

1888

ROSE'S NATIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL SERIES. II.

A CYCLOPÆDIA

OF

CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY.

BEING

CHIEFLY MEN OF THE TIME.

A COLLECTION OF PERSONS DISTINGUISHED IN PROFESSIONAL AND
POLITICAL LIFE; LEADERS IN THE COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
OF CANADA, AND SUCCESSFUL PIONEERS.

EDITED BY

GEO. MACLEAN ROSE.



Toronto:
ROSE PUBLISHING COMPANY.
1888.

MCGILL UNIVERSITY
ARCHIVES
ACC. NO. 2345
REF. 41

142

+R 72

Ser. 2

CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY:

And subject as far as his scientific papers
and monument. The first however, has not
presented the number of words of his
and a more than satisfactory and handsome
view for his more and various contributions
to the science of his day. These have been
found in various volumes of reports on
which are various accounts of reports on
which are various accounts of reports on
which are various accounts of reports on

Dawson, Sir J. William, C.M.G., LL.D., F.R.S., Principal of the McGill University, Montreal, was born at Pictou, Nova Scotia, on October 13th, 1820. His parents had come from Scotland several years before, and, if the Biblical knowledge of their son is any criterion, they were doubtless good examples of that high piety and religious education which distinguish the Scottish people. Young Dawson seems to have shown an early interest in natural history and geology, and the opportunity for an intellectual career was placed within his reach. He attended the school and college at Pictou, and was then sent to Edinburgh University, where he took the degree of M.A. at the age of twenty-two. Natural history and practical chemistry occupied his attention chiefly at Edinburgh; and it may be supposed that he listened with deep interest to the fading echoes which would be heard then regarding the respective claims of the Wernerian and the Huttonian hypotheses in geology. Here he made his first attempts at authorship, which were published in Edinburgh newspapers. He returned to Canada in 1842, and accompanied Sir Charles Lyell in his geological exploration of Nova Scotia. He entered into the work with characteristic enthusiasm, and the valuable assistance which he was able to render to the great English geologist was not unrecognized. Sir Charles Lyell has paid many tributes to the abilities of Sir William Dawson as a geologist. He was then appointed to the direction of a geological survey of the coal fields in that province, and his report to the government proved a very valuable one. In 1850 his attention was taken, so far as the business of his life was concerned, from geology to education. He was appointed superintendent of education for Nova Scotia. It was a reforming period in educational matters in that province, and the new superintendent was entrusted with the work of putting a new School Act into operation. His interest in education, to judge from the articles which he published at that date, was not less pronounced than his interest in science. The work was, therefore, congenial, and the experience afforded in the task of administering the affairs of the Nova Scotia schools doubtless proved valuable to the future principal of McGill. His appointment to the principalship of McGill in 1855 marks the beginning of an epoch in Canada's intellectual development. It is not a matter of ordinary course that McGill should be the university she is to-

day, or that she should wield the influence that she does. It is a matter of surprise. The conditions which fifty and a hundred years ago favored the advancement of great institutions of learning in the American republic have ever been absent from Canada. The wealth which poured into the treasuries of American colleges has only been represented in Canada by dribbling subscriptions and small legacies. Our colleges have struggled up with the aid of trusty and generous, but seldom very wealthy, friends. The fortunes of McGill were at a low ebb in 1855, and Principal Dawson had an extensive work before him. The work of a college principal and president is supposed to be limited to the duties of administration, but the financial condition of McGill at that time made it necessary for the new principal to undertake several laborious professorships as well. His influence, however, soon began to make itself felt throughout the country, and the fortunes of the university steadily advanced. Its stability is now assured, and from being a matter of anxiety to Montrealers it has become an object of pride. That the result is largely due to the vast energy and administrative abilities of the principal there can be no question; and it is a significant fact that when the university came in sight of the horizon of prosperity he annually contributed to its resources by still retaining arduous and unpaid work which he had taken upon his shoulders at the outset. Leisure might seem to be an unknown experience in the midst of labors indicated by the foregoing, but in addition to many pamphlets on educational matters, and some excellent textbooks on geology and zoology, Sir William Dawson has published the following volumes: "Archaia," (1860); "Air Breathers of the Coal Period," (1863); "The Origin of the World," (1869); "The Story of the Earth and Man," (1873); "Fossil Men and Their Modern Representatives" (1880). As indicated by their titles, the three latter volumes deal more particularly with the vexed questions concerning the nature of man's first appearance upon the earth, and the apparent conflict between Biblical history and the result of modern scientific research. If his treatment of the subject is not in all respects satisfactory to the present schools of scientific thought, it is at least independent and earnest. Whether his interpretations of the archaeological facts bearing upon prehistoric man will stand the test of time or not, time only can show. At present he stands alone with regard to

