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# METROPOLITAN CLEARING HOUSE

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## George Monro Grant

FORMER PRINCIPAL OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON.—A RETROSPECT BY ALFRED FITZPATRICK.

In the spring of 1901 the writer visited the "Limestone City" to pay his respects to his alma mater, Queen's. In the corridor of the Old Arts Building, between lectures I happened to meet, with all his conquering smile, the breezy, insipid, towering man, who was then its principal, George Monro Grant, endearingly known to his students as "Georgie". Holding out his left hand, his only one, he said, "Hello, Fitz, what are you doing, now? Come along into the Senate Room and tell me, it is quiet there."

I mentioned that I had spent over a year in the California redwoods and another year amongst the pines of Algoma, that I had discovered a new "America" where adult education was practically unknown, and had started a work in the interest of frontier labourers. The chief features of my work, as I pointed out, were: a separate tent, car, log or frame building where one could read and be entertained by books, magazines, and papers; and more important—a teacher, an unselfish, clean-living college man of any creed—as a fellow toiler, and as a leavening force amongst them. It took some of my friends in the Church many years to realize the significance of the Frontier College. Although I had withdrawn from its active ministry, they invariably referred to me as a "lumberman's missionary." Principal Grant soon grasped my point of view, that any work which would benefit the great illiterate masses of many creeds and tongues, living together in crowded sleep-camps and bunk-houses, should be primarily educational. "Splendid!" was his immediate pronouncement, as he hurried to his class: "Come to the house, stay with me tonight, and tell more about it."

Knowing Georgie's unselfish love of serving the "gals" and especially out-at-the-elbow graduates like the writer, I wondered whether he really approved of the work I had at heart or whether he was simply treating me the way he did the other alumni. My mind, however, was soon at rest that evening as we chatted before the open fire in his library. I saw the manner in which he reacted to my account of the life of the lumberjack and navy, as I pictured to him the bunkhouses of the Pacific Coast, Ontario, and Quebec—dark, badly ventilated and insanitary; no books, not even a newspaper, only the wrappings of medicine bottles for reading matter.

It was natural that such a man would be keenly interested. Only a few years previously he had lost his younger son from typhoid fever. Realizing that fever epidemics could be avoided, he had had himself appointed to the Kingston Board of Health and succeeded in effecting great improvements in the water and sewerage systems of the city. He was much moved by the recital of conditions existing in camps, and his handsome face shone with comparison as he fired questions after question about the shantytowns of northern Ontario and the loggers of the Pacific Coast. He was fully in accord with me as I advocated a reasonable day's work, a fair wage, and a modicum of educational facilities, under wholesome conditions for the men in isolated places. Repeating and emphasizing his sympathy with the work I had undertaken, he rose from his chair, took down many books from his well-stocked shelves, and gave them to me to add to the small number of travelling libraries I had already circulating in a few of the Algoma lumber camps. I felt that, however radical my plan then seemed for the neglected frontier labourers, I had the greatest Canadian of the nineteenth century wholeheartedly with me.

Next morning, as the Principal graciously allowed me to do most of the talking at breakfast, he beat me on the first course. In the midst of one of my sentences he blurted out: "But how do you finance your work?" On telling him that I had as yet no organization and was depending largely on my own small resources, he suddenly exclaimed: "I'll ask Shaughnessy to give you a pass." At the same time he told the maid to bring him pen and paper.

He at once started writing with his left hand, for as a small lad of eight he had lost the fingers of his right hand. He and his little chum had attempted to operate a new haycutter intended to do duty for the horses underground in the coal mines at Albion, near his father's farm in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. "Principal, I volunteered, 'I'll write and you sign it.' " "I can write as well as you can," was his reply.

Most people familiar with the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway will recall that George Monro Grant was twice invited by

his friend, Sanford Fleming, Chief Engineer of the expeditions bearing his name, to act as his secretary, and especially to indulge in an anachronism, in the capacity of "Cheer leader." Never was a greater game played in Canada than pathfinding a suitable mountain way for the projected new railroad—in the Yellowhead in 1872, and again in the Kicking Horse Pass in 1883. Pulling bronchos out of muskies, fording swift streams, climbing mountain ledges, negotiating impassable canyons, all tended but to increase his ardour. Grant was the life of the party. Most quites, muskies, and mountains held no terrors for this great pioneer. His "Canada from Ocean to Ocean," which is a record of the first Fleming Expedition, serves to remind the people of Canada of the heritage that is theirs, and is a plea, also, that the promise of a trans-continental railway made to British Columbia was practicable and would have to be kept.

While Grant was never a paid agent of the Canadian Pacific, it was a foregone conclusion that when he asked anything from Shaughnessy, another great leader of men, he got it. In a few days the pass arrived. This was the beginning of more than a quarter of a century of co-operation in the work of the Frontier College on the part of the railways of Canada.

There was one additional incident at the breakfast table that morning. I now recall that shows the selfishness so characteristic of the man. Not only did he voluntarily give me his own subscription to assist in my work, but also, although Queen's, herself, was then bleeding her patrons for money, wrote a few of his well-to-do friends asking them to contribute.

