

ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM WALSH

By JOHN E. BURNS

(Read before the Nova Scotia Historical Society, March 1, 1940)

The sources of this paper are:

1. A collection of letters in the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese of Halifax. This collection is quite large, including letters to Archbishop Walsh from British and American bishops, and from various prominent persons; also copies of letters from Archbishop Walsh. Among the latter is a large collection made from originals now at the Irish College in Rome. As the rector of this college was Archbishop Walsh's representative in Rome, the letters are of considerable value. Later, when the Archives of Propaganda for this period become available, it will be possible to add still further to this collection.

As one reads these letters one remarks the difference in style between them and modern correspondence of the same type. The crisp and unadorned style of the modern business letter is quite absent. Attention is given to the form of the salutation and to various courteous turns of phrase. An example to illustrate the point is a letter from Sir Robert Peel. Bishop Walsh had written Sir Robert asking that provision be made for the religious needs of Catholic soldiers stationed at Halifax. Sir Robert's reply is written in his own hand, and is a perfect example of the formal business style used by one gentleman when writing to another gentleman, when the first gentleman had not the honour of the second gentleman's acquaintance.

Whitehall,
August 22, 1845

Sir Robert Peel presents his compliments to Bishop Walsh and begs leave to acquaint Bishop Walsh that although amid the severe pressure of Parliamentary and official business he fears that he omitted to acknowledge a memorandum which Bishop Walsh sent to Sir Robert Peel through the intervention of the O'Connor Don, he did not fail to read this memorandum with the attention due to it as well from the importance of the subject as from the character and station of Bishop Walsh.

This is the first sentence of a letter which goes on through four

pages, all in the fairly clear handwriting of Sir Robert Peel, and all in the same formal and correct tone.

In letters of congratulation and greetings for various occasions the same style is in evidence. Both British and American brother bishops addressed him as "My Dear Lord" or as "My Lord Archbishop."

2. The second group of sources is the newspapers of the time. There is *The Cross* and *The Halifax Catholic*, of which more anon. Also the Catholic notes which appeared in *The Acadian Recorder* are valuable, as are chance items to be found in such long forgotten journals as *The Evening Express*.

3. Many of the Archbishop's pastoral letters have survived. These reveal the mind of the man and his type of scholarship. As reading matter they are heavy and uninteresting, dealing with the duties of a Christian, and quoting the early Fathers in an extensive manner, but doing so in a way that fails singularly to hold the attention or fix the interest of the reader.

In this group should also be included the ORDOS issued to his priests by the Archbishop. The ordo is a calendar giving the feast for each day of the year, and the order for the recitation of the Divine Office for that day. Because of the variation of the date of Easter the ordo has to be composed especially for each year, and its composition requires a considerable knowledge of the laws of the liturgy. Though he could have used one of the general ordos, published by any of the large pontifical publishing houses, Archbishop Walsh preferred to publish one for his own diocese. This gave him a means of keeping before his priests and the authorities of various institutions, regulations which he wished them to observe. He added to the ordo a list of the parishes and institutions of the diocese, and of all the diocesan societies with their officers. His ORDOS thus contain a considerable amount of valuable matter for a history of his times.

The Archdiocesan Chancery Office possesses a number of both the pastoral letters and the ORDOS.

4. Still another group of sources are his notebooks. He started a new one each year, and many of them have been preserved. In them he kept his personal accounts, recording what he paid for a new stirrup, or to have his horse curried,

how much he gave the beggar he met at Clontarf, what it cost him to have new thatch put on the roof of the Widow Malone's cottage, after a gale had taken away the old thatch. We learn that he was quite busy in his parish beside Dublin Bay. Often he had three sick calls in the run of a day, and, with only the slow horse and team, this was a day's work. In these books he also marked down important anniversaries, and in these records gives us a glimpse of his love for his family and his friends. At times there are short entries which are very revealing, showing the deep religious sentiment of their author.

5. A final source is "The Minutes of the Wardens of St. Mary's Parish." The Wardens of the parish started a minute book in 1802, when Bishop, then Father, Burke came to Halifax. They continued to use the same book until they handed over their affairs to Bishop Walsh in 1842. The bishop then used it as a diocesan register until the time of his death in 1858. Thus this ancient volume is a first-rate source book for the history of the diocese, and especially of St. Mary's Parish, from 1802 to 1858.

WILLIAM WALSH was born at Waterford, Ireland, on November 7th, 1804. He was the oldest of a family of thirteen children. His ordination to the priesthood took place on March 25th, 1828, and, until he came to Halifax, he was stationed in various parishes around Dublin Bay, at first on the north side at Clontarf, and later at Kingston on the south. In the latter parish he was a very busy and successful priest.

Turning the pages of his note books we find under March 15th, 1842: "Dr. Murray's letter certifying appointment as Bishop of Nova Scotia." On April 25th, "Received letter from Dr. Murray announcing the arrival of Bulls from Rome." On April 25th, "Offered Mass for the repose of all those whom I have attended in their last moments during my curacy in Kingston." On April 30th, "Offered Mass for all my penitents and to obtain pardon for all the sins comitted by me since my ordination." Then on May 1st, "This happy day I was consecrated Bishop of Maximinopolis and Coadjutor Bishop of Nova Scotia."

The Archives of Propaganda will have to be opened before any real light can be thrown upon the events outlined in these brief notes. It seems probable, however, that the Franciscan, Father Dease, who had come to Halifax for a short time in 1839, had, on his return to Ireland, interested Archbishop Murray of Dublin in the affairs of the church in Halifax, and that the appointment of Bishop Walsh had been suggested to the Roman authorities by the Archbishop of Dublin.