that subject, as far as his scientific peers are concerned. The fact, however, has not prevented the scientific worlds of Britain and America from recognizing and honoring him for his many and valuable contributions to the science of the day. These have comprised an extensive amount of original research in biology, chemistry, mineralogy and microscopy, which has been distinguished not only for its high scientific merits, but for the attractive literary form in which it has been presented to the world. For many years he has been an active and esteemed member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and was elected president of that learned body for 1886. It was also through his instrumentality that the British Association met in Montreal in the summer of 1884, and it was at the opening meeting in the Queen's Hall that Lord Lansdowne announced the honor of the knighthood. The American Association testified to its appreciation of his scientific labors by electing him to the presidency in 1883. The recognition which Sir William Dawson's scientific attainments have received abroad, however, should not withdraw attention from the valuable services he has rendered, and is rendering, to Canada's intellectual development. With this every Canadian is more or less practically concerned. The fact that a united nationality can never be built up in this Dominion without an educational foundation has been recognized by a good many of our public men, but by none more earnestly than by Sir William Dawson. He early took a broad view of the duties and privileges of a university as an intellectual centre. Besides taking an active part in scientific and other societies in Montreal, he has paid close attention to the interests of struggling schools and colleges in the province, and for many years has been perhaps the most active worker in connection with elementary education. This latter subject has all the importance, in Quebec province especially, which he attaches to it, and his efforts should be more generally seconded. Like Principal Grant, he is also a strong advocate for the higher education of women, who are now admitted to McGill, thanks to the generosity of Sir Donald A. Smith. This sketch would be incomplete without a reference to the annual excursions of the Montreal Natural History Society. It is on occasions like these that Sir William Dawson's qualities as a teacher are well displayed. The members go by rail to some point likely to be interesting to varied

scientific tastes, and then disperse for the purpose of collecting whatever specimens, mineralogical, geological, or botanical, the district will afford. A few hours generally suffice to bring in a large heap of "booty," which is placed before the president, usually Sir William Dawson, who explains the nature of the specimens in clear and simple language. These excursions have been the means of awakening an interest in natural science in the minds of many who have been inclined to think that "the long, learned names of agaric, moss, and fern" were invented chiefly as a form of modern torture. Sir William Dawson is a pleasing speaker, and it is a tribute to the real taste of the day to say that he is always listened to with interest in spite of the fact that he does not indulge in the cheap fire-works of oratory. The charm of his address lies in this, that he conveys clear and definite ideas in clear and definite language. His pronouncements at convocation are always awaited with interest, and seldom fail to have a weighty effect upon the deliberations of the governing board of the university, or upon educational matters of the province when these are touched upon. His university lecture, a short time ago, on the question of examinations for the learned professions, was awaited by the friends of Protestant education in the province of Quebec with as much interest as British politicians await a premier's speech at the Mansion House banquet. This question, which affects not only the interests of the Protestant universities of the province of Quebec, but the rights of the English minority, is doubtless familiar to all who take an interest in education. The action of the Council of the Bar of Quebec bears with great severity upon McGill, and the Council is supported by the immense power of the Catholic majority; but Sir William Dawson has opened the battle for the Protestant universities in such a manner that there can be no question about the ultimate removal of the disabilities. He is relying upon a determined use of the weapons of irrefragable logic and appeal to the highest courts of the empire for victory. The battle will be a severe one, and it will result not only in winning security for the universities, but in establishing the principle that the rights of the minority in Quebec must be recognized. At such a crisis in the history of Quebec education, it is a matter for the deepest congratulation that such a man as Sir William Dawson should be leading the fight of liberty and justice. Canada, indeed, is fortunate in having able, broad-minded, and progressive men at the head of her principal universities. No other circumstance can tell so strongly in the future for the building up of all that is best and lasting in the nation. Like all growth, the effect of educational work is imperceptible to the observer watching its progress, but the growth and effect are there. When the historian in the next century takes account of the elements concerned in the development of Canada during this century, he will not neglect to mark the broad and solid lines of our educational progress attributable to Sir William Dawson.

p-600