

almost entirely English in its composition, it proceeded to the establishment of non-denominational schools. These schools were never very numerous—about eighty being the maximum number; but they formed the beginning of the present school system. The Royal Institution, being a Government board, had, on that account, too little of the popular sympathy, especially among the settlers in the Eastern Townships; and the Local Legislature practically refused to acknowledge it, and set up in opposition to it the denominational system of "Fabrique schools" in the French parishes; and, finally, its functions were restricted to the McGill college alone, by the new educational act which followed the rebellion of 1837.

In so far as the McGill college was concerned, the Royal Institution at once took action by applying for a royal charter, which was granted in 1821, and prepared to take possession of the estate. This, however, owing to litigation as to the will, was not surrendered to them till 1829. They also demanded the grants of land which had been promised, and received fresh assurances; and, as an earnest of their fulfilment, the Government of the day was authorized to erect a building for McGill college, and to defray the expenses out of those "Jesuits' estates," which have in our own time given to the Legislature of Quebec so startling and exceptional celebrity. But the hopes thus held out proved illusory, and the college buildings had to be begun with the money left by Mr. McGill, and were at length completed only by the liberality of another citizen of Montreal, the late Mr. William Molson.

In the year of Mr. McGill's death the population of Montreal was scarcely fifteen thousand, and of these a very small minority were English. One-third of the houses were wooden huts, and the extent of the foreign trade may be measured by the nine ships from the sea, of an aggregate of 1,589 tons, reported as entered in the year 1813. The whole English population of Lower Canada was very trifling. There was no school system, and there were no schools, with the exception of the seminaries of the Church of Rome, and a few private adventure schools. It seems strange that, in such a condition of affairs, the idea of a university for Montreal should have occurred to a man apparently engaged in business and in public affairs. Two circumstances may be

mentioned in explanation of this. The first is the long agitation on the part of some of the more enlightened of the English colonists in behalf of the establishment of a university and a system of schools. As early as 1787 the Legislative council had taken action in the matter and had prepared a scheme of general education; but this infant Hercules was according to the testimony of Abbe Ferland, in his life of Bishop Du Plessis, "strangled in its cradle" by a remonstrance written by Du Plessis. In 1801, the project was revived, and the act for the establishment of the Royal Institution was passed; but the new scheme was for the time foiled by the refusal of the Roman Catholic clergy to act on the board; so that, as another learned priest Rev. M. (now Bishop) Langevin informs us in his "Cours de Pédagogie," it was without result, "thanks to the energetic vigilance of the Roman Catholic clergy." Mr. McGill was familiar with these movements, and no doubt was somewhat displeased with the "energetic vigilance" above referred to, and with the yielding of the Government to such opposition. He knew what colleges and a school system had done for his native country, and that the withholding of such a system from the new settlers in this province would involve semi-barbarism, leading to poverty, discontent, superstition, irreligion, and a possible war of races. In so far as these evils have been averted from the Province of Quebec he has certainly contributed to the result more than any other man of his time.

A second circumstance which may have aided Mr. McGill in his resolve, was of a different and more personal character. In 1797, General Simcoe, the first Governor of Upper Canada, and his Executive Council, had decided to establish a seminary of higher learning in that province. They had invited Mr. Strachan, a graduate of St. Andrews, to organize this institution. He arrived early in 1799, but only to find that his patron, Gen. Simcoe, had been removed, and that the plan had fallen to the ground. Greatly disappointed by this, Mr. Strachan opened a school in Kingston, and subsequently occupied, as a clergyman of the Church of England, the mission of Cornwall, and commenced the Grammar school at that place, where many men subsequently of note in Upper Canada were educated. A year before McGill's death, Strachan was transferred to Toronto, of which diocese he was afterwards the Bishop. The precise circumstances which introduced to each