

NOTES AND MEMORANDA

OBITUARIES

Alfred Burpee Balcom, 1876-1943

Professor A. B. Balcom, Head of the Department of Economics in Acadia University, died on September 21, 1943, at the age of 67. Born at Nictaux Falls in 1876, he received his B.A. from Acadia University in 1907 and his M.A. from Harvard in 1909. After serving as an assistant in economics at Harvard and as an instructor at the University of Minnesota, he was appointed in 1913 to the chair in Economics and Sociology in Acadia University. He was also appointed Registrar of the University, a position which he held until 1925. In 1930 Acadia University conferred on him the honorary degree of D.C.L.

A follower of Marshall and Taussig, Professor Balcom was nevertheless alive to the implications of "welfare" economics and the "institutional" approach. The *Athenaeum* pays him this tribute: "As a teacher, his sound thinking, balanced judgment, and unique style of presentation won for him the admiration and love of his students. Economics under 'Chirpie' became no longer a 'course' of intricate and complicated rules and systems, but rather an easily understood and vital subject with unlimited fields for research and possibilities for a life work."

In 1925 the Pollak Foundation offered a prize for the best adverse criticism of *Profits* by Messrs. Foster and Catchings. The judges were Wesley Mitchell, Allyn Young, and Owen D. Young. The prize went to R. W. Souter of New Zealand. Alfred Balcom was amongst those who were honourably mentioned, along with Alvin Hansen, Calvin Hoover, P. W. Martin, and one or two others. (See *Pollak Prize Essays*, Pollak Foundation for Economic Research, Newton, Mass., 1927.)

Professor Balcom took an active part in civic politics. He was more than once mayor of Wolfville. He was a member of the Nova Scotia Economic Council from its inception, and succeeded Dr. Stanley MacKenzie as its chairman in 1938. [I. M. M.]

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"Agriculture in Nova Scotia since 1870" (*ibid.*, vol. VIII, April, 1928, pp. 29-43).
"The Jones Report: An Interpretation" (*ibid.*, vol. XV, April, 1935, pp. 1-13).
"The Automatic Gold Standard and the Necessary Modifications" (*Papers and Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association*, vol. IV, 1932, pp. 123-38).

John W. Dafoe, 1866-1944

In the death of John W. Dafoe the Canadian Political Science Association has lost a past president and one of its most distinguished members. Although prevented by age and indifferent health from attending in recent years the annual conferences of the various learned societies, he

did not lose interest in them. Indeed, the *Canadian Historical Review* of September last contains an important paper by him on "Canada and the Peace Conference of 1919," and he had consented to address a joint meeting of the Political Science and Historical Associations next spring, though he said in his letter of acceptance that there had to be a certain "provisional element" about it.

He was of the company of Horace Greeley and William Allen White, of George Brown and John Willison, of the great personal journalists who have so influenced the climate of political opinion of North America. To him journalism was a calling, not a trade, and his editorial chair a trust, not a means of personal enrichment or a stepping-stone to higher public place. Only twice in sixty years did he leave his post for official public service—during the Peace Conference when he was press officer for the Canadian delegation, and in 1937-40 when he served on the Rowell-Sirois Commission. For forty-two years he edited and directed the Winnipeg *Free Press*, and under him its editorial page became the nearest approach to a national organ of opinion in Canada. In his later years his books and articles, and public lectures in Canada and the United States extended his influence far beyond the territorial limits of the nation. In part his influence was due to his forceful writing, and his constant insistence on moral and political principle in public affairs. In part, and perhaps in larger part, it was due to his personal qualities—his great capacity for friendship, his wide acquaintance with public men, his moral weight in any company, the affection and loyalties he inspired in the young men of parts whom he gathered about him.

He often remarked that he got the milk of the word from Edward Blake. Blake's liberalism was essentially of English origin; D'afoe's to the last retained a strong flavour of Manchester though modified by a North American environment. Liberalism was to him far from an attitude of *laissez-faire*; it was a faith to be fought for, a creed to be taught, a set of principles to be applied to the whole range of human affairs. And there was always a cause to be fought for—non-sectarian schools, free trade, equality for agriculture as against industry, Canadian nationalism as against colonialism, a Commonwealth of Nations as against Empire, the League of Nations as against power politics or isolationism. Even the Liberal party was to be judged by its faithfulness to liberal principles.

He was a democrat by instinct and conviction, as became a good North American. He always retained the frontier man's dislike of pomp and rank; he judged men by worth not place. He had Walt Whitman's belief in the fundamental equality of men and in the dignity and worth of the common man, Lincoln's belief in the soundness of the people's judgment in the long run, Wilson's belief in the capacity of the average man for education for citizenship in a democracy.

