

CHAPTER 2

DENOMINATIONAL COLLEGES

Protestant sects had early established claim to the pursuance of religious freedom in North America. From the times of the earliest Puritan settlers it had become part of the American heritage that each person be accorded equal rights. The freedom to pursue those rights was inherent in the American Constitution. Although the American Loyalists who pledged allegiance to the British Crown were firmly committed to the defence of the crown, they were equally entrenched in the philosophy of freedom of religion. Many of the Loyalists who settled in New Brunswick during and after the American Revolution were members of the Church of England. However, a very substantial number were not. In fact few rural areas followed the persuasion. One itinerant Anglican missionary is quoted¹ as saying in 1776: "I found the lower orders of the people, nearly to a man, Presbyterians or fanatics", and another elsewhere to remark in 1794 that "the population was largely in the grip of itinerant and mendicant Methodists, a set of ignorant enthusiasts whose preaching is calculated only to perplex the understanding and corrupt the morals; to relax the nerves of industry and dissolve the bonds of society". The sentiments expressed were clear foreboding for the fights for denominational domination yet to come. The Maritimes also played host to a substantial number of congregationalists who formed the basis for the strong Baptist movement. As well, a large rural population of Wesleyan Methodists took up residence especially in the southern reaches

of the province.

Irish immigrants came early to the Province, bringing with them the basis for an English-speaking Roman Catholic community. Although basically of peasant and labour stock they settled more in urban centres than otherwise. Their contribution to the religious milieu was to culminate several years later in the revolutionary foment of a transplanted religious prejudice², as much the shaping of the fortunes of the province as any other sect. The Irish Roman Catholics, together with the Anglicans formed the basis of the urban society, although the latter had always constituted the ruling oligarchy and continued thus in New Brunswick, as well as in Upper Canada (the Family Compact) and in Lower Canada (the Chateau Clique). In the Inland Provinces, party politics tended to settle along denominational lines, with the Anglicans dominating the government as the Conservative or Tory party. Such control tended to violate the American concept of separation of Church and State, since it enabled the interests of the Church of England minority to be represented directly to the governor and thence to the British government. However, it should be remembered that one test of loyalty to the crown was membership in the Church of England. The British government was still reeling under the effects of the loss of the New England colonies, and continued to pursue conflicting and uncertain policies under the less than able hand of the ailing King George III, who had already manifested those signs of madness which ultimately led to rule by the Prince Regent. As a result, the Anglican clergy enjoyed a rather privileged position in the Provinces, prompting Johnston³ to remark: "The position of the Church of England in the colonies is rather anomalous, and is the cause of considerable jealousy on the part of the other denominations. It is in some measure established, and has a lead in New Brunswick, and the Bishop takes precedence after the Lieutenant-Governor and Commander of the Forces". The Church of England achieved this

privileged status under statute. The status of the Church of England was the same in the crown colonies as in England, a part of the government. However Johnston goes on to remark that the Anglican clergy were not supported by the people of the province, were not sustained by them, and had little persuasion with them. Strife could not long be avoided under these uncertain conditions.

The elected representatives tended to be more and more of the rural, hence non-Anglican population, held in check by the reigning Tories in the Provincial Capital of Fredericton.

It was to this great Tory stronghold that Bishop Medley was appointed in 1845. An immensely powerful and dedicated, even zealous man was the Bishop. However, he enjoyed the friendship of most of the leading society in Fredericton regardless of their church affiliation. From the time of the founding of the province there was a certain amount of discontent on religious grounds. Although freedom of worship was general throughout the provinces, it was only the Church of England among the Protestant sects which had the right to solemnize marriage. Indeed some sects were even denied the right to hold property. This Anglican suasion over the entire life of the colonist was not accepted with equanimity. When the Church of England attempted to gain complete control over education it was more than the colonists in any of the provinces were prepared to accept.

