold medal in the latter (an exactly similar position to the one held by Sir Robert Ball a few years later) and a scholarship in the former.

The present Lord Chancellor of Ireland, also a classical scholar, graduated in the same year with the senior moderatorship in classics.

Amongst his other contemporaries were the Prime of all Ireland, Leckey, the historian, and Lord Russell of Killowen, lately appointed Lord Chief Justice of England.

Among others, he secured prizes in logic and metaphysics, Hebrew, and on three separate occasions, the Vice Chancellor's prize for English prose.

The combination of the classical scholarship and mathematical gold medal, by all previous records of the University was sufficient to entitle him to feel confident of obtaining a Fellowship and to that end he continued his studies in the University several years. A Fellowship in Dublin is not similar to the Fellowship of other universities but more in the nature of a professorship, being held for life and continually rising in value to about \$10,000 a year.

McGill, at that time, was just beginning the forward movements which have caused it to reach its present height, and at the Governors' request to the late Dr. Macdonell, Provost of Trinity, to appoint a Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy he at once offered the position to Mr. Johnson.

There being no Fellowship vacant, or indeed any immediate prospect of a vacancy occurring, Dr. Johnson accepted the position which he has so long and ably filled, and came out to Canada to assume the duties of his new post.

If any present student at McGill could be translated back to those days, he would find it extremely difficult to perceive any resemblance between the University of that time and to-day. The Faculty of Arts turned out only four or five graduates yearly; lectures were delivered in the old High School on the corner of University and Dorchester Streets, the building now occupied by the Fraser Institute. In the grounds, there were but two buildings, the central

one crowned by a Cupola and the east wing lately occupied by Sir William Dawson as a residence. The main building was utilized as a residence by the Rector of the High School (which was under control of the University) and the College Secretary.

Even then there were ten professors, being a very much larger number in proportion to the number of students than the present staff of twelve professors, four lecturers and five sessional lecturers. Honour courses were as yet unknown, but were introduced in the following year. It is interesting to note amongst the names of his earliest students those of C. P. Davidson, J. R. Dougall, L. H. Davidson, William Hall, N. W. Trenholme, David McCord, F. Lyman, James Kirby, George Ross, late Vice Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

Shortly after his arrival he returned to Dublin to receive the degree of M.A. and two years later that of LL.D., which entitled him to wear those gorgeous red robes which a valedictorian once so humorously described as being dyed in the blood of his victims.

Later he received the Honorary Degree of D. C. L. from the University of Lennoxville.

In 1876 Doctor Johnson was appointed Vice Dean, of the Faculty of Arts, and in 1886 he succeeded Doctor Leach as Dean and Vice Principal of the University.

During the past two years, during the illness of and since the resignation of Sir William Dawson, he has been Acting Principal.

With regard to the work done by him outside the University, it might be mentioned that he is one of the original members of the Royal Society of Canada and was third President of Section 3. As a member of that section, he contributed papers: 1. "On the symmetrical investigation of the curvature of surfaces," 2. "Preparations for observing the transit of Venus in Montreal." 3. "Tidal observations on Canadian waters." 4. "Newton's use of slit and lens in forming a pure spectrum." 5. "Faraday's lines of force." 6. "On the need of a coast survey for the Dominion of Canada."

When the British Association met in Montreal in the year 1884 he wrote a paper on "The importance of tidal observations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the Atlantic Coast of the Dominion."

The subject was taken up warmly by Lord Kelvin then Sir William Thompson, and Dr. Johnson was appointed Chairman of the Committee in Canada to represent to the Canadian Government the urgency for taking steps to make such observations, with a corresponding Committee in England composed of Lord Kelvin, Mr. J. C. Adams and Professor Darwin.

Doctor Johnson also introduced this matter to the notice of the Royal Society of Canada and a similar