

## AN ABLE SKETCH.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF FATHER DAWSON.

OLD TIMES IN OTTAWA—MEN AND DAYS  
NOW DEAD—MOST INTERESTING  
EVENTS RECALLED.

"Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."—I PETER, V., 2.

Having been asked by the conductors of *The Owl*, to furnish them, for publication in their popular periodical, with some of my recollections of our lately deceased and widely lamented townsman, the Very Reverend Dr. Dawson, V.G., I have thrown into the following pages, and now submit, the impressions left on my mind, after an acquaintance of over thirty years, with that eminent scholar and divine. I think I first heard of Father Dawson in 1863-4, when preparing for publication my *Bibliotheca Canadensis*. In that work will be found an account of his various literary undertakings from the time when as a very young man he made his first essay as a writer. I was then living in Quebec, but before the appearance of the book, being then, as now, a member of the Civil Service, I came to Ottawa, on the removal hither of the seat of government, and on that occasion had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Dawson for the first time. It was in the autumn of 1865; and the friendship which was then formed between us, he, a man advanced in years, and I but just come of age, remained firm and unbroken until the end. There were as members of the public service at that time, as there are at present, many ripe scholars and men of fine literary tastes, among whom I recall the late John Langton, the late Dr. Adamson, the late Dr. Alpheus Todd, the late Dr. Tache, the late A. Gerin-Lajoie, the late Fenning Taylor, the late Etienne Parent, the late R. S. M. Bouchette, Dr. E. A. Meredith, Mr. W. H. Griffin, Mr. G. W. Wicksteed and Mr. Arthur Harvey, and it was to many of them, as it certainly was to the younger members of the fraternity, like myself, a matter of sincere pleasure and congratulation to meet among the residents of the new Capital one with Dr. Dawson's refinement and breeding and high claims to intellectual excellence. The opportunities, however, were not many, for cultivating new acquaintances. Owing to a lack of accommodation, many of the public employees were unable as yet to remove their household goods to Ottawa, and there were few, if any, agreeable places of resort, beyond the Russell House and Pat O'Meara's eating-house across the Sapper's Bridge. But Father Dawson was a prominent member of the old Mechanic's Institute and Athenæum, where he frequently lectured in company with the late Mr. A. J. Russell, the late Major Perry, the late Mr. Henry J. Friel, and our present distinguished townsmen, Dr. Thorburn and Sir James Alexander Grant; and it was in the reading-room and library of this venerable institution that the more serious minded of the new-comers accustomed themselves to foregather during the long winter evenings, either to discuss philosophy or talk over the events of the day.

Father Dawson made everyone at home, and was always much in request in this circle. He, as I have remarked, was a fine scholar, had read largely and diligently in general literature and in addition kept himself remarkably well informed on all that was transpiring in our daily world. He possessed also, what is so seldom seen associated with one from the land of Macallum More, a bright and ready wit, which was rarely if ever found to be out of place; but what, in my opinion, gave him so firm a hold on the affections of men was his broad-minded, liberal, Catholic spirit, so free from all manner of bigotry and intolerance. Such a man could not fail of impressing his personality most particularly upon the mind and heart of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, then in the zenith of his fame, whose especial mission in Canada seems to have been the cultivation of a spirit of unity and brotherhood among all creeds and