King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia, lays claim to being the oldest University in the British Overseas Empire. It was founded upon the rock of the Church of England and very nearly floundered there at the outset. It was the earliest example of educational discrimination

in the Provinces and could easily have proven a model for others to avoid, had they been so inclined. During its early life it was dominated by Dr. Alexander Croke, the epitome of the Tory stalwart, a politician of immense power, and a ruthless individual, both in achieving his aims and in suppressing all adverse opinion. Croke framed the constitution, statutes and rules for King's College, including the requirement that all matriculants not only subscribe to the faith of the Church of England but also that they must sign the Thirty-nine Articles of faith⁴. The Board of Governors was comprised of seven men including not only Croke but Bishop Charles Inglis. The bishop recognized immediately the harm that must follow the statutes as they had been drafted, but was very effectively silenced by exclusion from key meetings of the committee to frame them. Notwithstanding, he wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury protesting that the "plan proposed by them is too extensive, much beyond our means or our wants and is not suited to the state of the country", and again "Many of the statutes are very repugnant to my sentiments". Finally he complained that harm must inevitably result from the requirement that every student must sign the Thirty-nine Articles at matriculation. Although the Archbishop did not agree to this requirement it remained as a condition of entrance to the College from the date of granting of the Royal Charter in 1802.

It is perhaps fortunate for the people of New Brunswick that these statutes had remained. For at this time, the College of New Brunswick, incorporated in 1800 under Provincial Charter, was little more than a grammar school, with no pretensions to the grandeur of a College along the University model. The effect of the statutes was to endanger the very being of the Nova Scotia King's College for several decades; indeed that school achieved little prominence for the better part of a century, leaving room for the establishment of a degree-granting institution in New Brunswick.

Both King's College in Windsor, and the College of New Brunswick were begun by the Loyalists at about the same time. Dr. William Paine⁵ petitioned for a Provincial Academy of Arts and Sciences at Fredericton in 1785. However, both schools were conceived in the bleak turmoil of 1783 by the Loyalists on Manhattan Island, awaiting transportation to their new lands. They requested that a college be made available for the education of their children⁶. (Chief among the petitioners who would make his home in New Brunswick was the staunch Tory Jonathan O'Dell.) The founding of the educational institution was facilitated by the subsequent partitioning of Nova Scotia into two provinces, thereby allowing scope for two schools.

Although the evidence we have is that the early school in New Brunswick met with favour, this should be tempered by the fact that the only people capable of taking advantage of the facility were both Tory and of the Church of England. There was no opposition because the rural population of New Brunswick was at this time comprised principally of new Loyalist settlers who were either in accord with the urban leaders, or too much concerned with survival in a new land to be interested in the niceties of civilization. The situation was quite different in Nova Scotia where there was already an established rural population about the environs of Halifax. That city was, by its nature, a rather cosmopolitan centre. Consequently, there was almost immediate opposition to the college at Windsor by a very vocal populace, resulting in very few applicants to the school. Croke's bigotry so afflicted the school that it was not to achieve any measure of popularity until 1836 with the arrival of the Rev. Dr. George McCawley as president. Dr. McCawley, rather ironically, had been Professor of Mathematics and Hebrew at King's College, Fredericton, before being lured to Windsor, where his considerable talents gained a large measure of success both for the school and himself. In the interim, the church domination of the school had exactly the opposite effect on the educational establishment that its founders intended: it resulted in a proliferation of colleges under the auspices of various

sects throughout Nova Scotia, a plight which still haunts the various governments of that Province as well as the tax payers. It quite limited the influence of the college in the affairs of the Province, owing not only to the paucity of graduates in those earliest days, but also to the growing influence of other schools such as Dalhousie, founded shortly thereafter.

The Earl of Dalhousie laid the cornerstone for what was intended to be a state school on May 22, 1820, and paid for the cost of the first building out of the Castine fund. Dalhousie was a model of enlightenment after the harsh entrance requirements of King's College, Windsor. It was founded on the model of the Scottish universities which were undoubted educational leaders in the British Empire at this time. After the founding of Dalhousie, the fortunes of the Windsor King's College waxed poorly.

THE SITUATION IN THE CANADAS

In Upper Canada, the United Empire Loyalists, together with the Anglican clergy under the dominating influence of Archdeacon Strachan, comprised the Government of the right, known as the Family Compact. With the same laudable motives as Nova Scotia, Upper Canada set about founding a university. Unfortunately, the administrators of the scheme were no better equipped than those in Nova Scotia, were even more bigoted, and worse, having the lesson of what had happened in Nova Scotia, persisted with their plan to establish a sectarian institution to be run strictly as an elitist Church of England Society, at public expense. Sir Peregrine Maitland, then Lieutenant Government, together with Strachan, was successful in obtaining a Royal Charter in 1827 for King's College, Upper Canada, and funded from public funds. The perfidious requirement of a religious test was to be imposed upon the teaching staff, thus placing

the college entirely under the control of the Church of England. They reckoned without the interference of Egerton Ryerson, a staunch Methodist, who was uncompromisingly against this Anglican monopoly of both higher education, and education at lower levels⁷.

