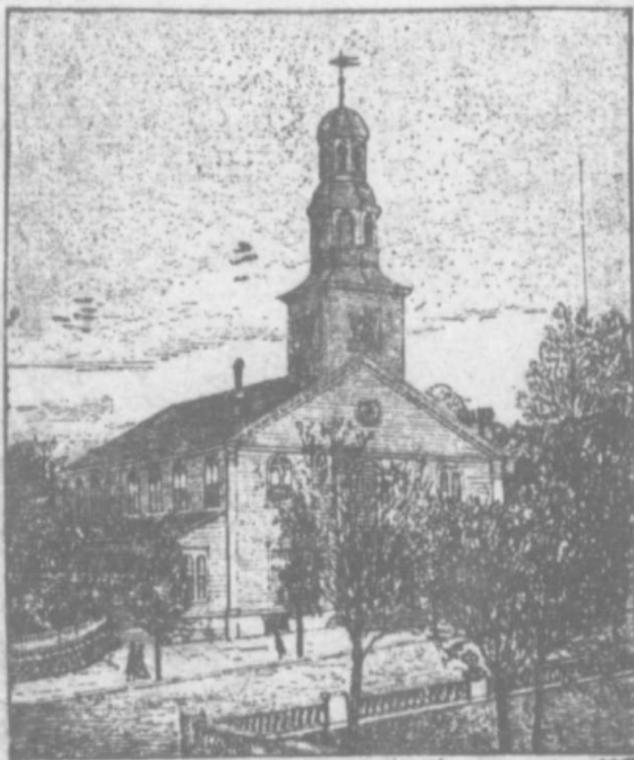


MM52.6

H122

ANGELICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOOD ARCHIVES
Impressions of
Paul's Church

In the 60's of the last
Century



By MRS. W. B. SLAYTER.

Impressions of St. Paul's Church in the 60's of the last Century.

The following sketch was written by Mrs. W. B. Slayter, about 1891. She has since permitted to have it reprinted in the hope that it may be of interest to St. Paul's people and their friends to-day :

On my way to Halifax twenty-five years ago, I met in St. John, Dr. Bernard Gilpin. This clever and interesting man was kind enough to tell me much about the city to which I was going. Not only the more trifling bits of information about hotels, shops, the prices of things, but much of historical and scientific interest, we were indebted to him for, and he gave us pamphlets on subjects connected with the Province to send back to the States, which commanded there much attention. Confederation had brought Nova Scotia into a prominence which excited a new interest in her during that rather painful struggle.

Coming down to more personal matters, I asked Dr. Gilpin which church I would be most at home in. "You will be nearest St. Paul's, and I go

there when I go anywhere," he said, "but you will find St. Luke's most like what you have been accustomed to."

The fates decided otherwise and our first Sunday in Halifax found us wending our way to St. Paul's in obedience to the bells which called out in the most matter of fact way "Come to church, come to church, come to church."

Shall I ever forget the sensation? Opening a door I found myself *facing* a congregation which filled every apparent space. I felt as a man does who, retiring from a ladies' drawing room, opens the wrong door and finds himself in a cupboard, or plunging into the cellar. A dumpy, motherly pew-opener, with spectacles on nose and a wonderful bonnet on her head took pity on and whisked me into a pew near the front of the church where, after half an hour's blushing and misery, I 'come to' and looked about me.

A big, square church, no chancel, three broad aisles, a gallery running around three sides, at the north end of this gallery the organ loft, with a delightful looking old organ with plaster and gold cherubs smiling from its front. There was no "dim religious light" no painted glass, no delicate tracery of carving. "The Lion and the Unicorn fighting for the Crown," decorated the

north gallery. A crimson curtain draped the big window behind the communion table. Square doored pews fastened with solid fastenings, each respective family into its proper well-defined place. The Ten Commandments, in gold letters on a black ground, and some mural tablets, were at the south end of the church, and over the northern doors similar gold and black boards immortalized the people who had made large donations to the comfortable, substantial, serviceable old church. The pulpit cushions were of red velvet, the big books on the communion table rested on red cushions. The font was very small and had a chirpy gilt dove perched above it.

The clergyman—Rev. Dr. George W. Hill, rector of the parish from 1868 to 1885—spoke in a ringing, decisive way, with a constant rising inflection at the end of each sentence. He did the whole service and preached a capital sermon, and the choir of girls and men supplied the musical part of the service, the organist being a lady. The responses were whispered reverentially by the people; only in the reading of the Psalter did they speak up. No one sang, that I saw, but the choir, and they sang doubtless with "the voice and the understanding," but each after his or

her own fashion. The hymn tunes were pretty, the girls' voices were as fresh as their faces, the tenors and basses did wonderfully, but the harmony betrayed a diversity of opinion which led one to imagine that some of the men and maidens sang "by ear."