nationalities. The poet-statesman was at this period a member of the government, and, in the prosecution of his duties, came frequently to Ottawa. He formed the deepest regard and friendship for Father Dawson, and when in town would have him constantly near him, along with others of similar worth and merit. I recall an incident at the delivery of one of his lectures in Ottawa, I think it was the last one of a delightful series given by him in illustration of public opinion, life and character, in the old Theatre, Wellington street, not long before his barbarous assassination. Mr. McGee had on either side of him, on the stage, the Venerable Archdeacon Lauder, rector of Christ Church, and our departed friend, Dr. Dawson. Rising at the commencement of the proceedings, with a merry twinkle in his eye, he invited attention to the strength of his support. "With Father Dawson on one side of me and Father Lauder on the other, I think," said he, "Church and State are well represented on this occasion!" Later, in 1869, we had here the Ottawa Literary Club, of which the late Mr. W. McKay Wright, a young and popular M.P., was President, and Father Dawson 1st Vice-President. Among those who took part in our winter course of lectures, was Dr. Bourinot, the present clerk of the House of Commons, Col. Gray of New Brunswick, Mr. Sulte, Mr. H. B. Small, Mr. A. J. Christie, Q.C., Mr. G. H. Macaulay, and Mr. Carroll Ryan, but undoubtedly the worthy Father's contribution—on McGee—was the *chef d'œuvre* of the series. Father Dawson was at this time an occupant of the Bishop's Palace, doing duty with that exemplary priest and excellent gentleman, Vicar General Dandurand, to whom, with the late Bishop Phelan, the Catholics of Ottawa owe the erection of their magnificent Cathedral church. Afterwards he moved into private lodgings on Ashburnham hill with the late Father Collins. I frequently visited him and he as often came to see me at my bachelor's quarters, at Matthew's hotel, now the Rideau Street Convent. We took many pleasant walks together, and I may here remark, as an evidence of his nice feeling of delicacy, that never during the entire period of our long and close acquaintance did he at any time broach in conversation any matter of a controversial religious character, or seek in any way to influence my judgment in that regard. He knew that I belonged to another Church, and like the true gentleman that he was, respected my individual convictions. Sometimes, however, I questioned him, and I remember on one occasion asking his opinion of Heaven. His reply was characteristic of the purity and loveliness of his nature. "To my mind," he said, "Heaven is like a beautiful garden, full of beautiful plants and beautiful flowers, and where we walk about and hold converse with saints and angels, and all is endless peace and joy." Many a dainty and pleasant little repast I have had with the dear old gentleman either at his private rooms or at Matthew's or O'Meara's the latter of whom's fame as a *chef*, like the flavor of his dishes, lingers fondly in the memory of many delightful friends and companions of the past. Gone to his reward is the good Bishop, and gone his devoted secretary, the ex-priest of St. Patrick's; gone also Dr. Tabarat, Father Bennett, and that other true and faithful servant of Christ, Father Molloy; gone the Donaldsons, gone the Douglass, and gone the Armstrongs, Wrights, Skeads, Curriers, Thompsons, Goodwins, Sherwoods, Fellowses, Lyons, Friels, Bells, O'Reillys, Cruices, Wallers, Himsworths, Lees, Powells, Lindsays, Haringtons, Wises, Mackays, Montzamberts, and others whose well remembered forms come back to us not unfrequently in memory. I remember, especially, one notable gathering at Matthew's, which building, by the way, has associations with our political history, in that it was the home of the Nova Scotia "repealers" at the dawn of confederation, and later, witnessed within its walls the birth of "Canada First," Foster, Mair, Haliburton, Shultz, Father Dawson and the writer being there to rock its cradle. The occasion was a large public banquet, having for its two fold celebration the departure from Ottawa of Benjamin Sulte the historian, and the arrival here of Sangster the poet. His Worship Mayor Friel, an old journalist, occupied the chair, and there were present with us many representative men. Father Dawson favored us with an original poem

in Sangster's honor, and subsequently responded to the toast of "The memory of the Hon. Thomas D'Arcy McGee," which was drunk in solemn silence. About this time, Dr. Dawson was induced to join the Rideau Club, his proposer being Mr. Under Secretary Meredith, before mentioned. He remained a member of the club until his death, and as such was daily brought into contact with some of the most eminent of our statesmen and public men. He knew intimately all the great political leaders of his time, including Sir John Macdonald, Sir George Cartier, Sir Charles Tupper, Mr. Howe, Mr. McDougall, Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Laurier, as well as the several Governors-General, and was oftentimes an honored and privileged guest at Government House. As an Imperial Federationist and an unwavering upholder of every thing tending to the strength and solidity of the Empire, he enjoyed the particular friendship and regard of such men as the late Archbishop Connolly of Halifax, the Very Rev. Principal Grant, of Lieut.-Governor Schultz, and last but by no means least, of our eminent townsman Dr. Sandford Fleming, Chancellor of Queen's University. The marked respect which he always received was the tribute offered by old and young to one of his years, position and merit. On one occasion Principal Grant was lecturing in Ottawa. He was in the midst of one of the finest passages in his address, when the door opened and there passed slowly up the centre aisle a bent and venerable figure. It was Father Dawson, come out in the midst of a violent snow storm to lend encouragement by his presence to the cause in hand. The lecturer, recognizing the new comer, instantly stopped, and walking half-way down the hall to meet him, cried out as he grasped his outstretched hand: "Father Dawson I am proud to welcome you among us; you have paid us a great compliment in coming out on such an inclement night." The good priest was led in triumph to a post of honor on the stage, but so loud and frequent was the applause that it was some considerable time before the lecturer was enabled to proceed by the audience.

