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Memoir

OF

ARCHIBALD MACMURCHY

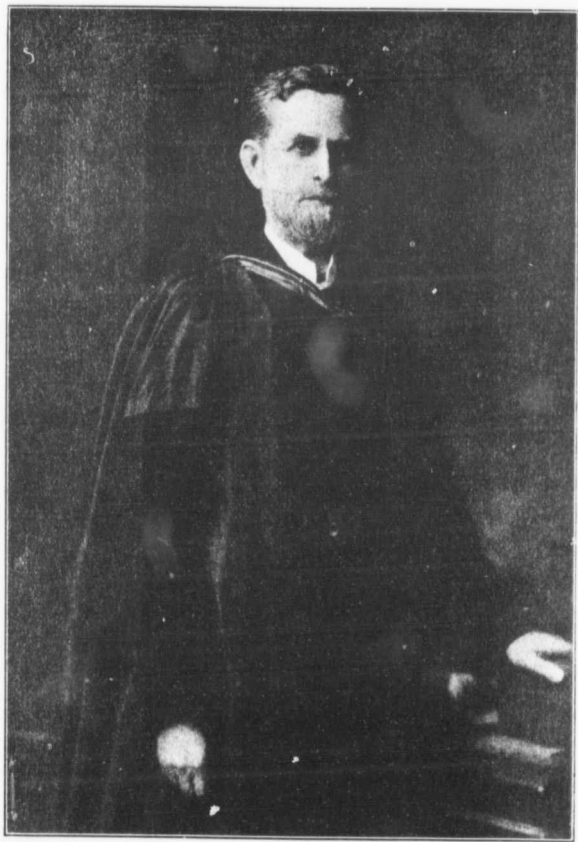
M.A., LL.D.



BY

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THE passing of Dr. MacMurchy in April last removed from our midst one who for half a century was among the most conspicuous figures in Canadian secondary education, who during that period was a devoted friend of the University of Toronto and intimately associated therewith, and who by reason of his distinguished services in his profession deserves a more extended notice than the pages of the MONTHLY permit.

Dr. MacMurchy was born at Clachan in Kintyre, Argyleshire, in 1832—of the clan Macdonald. Gaelic was his native language; and though he left Scotland when a young boy, he continued in early manhood to think in Gaelic—curiously shown by his using that language if he spoke in sleep. Though he was an accomplished Gaelic scholar, one would hardly say that his accent in later life exhibited traces of his early tongue. When Mr. Dickson Patterson was painting Mr. MacMurchy's portrait, the conversation fell on the Doctor's recently developed devotion to golf; and knowing well our friend's character, Mr. Patterson wickedly inquired how the Doctor expressed himself if a bad stroke were made. "Well," replied the subtle Highlander, "you know I always have the Gaelic to fall back on." It met the demands of the emotions without the employment of objectionable language.

Mr. MacMurchy came to Canada in 1840, when his grandfather and eleven sons emigrated from Scotland.

The family settled in King township, York County; in Wellington County; in Nottawasaga township, Simcoe County; and in Eldon township, Ontario County. His preliminary education was obtained at Rockwood Academy, and his first teaching was done at Erin. In 1854, as principal, he opened the first public school organised in Collingwood. In Collingwood he prepared for university matriculation, and walked each Friday night eight miles to Duntroon to receive lessons in Greek from Rev. John Campbell of that place. The road between Collingwood and Duntroon is long, and in those days, being recently cut through the forest, was deep in sand, or mire, or snow; but we may well suppose the toilsome parasangs served only to make his "Anabasis" more real to the vigorous young Highlander.

About 1856 he attended the Normal School in Toronto and afterward taught in the Model School. In 1858 he was appointed mathematical master in the Toronto Grammar School, and remained associated with it in its various forms and under its changing names until his retirement from active professional life in 1900. His B.A. was obtained in 1861, with silver medal in mathematics, his M.A. in 1868. In 1872 he became rector of the Jarvis St. Collegiate Institute, and was possibly the first mathematical scholar to become head-master of a high school in Ontario. Indeed, on the occasion of his appointment the question was raised at the Board—Would a classical scholar consent to serve as assistant master under a mathematical principal? When Mr. G. R. R. Cockburn retired from the principalship of Upper Canada College in 1881, Mr. MacMurchy was approached with the view of offering him the appointment, but preferred to remain where he was. From 1877 to 1884 he was a member of the Senate of the University of Toronto, representing the high school masters on that body. In 1907 the University of Toronto recognised his services to education by conferring on him the degree of LL.D., *honoris*

causd, the occasion coinciding with the celebration of the centenary of the Jarvis St. Collegiate Institute, with which for half a century he had been associated. On the occasion of his visit to the British Isles in 1899 he made a report on technical education in England, and it was presented to the Toronto Board of Education.