In the congregation was a marked absence of genuflection—even in the creed many stood with unbowed heads; some devout women knelt on the floor in their pews with their faces hidden in the cushions in a way I had never seen before, and some old gentlemen turned and looked at the choir while they were singing, and they were well worth looking at. There were some very pretty girls in the choir twenty-five years ago. Not that I mean to insinuate that the old gentlemen looked at the girls. They were beyond suspicion; grave and venerable old men, whom to look upon was a joy for a woman who had come from a young western city where a white head was rarely seen.

I went many and many a Sunday after that first one, to dear old St. Paul's, and I remember with the vividness of first impressions so many faces and figures—now passed on from the church militant to the church triumphant. How well I remember the eagle-like face of Judge Ritchie, so clean cut

and distinguished; the aristocratic bearing of Mr. Mather Almon and Mr. Wm. Pryor, typical English gentlemen, erect, substantial in breadth, and a certain imperiousness of mien; Judge Wilkins' slender, commanding figure and striking head, and the bent figure of a constant church-goer (despite his delicate health) Mr. Edward Pryor. Mr. John Halliburton came stepping quietly up the aisle every Sunday, always late, and sometimes in his effort to be noiseless, dropping his umbrella, and, tradition said, he had been known to leave his goloshes behind him in the aisle on one particularly unfortunate Sunday. How the women who had to collect for St. Paul's charities used to bless this same Mr. Haliburton, who paid so generously and as if it was the greatest compliment to be asked to give. Ah! a courtliness that some of our rich men of now-a-days might well imitate.

There was, as there is in every church, a company of unmarried women in St. Paul's Church, who did not need "to bid their neighbour or their work farewell" to devote themselves to good things. Among these "un calendared saints" whose meek goodness, prevailing prayers and patient labour keeps this world sweet, one face rises I am

sure to the mind of every member of the St. Paul's of that day—"Dear Miss Cogswell" whom to have known was the best argument for the *reality* of Christianity. St. Paul's Church gathered into its pews such large families as could not but be noticeable to an American, accustomed to the small families of "the States." Many families filled two long pews. Judge Ritchie's, Dr. Almon's, Colonel Francklyn's. The rector's pew was full to overflowing with pretty dark-eyed, brown-haired children. How the faces rush back to my memory, and how few are left of the older people who were then bearing the burden and heat of the day in the church and in the world.

St. Paul's Church was, and is, unlike any Episcopal church I had seen. It represented a phase of churchliness which we had not developed in the United States. There was a well-defined principle and a deep conscientiousness under much that *seemed* narrow and a little petty. The dread of sacerdotalism was honest, but it was puzzling to know why, logically, freedom from "priestcraft" should be purchased by so many self-denials. Why, for instance, at Christmas time must we have evergreens decorating the church, but no flowers; and why must all the

buds be cut off the calla lily which was smuggled into the font? Why at Easter might we not have one green leaf even, as a type of the "joyful resurrection?" Why must the choir, with fear and trembling attacking the most modest of anthems, be liable to the reproach of turning the House of God into an opera house; and why, oh why, was Jackson's the only orthodox *Te Deum*?

The rector, fortunately for himself, did not know one tune from another, but in course of time he had a curate, Rev. Mr. Armstrong, who was unmusical, hapless man! He liked music, he tried to attend the choir practices and exercise a mild control. No one ever thought of minding anything he said in the slightest.

There was no married woman in the choir, save the organist, Mrs. Tidmarsh. The curate called on a lady (certainly *not* a singer) and asked her to join the choir. That *was* an honour, for St. Paul's choir was aristocratic, if untrained. "Do you think my voice strong enough to be of any use?" said the flattered woman, and awaited with complacency the fished-for compliment. "That doesn't matter," quoth the honest curate (a man after Bishop Courteney's own heart) who told the truth and shamed the—ahem. "That

doesn't matter, we only want you because you are a married lady, as a sort of chaperone."

On one girl's shoulders—Miss Uniacke, afterwards Mrs. William Cogswell—in this choir, rested much responsibility. The organist was apt to be late. The organ would be opened, the book set up on the desk, the choir would sit breathless, the bells cease ringing, tap, tap on the stairway, the welcome sound of the organist's boot heels, a rustle, a rush, and with one hand on the keys, and the other on the organ bench, into her place vaulted the organist, keeping clear of the pedals in some wonderful way. The "Voluntary" was saved!"