But Dr. Grant's kindness to the writer did not indicate that I was a special favourite. This brilliant and big-hearted principal knew every graduate and helped them all alike. He interested himself always in their advancement. When John Smith had preached in Brimstone for a few years without apparent success, Grant would always be more disposed to blame the town than the son of Queen's. He would write the presiding moderator of a vacant congregation in Plymouth, a much better place, and ask him to give Smith a hearing. To assist a worthy Queen's man, underpaid in the civil service, he would pack his grip, go to Ottawa, and sit on the doorstep of the head of the department in which this particular man was working, with the plea: "Stannington Jones has been in your office for five years and his salary is only nominal. He is, as you know, an honour graduate. His mother long helped him, give the man a chance to help her." So saying, smiling in his captivating manner, and poking the Minister in the ribs, the matter would be practically settled. Pleading for another was vastly easier for him than pleading for his own Queen's. And so he would often go through the long gamut of graduates, launched out into professions and businesses throughout Canada, wondering what he could do for them.

Although Grant was an excellent scholar, having headed all his classes at Pictou Academy and Glasgow University, he was also a masterly executive. He, perhaps, touched high water mark in his efforts when in one year he raised a quarter of a million dollars. On the occasion of Queen's golden jubilee, Sir John A. Macdonald, an honoured guest, in a congratulatory address, emphasized Grant's persistence in raising money, and added that he, himself, lost no opportunity to put in a good word for Queen's. Among other things he related the following: "On one occasion I was in the office of a well-to-do business man in the City of Toronto, and who should come in but the irrepresible principal, and, of course, he was after money. Seeking to evade his persistency, my friend said, 'Now, Dr. Grant, I gave you a subscription a year ago and that was for all time.' Knowing the need of Queen's, I took my friend by the arm and said, 'Tut, tut, man! give the Principal a little for eternity!'"

But the raising of funds, then as now, was a herculean task. Even with his outstanding personality and popular gifts it was always arduous, and it, perhaps, more than anything else, undermined his constitution. The writer has heard him say: "It is killing not to be able to look one's friends in the face without giving the impression you are after money."

Gratitude and service were the guiding principles of Grant's life. He believed that there is nothing on earth or in heaven greater than self-sacrifice for others. He felt he could accomplish most for Canada and the world by personally schooling young men at Queen's, yes, and young women too. When Miss Eliza S. Fitzgerald was refused admission to the University of Toronto in the fall of 1880, she turned her footsteps to Queen's, and was admitted by its chivalrous principal, who believed in the absolute equality of man and woman. While head of Queen's, he declined several tempting offers from col-

leges in the United States, because, staunch imperialist that he was, he believed in serving in his own country. He declined during these same years the editorship of the Toronto Globe. He was offered, too, the portfolio of Education of the Province of Ontario, which he declined, because he would not suffer his hands to be tied by any political party on the important subject of education, in which he, himself, was always a radical. He refused, also, the presidency of the University of Toronto that he might devote his life to the upbuilding of Queen's, a struggling institution, and that he might combat with the whole strength of his ardent soul, the principle of centralization in education—a trend that even today, forty years later, is still ominous in our provincial systems. Although strongly urged to do so, Grant, while doubtless conscious of the fact that his personality, brains, initiative and cheerfulness fitted him, above all others, for the posi-

tion of leader, disregarded the entreaties of his many friends throughout Canada to enter politics and to allow his name to go before the nominating committee of the Conservative organization in Kingston. This, too, despite the fact that it was common knowledge that had he so desired he could have succeeded Sir John A. Macdonald, then in failing health, as premier. He was an independent not only in education and in politics, but also in religion, and often drew fire from the other side of the house. The writer was present at a meeting of Synod in Toronto, when the late Professor McLaren accused Grant of sympathizing with higher criticism. But he was always able to defend his own laurels. Amongst other things the professor had charged him with adhering to the belief that there were two Isaiahs. In his reply, Grant showed that the differences in style and the historical setting pointed unmistakably to a second writer of the same

name. In a brilliant peroration he exclaimed: "A second Isaiah! What difference does it make? Would to God there had been forty Isaiahs!" Like Henry Ward Beecher, Grant was one hundred years ahead of his time, and led his generation. But he was at his best in fighting for another. Pleading in 1877 at the General Assembly held in Montreal in defence of his friend, the Rev. D. J. McDonnell of New St. Andrew's, Toronto, who was being tried for heresy, he flayed the men of his own church who could not see any sun shining for the great masses of the world beyond the bounds of Christendom. His impassioned eloquence on that occasion brought the General Assembly to its feet, and his triumph there will go down in history as one of the most striking instances of the power of a master mind to sway, at will, the highest assembly of a great church. His breadth of mind is also shown in his sympathy for all creeds. In

more to benefit and bless our com-

mon humanity? Personally, the Queen's graduates. Those who had writer thinks, on Grant's account alone, Canada owes Queen's a generous endowment. His far-reaching influence, his broad patriotism, and the unequalled service of this great educator to the whole "fourth" call for recognition. The question: "Where are the nine?" should be specially irrelevant if applied to

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