Dr. MacMurchy was joint author of Smith & MacMurchy's elementary and advanced arithmetics and author of a Collection of Arithmetical Problems. The years following his retirement from the principalship produced his valuable Hand-Book of Canadian Literature. For many years he edited the *Canadian Educational Monthly*.

The Doctor deeply loved his native Scotland and his adopted Canada, and was a devoted imperialist. His patriotism expressed itself in his joining the University Rifle Company at its formation. On the memorable June 2nd of 1866, as the family rose from morning prayers, an orderly appeared at the house to say that the troops were called out. Our friend bid good-bye to his wife and little children, and left with his regiment for the front. He afterwards became first lieutenant in the Garrison Artillery when under the command of Captain T. A. MacLean. For many years he was a very active member of the Board of the House of Industry, and attended one of its meetings two days before his death. His political leanings were distinctly Conservative. He was a personal friend of Sir John Macdonald, with whom on various occasions he had considerable correspondence.

As a teacher Dr. MacMurchy was singularly skilful and singularly successful. The number of his scholars who won honours in mathematics in the University was very large indeed. He made the old Toronto Grammar School the mathematical school of the Province. Analytical geometry was taught there when analytical geometry was a second year honour subject in the

University. His skill appeared perhaps to best advantage in the fine discrimination he exercised in determining what difficulties each pupil could unravel for himself, and in affording occasions for solving those difficulties. If a pupil had originality, opportunities for its development were provided. The Doctor's interest in his school and his scholars was intense. One consequence of this was his clear recollection of almost every one of the thousands who, during his years of office, pursued their studies in the school. His interest followed them in after-life. Teaching with its countless opportunities for good was to him not a mere profession—rather a mission almost sacred in its character. When the writer became an undergraduate in the University, he not infrequently called to see Dr. MacMurchy, and always felt the magnetism of his sympathy and interest, and left him with a lighter step and lighter heart and with more courage for work.

Though Dr. MacMurchy made no pretensions as a public speaker, his elocution in such short speeches as he made, in reading and in prayer, was impressive. His voice was pleasing and had the natural modulations which so often accompany heart-felt utterances, and which no artificial voice culture can impart. The writer recalls certain mornings in the old Toronto Grammar School when our friend took the prayers; even thoughtless boys were impressed and would say, "How different the prayers seem when Mr. MacMurchy reads them."

Though his intellectuality was strong and his professional accomplishments were broad and thorough, those closest to Dr. MacMurchy were perhaps most impressed by the presence of that quality we call character—elementary, yet compounded of many things. "I have read," says Emerson, "that those who listened to Lord Chatham felt there was something finer in the man than anything he said." Our friend had something in him still better than even the things he did or

said. We reach such conclusions in the usual synthetic way—a generalisation from various manifestations. In administering his school he was more anxious that others should have their salaries increased than that his own should be. His family motto is *Dominus providebit*. Forms of ostentation or showiness were distasteful to him. This simplicity of taste went very far; he even seemed to regret the dilapidated old Nelson Street school-house, and would often say, "What good work was done in the old place!" The influence on which he laid stress was the unspoken suggestion. He never looked for commendation: he had that of his own conscience. Within his sphere he held himself responsible for what happened, and was too courageous to suggest excuses and too successful to need them. He was devoid of egotism, that vanity of vanities. His deeply religious nature was "a presence to be felt and known in darkness and in light", and as its setting shows a jewel to better advantage, even religion was illustrated in the character of our friend. No earthly honour that could have been conferred on Archibald MacMurchy would have given him so great pleasure as the knowledge that he had performed his duty, and for such performance he asked no reward.

ALFRED BAKER.