The chants were liable to an accident which arises from the organist playing No. 71, whilst the singers sang No. 72. On one such occasion when the choir had righted itself with wonderful "skill and dexterity" by singing "by ear" the unfortunate girl who "bossed" affairs was seen shaking the gentle, inoffensive organist as she sat on the bench—"How *could* you do such a thing?" It was very funny. I do not pretend to say who was to blame—the choir or the organist, or the scrap of paper called the "programme." "Somebody had blundered," that is certain.

There were lively little insects that

made Summer days in that old organ loft martyrdom of a smal'er sort. One girl in a fresh, transparent muslin frock was genteely and furtively nipping at her sleeve, when the tenor behind her leaned forward sympathetically and said, "I've got one, too." Tableau.

The sexton of the church was an old soldier, a total abstainer, but being human, he occasionally lapsed from strict soberiety. Girls wore in those days (no one knew why) yards of narrow ribbon tied around their necks, hanging in long loops behind. One of these ladies came down the aisle, blissfully unconscious that in the throng, the sexton was driving her by these convenient reins. It was one of the days when he had "had a glass," poor old man.

What stately affairs weddings were in old St. Paul's. The central aisle was so broad and the bride looked her best as she proceeded up it in the accepted white satin gown, veil and orange blossoms. The bridesmaids always wore white, with colored sashes—pinks and blues; the guests wore wedding bonnets of tulle or crepe; black was an unheard of thing, at a wedding, or a walking costume, such as is worn now. The bitterest Winter weather did not change

the custom of airy bonnets or filmy wraps of lace. Society was like a big family party on these occasions and chatted and nodded over the pews in a truly friendly fashion. That was *among themselves*. I am bound in strict candour to say outsiders were rather left out in the cold, and I for one used to feel quite humble minded when a dear, white-haired old clergyman, (Rev. F. Uniacke, from St. George's.) used to come to preach occasionally. He often invoked his hearers "by the memory of those whose names are inscribed on the walls of this church and whose bones lie beneath." I, who had not an ancestral bone to my name in the place, felt very much out of it.

I had been warned that St. Paul's people were exclusive. "They will snub you like anything." But it wasn't *so very bad*. Elderly ladies with prominent noses and a general likeness to the Queen in figure and bearing, fairly froze my blood when I by chance encountered them. But it was the proper expression for the British matron of that day—as witness *Punch* for 1866-8. There is a fashion in expressions as in other things; and these ladies were the representatives of a fair share of what dignity of position and responsibility Halifax then possessed.

Everything in St. Paul's church was done liberally and thoroughly. Rarely was an appeal for money made from its pulpit. Its members went to church on Sunday, not much on other days. They remembered both sides of the commandment "*Six days shalt thou labour*" as well as "Keep the Sabbath holy." Their religion, nevertheless, was a great reality to them. The men gave as naturally to their church as to their families. They managed the financial affairs of the church: there were no bazaars to raise money, the women visited the sick and the poor, taught in the Sunday School and studied the Bible.

Tuesday's Bible class was one of the week's events. Not always, perhaps, were these classes unmixed with a humorous element. From Genesis to Revelation "references" were gathered together and compared, regardless of the style of the book, or the time in which it was written, or the circumstances. Really it seems to me a wonderful proof of the oneness and inspiration of the Bible that it came out as well as it did from such an unscientific sort of study. What other book, or more properly, collection of books, was ever so dealt with? There were women in that class whose knowledge of the

text of the Bible was simply astounding. No remotest corner of Leviticus or Habakuk was unknown to them. That worthy man who hunted down "*Ezra*" in "The Little Minister," would have been put to shame by half a dozen members of St. Paul's Bible Class.

To their brethren, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Baptists, the people of St. Paul's held out most friendly hands. Many a member has it gathered from less ritualistic folds, and in turn handed them on to St. Luke's, to be educated into sympathy with our other "brethren of the Romish and Greek Communions." One Presbyterian sister who always went to St. Paul's Church gave that Bible class a bewilderment. She set them looking for this text, "Mix trembling with your mirth." They have never found it yet, for it is out of the "Paraphrases" of the Presbyterian Psalm book.

Long may St. Paul's bells ring out!

They voice honest conviction, religious freedom and a sturdy practicalness and common sense in religion which are sorely needed.