With Ryerson's assistance, Victoria College was established in Cobourg in 1836. Although supported by the Methodist community, no religious tests were required, nor were they required at Queens College, established by the Presbyterians at Kingston in 1841. Other colleges sprang up in the thinly populated province, buoyed by the sense of injustice against Strachan's regime. Little order was to come from this system until 1851 with the founding of the University of Toronto after the model of the University of London⁸ which served as an umbrella for several colleges. In the meantime, Strachan's dream of an Anglican University, supported at public expense as the only alternative to higher education, had turned into a nightmare of dispute, rivalry, intrigue and misrepresentation⁹.

In Lower Canada, the question of establishment of an institution of higher learning was still unresolved. James McGill had organized a petition to the Home Office as early as 1787 to request appropriate educational facilities. After repeated requests the government created The Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, a fantasy which existed solely on paper for the appeasement of the agitators. McGill decided to foil the government's clear policy of non-action by leaving his considerable property and a substantial bequest to the Royal Institution on condition that it establish a University within ten years of his death. McGill died in 1813. But it was not until 1821 that a Royal Charter was granted by King William IV. And then the institution existed only on paper, since McGill's other heirs contested the will. A very long, drawn-out court battle lasting through more than fifteen years resulted. Here again

Bishop John Strachan played an important role. But this time, as an active member of the Board of the new university, he exerted his considerable influence to prod the government into taking up the terms of McGill's bequest. Thus McGill University was spared the religious squabbling which so encumbered the other universities in the country. However, the college did not emerge from obscurity in any measure until 1855, with the appointment of an able and dynamic new leader to the principalship¹⁰. On March 31, 1827, Lord Bathurst announced the grant of a Royal Charter to King's College, Toronto. The resultant furor could be heard all the way to New Brunswick where Sir Howard Douglas had been trying since March 10, 1823 to organize support for a Royal Charter for the college at Fredericton. Sir Howard was well aware of the sentiments of the people of his province and felt that the stringent limitations of a religious college would not meet with sufficient funding. He was persuaded, however, by George Baillie¹¹, to use the form of the charter granted to King's College, Upper Canada. And so the stage was set for the strife which was to encumber the fledgling college for over thirty years. One should not judge the enthusiasts of these college schemes too harshly. It is necessary only to remember that the indefatigable spendthrift, the Prince Regent, had become King George IV in 1820. Neither he nor the British parliament were well known for their acts of indulgence toward the colonies.

There would have been little support for a Royal charter for any of these colleges unless it contained some stipulation in regard to the Church of England. Further, as finances were found to be a pressing problem, in each case, it was felt that a grant from the Crown would improve the circumstances of each of the colleges. In hindsight we can easily say that their purposes would have been better served without a Royal charter¹². Sir Howard Douglas, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, had fought hard to obtain an institution of higher learning for the province. When the Royal Charter was granted in 1829, effecting with it a change in name from the College of New Brunswick to King's College, he felt he had achieved

his ambition. It was a gala occasion that New Year's Day when he launched the college amidst the tumultuous enthusiasm of the press and the populace. The fact that the inauguration of the new college was enhanced by the acquisition of a new building, recently completed, must have gone far towards invoking an aura of pride and success, as well as a mood of optimism for the future of the venture. John McGregor, visiting the college in 1832 was still captured by that mood¹³: "The magnificent view from the College, lately built on the brow of a hill above the town, embraces, during summer and autumn, much of what poets and romance writers tell us about fairy land. -- The college is a spacious, handsome stone building, and in my opinion exactly what it should be. Some consider it too large. For the present state of the province it certainly is; but it will not be thought so, when twenty years more pass away". McGregor's prediction proved less than prophetic. For with the appointment of Dr. Edwin Jacob as resident vice-president and acting head of the new college, the seeds of dissension had already been sown.

Dr. Jacob, together with Archdeacon George Best, the first president, established the school firmly in the fashion of the English model as a Church of England denominational college, so setting the stage for thirty years of bitter strife, not only against the denominational aspects, but also against the classical curriculum. There is also little doubt that much of the animosity directed at the college over the next thirty years was actually meant for its head.