Despite widespread opinion to the contrary, springing no doubt from the strong stand he always took on political issues and the vigour of his editorial style, his liberalism was rarely rigid or doctrinaire. His

regard for facts and his sense of history prevented. As he put it in his presidential address to the Canadian Political Science Association in 1940:

The theory of the state as keeper of the ring within which conflicting interests fight out their battles under a general rule that it is nature's way that the race should always go to the swift and the battle to the strong, never was the governing principle of any civilized Government. There has always been a division of functions between the state and individuals, business enterprises and forms of corporate and communal organization. The line of demarcation shifts in keeping with the public conception of policy and the supposed needs of the country, and it is the business of Government to see that these adjustments are made after their need is clearly shown [*Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. V, Aug., 1939, pp. 298-9].

If in his last years he denounced socialism as he had once denounced high tariffs, and lashed out at C.C.F. leaders as he had once belaboured politicians of other political stripes, it was because he was convinced that the socialist programme was doctrinaire, that it lacked historical timing, that it demanded a regimentation of society which was incompatible with liberty, and destructive of democracy because of the improbability that the electorate would accept indefinitely the necessary regimentation except by coercion by the state.

To Dafoe's memory Canadian scholarship will ever be indebted. His writing is characterized by a precision in the use of language and an aptness of literary allusion and a quotation rare in these days of mass literary production. He did much to popularize knowledge. His passion for getting all the available evidence within the time at his disposal and his belief that facts and reason ultimately prevail led him into a wide field of reading, not merely for satisfying his own intellectual curiosity, but with a view to teaching the public the facts of history, of politics and economics. He was a staunch supporter of all education, but particularly higher education, a champion of academic freedom, a supporter of worthy intellectual causes and associations. And despite his very busy life as a working journalist he made considerable contributions to the permanent literature of the social sciences. Among Canadian political biographies his *Clifford Sifton in Relation to his Times* (1931), will stand up as one of the best, although as he said in his review of Skelton's *Laurier*, the definitive biography of a great man can probably not be written by one who knew him in the flesh. His *Laurier: A Study in Canadian Politics* (1922), is undoubtedly his most brilliant contribution to the literature of Canadian politics, and the best analysis of the career of Laurier and of Canadian party politics yet written. Many of his public lectures, especially those to American audiences, are highly useful interpretations of Canadian political development. Among these the three lectures under the title *Canada, an American Nation* (1935), delivered at Columbia University in 1934, are perhaps the best. At one time he contemplated a systematic work on the constitutional history of Canada and published several papers in the *Free Press*, but the pressure of time and his interest as a journalist in the men and events of the day prevented completion of the work. It is a great loss to scholars and laymen alike that he never completed his Memoirs. He had planned to

write them immediately after the Rowell-Sirois Commission, but the war intervened and duty called him to return to active editorial writing. He began again last autumn, but Providence wrote "finis" before the first paper was complete.

Yet he made no pretences to scholarship; he preferred to think of his contribution to literature and thought as that of a journalist. As he said, half apologetically, in an address to the graduating class at the University of Manitoba in 1923,

A journalist is hardly an authority upon anything—unless perhaps upon the appraisal of the drift of public opinion. His writings on economics are likely to be greeted by your professor of economics with a polite snort. Eminent lawyers disagree with his constitutional pronouncements. Preachers do not subscribe to his theological views. Transportation experts regard his comments on freight rates as wholly uninformed; and financial magnates consider his ventures into the mazes of finance as the triumph of reckless ignorance over prudence. And yet, in spite of all these limitations, the journalist must go forward laying hands upon these and other mysteries with a sort of reckless courage; and unless he is to fail he must out of his half-knowledge and his intuitions, his sense of values and his knowledge of life, tell a story which may not be accurate but is still true and which does not altogether lack suggestive power.

And yet he was never a mere reporter of events. Interested as he always was in the colour, the drama, the tragedy, and humour of the human scene, life always had for him a meaning, a meaning based ultimately on faith not sight, and it was the duty of a journalist to interpret events according to his inner light. The individual, whatever his trade, had a moral duty to himself and to society. As he said in the same address to the university students:

The most inspiring of sights is not the young man starting forth in the morning amongst the plaudits of his friends, alive with hope and ambition, fired with generous desires, but the grey man at the end of the road who has outlived individual hope and fear and yet "obeys the voice at eve obeyed at prime"—who has faith in mankind and in the future of the world and looks forward in the spirit to achievements that he will never see. It was in this faith that he laid down his pen. Many of the causes for which he had fought, among them economic liberalism and the League of Nations, seemed to have been lost by reason of human frailty, human selfishness, and the blindness of political leaders. Yet his latest editorials, even if tinged at times with strong denunciation of those he deemed responsible, were without personal bitterness and reveal that he had not lost hope in the ultimate sanity of mankind. The closing sentences of his *Laurier* are indeed a fitting epitaph of himself: "The end was fitting in its swiftness and dignity. No lingering, painful illness, but a swift stroke and a happy release. 'Nothing is here for tears; nothing to wail.'" [R. A. MacK.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In view of the date of Mr. Dafoe's death it was impossible to prepare a complete bibliography of his writings but it is proposed to publish one in a later number of the JOURNAL (Editorial note).