In 1866 Dr. Dawson was selected for appointment as Roman Catholic Chaplain to the Queen's troops, Ottawa in that year becoming a garrison town by the arrival here of the right wing of H. M.'s 100th Regt., or Royal Canadians. On their departure, he fulfilled the same duties in connection with the several other regiments that successively followed, among which were the 1st Batt., Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade, Col. the Right Honorable Lord Alexander Russell, O.B.; the 1st Batt. 60th, or King's Royal Rifle Corps, Lt. Col. R. J. E. Robertson; and the 4th Batt. P.C.O. Rifle Brigade, Lt. Col. H. R. L. Newdegate. Service for the R.C. troops was held with the permission of the bishop, in the crypt of the cathedral now the Basilica. As chaplain, Father Dawson was regularly invited to dine at the officer's mess, and as there were always among the officers of the regiments some who professed the Catholic faith, the scions of old English county families like the Wickhams, Banbury's Macdonell's and Cliffords, the chaplain never found himself otherwise than completely at home on these festive occasions. Sir Francis Turville, Lord Lisgar's Secretary, who was here at the same time, belonged also to the Catholic Church and attended Dr. Dawson's services for the troops. I have been told that the venerable father was a great favorite with both officers and men, and exercised no little influence, especially in the orderly-room when pleading "in arrest of judgment" for some erring warrior. His was ever a kind good heart, overflowing with love for his fellowman; always open to the cry of sorrow, and always ready for any work of mercy either for the bodies or the souls of men. I could relate many stories in illustration, but two will suffice. One of these has reference to his exertions in behalf of a condemned convict in the West. The case, to my mind, was an aggravated one, but the good priest, after an examination of the papers, felt convinced there was a miscarriage of justice somewhere in the premises. Acting on this idea, he left no stone unturned to secure a commutation of the sentence—going frequently to interview Lord Lisgar, the Governor General, on the subject. The prisoner was a friendless Irish Catholic, and had no claims upon

the priest save that of being a fellow creature in distress. Father Dawson could not save him, however, and at the appointed time, he was duly executed. The other case was that of a personal friend—the late Mr. W. L. Gane, known in the annals of literature as "The Lowe Farmer"—who lay at the point of death. Mutual friends urged Father Dawson to visit Gane, but as the sick man was a Protestant the former, with that nice appreciation of the circumstances I have previously touched upon, hesitated and held back. At length word came that Gane was in *extremis*, and then putting all other considerations aside, the Father no longer hesitated. In relating the circumstance to me, he said: "I just went to the door of the room, and looking in, saw our poor friend Gane in his bed all propped up with pillows. I waited until I caught his eye, and then, without entering further, I said to him: 'Oh! Mr. Gane, have faith in God—put your whole trust in God!' He nodded his head in assent, and I knew that he had heard me." Then, who has not heard of his personal exertions as President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty. It was acts of kindness, of gentleness, of mercy such as these which made the old man's life beautiful and blessed, and that doubtless led my friend Robert Haliburton to observe to me; that when he should himself be in *extremis* there was no one he would sooner have near him at that supreme moment than Father Dawson. But I must hasten with what remains to be told. After the departure of the troops, Father Dawson resumed his duties at the Palace, and later, was appointed by the late Bishop Guiges, to be parish priest of Osgoode, in succession to the well-known Celtic scholar, the Rev. Thomas O'Boyle. Here he remained for eight years, and as he had a comfortable presbytery and was surrounded by a prosperous, intelligent and contented people, I take it he was reasonably happy. Indeed, I am sure of the fact, judging from the tone of his letters to me. Writing July 16, 1873, he says: "Should I miss you on coming to town, the only remedy will be that you come to spend a few days with me in the country. My notions about town and country are far from being Canadian. They are rather homespun, and to many people must appear so in more senses than one. I hold to them, however, and would have everybody brought to believe that there is more enjoyment as well as more elegance and refinement in rural abodes than in crowded cities: *Nobis placeant ante omnia sylvæ*."

No doubt, the leisure he now enjoyed was turned to good account in more ways than one, and we probably owe to it the preparation of one of his masterpieces: "*Pius IX and His Times*." On examining the list of his works in *The Owl* for June, 1892, it will be seen that he contributed to literature a very large number of translations, essays, poems, histories and critical writings, many of which are of great value and merit. His literary fame, as I have said elsewhere, will not unlikely rest upon the work first named, and upon "*The History of the Catholics of Scotland*," and his "*Temporal Sovereignty of the Pope*," the latter of which was highly eulogized in the London press by one of the Wilberforces. Dr. Dawson wrote with elegance, force and vigor, and he had the power of compressing an immense amount of research into a small compass. On looking over some of the papers which have come into my possession, as his literary executor, I find among his early poems one on the massacre of Orzmissa in Lithuania, which he was induced to write by a friend of Poland in 1844. Although the lines were intended merely as an expression of sympathy with the unfortunate Poles, the late Lord Dudley Coutts Stuart, then the vice-president of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, deemed them of sufficient importance to indite a letter of thanks to their accomplished author. "The Christian and truly noble sentiments," writes His Lordship, "with which this short poem is replete, and the vigorous and poetic language in which it is expressed, fill me with admiration, and I determined to take the liberty of conveying to you directly my thanks for the gratification which I had derived from the perusal of it. It is always most gratifying to me to find others sympathizing with me in my feelings for Poland, and that sympathy is still more grateful when it comes from men of reflection, of learning and of talent; and I can add most sincerely that I am never more