Dr. Murray's interest in Halifax had one curious result. He was a primate, and wore a double-barred cross. When Bishop Walsh was consecrated it seems that his Archbishop supplied him with some episcopal vestments, for all the old episcopal crosses belonging to the diocese of Halifax are double-barred primatial crosses. The Archbishops of Halifax have all worn these crosses, so that by prescription the diocese of Halifax has now a right to a primatial cross.

Bishop Walsh left Ireland on the evening of September 30th, 1842, and was in Liverpool early the next morning. On October 4th, he sailed on the *Britannia*, and reached Halifax in twelve days.

Bishop Walsh was to be coadjutor bishop to Bishop William Fraser, and one of his first cares was to get in touch with his ordinary. Bishop Fraser had been Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia since 1827, having been consecrated in the June of that year. About the time of Bishop Walsh's consecration, Halifax had become the seat of a diocese and the vicariate of Nova Scotia had ceased to exist. Bishop Fraser was the first bishop of the new diocese, and to him, on October 21st, Bishop Walsh wrote as follows:

Since I had the pleasure of writing to you by Mons l'Abbe Frechette, Mr. Laughlin and I have agreed that the sooner we proceed to visit Your Lordship the better, as the cold weather appears to be commencing. It is our intention, then, unless something new and unforeseen should occur to prevent it, to leave here in the mail on Monday morning next, so that we may arrive in Pictou on Tuesday evening. I am told there is no regular conveyance

between that town and Antigonish and that the road is not in good repair . . .

This letter and the following extracts from the note-books tell how one went from Halifax to Antigonish in 1842.

Oct. 24th, "Left Halifax with the Reverend Mr. Laughlin for Antigonish. Arrive Truro." Oct. 25th, "Went from Truro to Pictou, thence to Little Glasgow." Oct. 26th, "From Glasgow to Antigonish, a most memorable journey. Was most kindly received by the worthy Dr. Fraser."

On his way back the Bishop stopped at Pictou, then at "Shult's Hotel on the lake," and reached Halifax in one day's journey from this latter place. It is too bad that a more detailed account is not available of this journey. One would like to know what made the trip from Pictou to Antigonish so memorable for the bishop and his travelling companion.

The months following his arrival were busy ones for Bishop Walsh. On November 4th, he took over from the Wardens of the parish the care of temporalities, and this body which had functioned for forty years, ceased to exist. A few days later he accepted the presidency of St. Mary's College, visited the institution, and drew up rules for its management. During the same month he is recorded to "have said mass in a barn at the north end" thus opening the way for the erection of St. Patrick's parish.

During the next two years many problems claimed his attention and called for a solution. However, early in 1844 Bishop Walsh became convinced that the most important and insistent problem was government of the diocese. Accordingly he set out for Rome, where he spent some time with such success that the original diocese of Halifax, which embraced the whole province, was divided in two. Bishop Fraser became bishop of Arichat. Bishop Walsh received the see of Halifax. A still further consequence of this visit was that after the death of Bishop Fraser, which took place in 1851, the see of Halifax was raised to the dignity of an archdiocese, and placed at

the head of an ecclesiastical province which embraced all the Maritimes.

In the Wardens' Minute Book the Bishop records that "In the beginning of Lent, 1843, a small cheap religious publication, named *The Cross* commenced." The paper was printed by John P. Walsh, address 3, Kinneear's Building, and later by James Donahoe. Several complete sets are in existence. The paper grew in size until it became a folio size publication. In 1854 its place was taken by *The Halifax Catholic*, published by J. & W. Compton. One volume of this publication exists, the last number of which is dated December 22nd, 1855.

The Cross is a valuable source of information. Most of the important events of local interest are described in its pages, and from them it is possible to correct many falsified traditions of those early days. However the chief purpose of *The Cross* was to instruct the people, not to record current events. It explained the teachings of the Church, corrected wrong impressions, and reproved abuses. Sometimes it contained items of European news, but these were generally quite stale. At times the collection of matter to fill its pages must have been a difficult task, and the editor seems to have regarded special events in the religious life of the people as a God-send. For example, in 1843 Bishop Walsh ordained three priests. This gave the editor a real holiday. For two issues his paper was taken up with the English translation of the ordination ceremony.

The editor of *The Cross* had a style which seems to us at least, as very smug, though it was usual at the time. It gives a touch of humor to his reporting. A good example is his story of Bishop Walsh's return to Halifax in 1845.

At half past twelve the noble pilgrim of the Atlantic (The Britannia) presented her gigantic proportions, making her irresistible way towards her station. Shortly afterwards the people were seen in hundreds making for the wharf. They looked with outstretched neck and eager eye among the passengers . . . At a quarter before one o'clock . . . a number of respectable gentlemen of the city

waited on his lordship, and were most affectionately and paternally received.

The "outstretched necks" of the local worthies, and their subsequent "respectable" appearance in his presence, must have deeply moved the good Bishop.

Bishop Walsh was interested in the publication of prayer books and catechisms to meet the needs of his varied flock. The most curious of these publications is a catechism in the several Indian dialects spoken in the Maritimes and the State of Maine . . . It was composed by a Father Ventromile, and is called *Indian Good Book*. The dedication deserves to be better known.

To the Great Patriarch, Pius the IX, over the whole world, Red Faces, Pale Faces and Black Faces. May the Great Spirit smile upon you, and the Universal Wigwam of prayer. May He hold the bad spirit, that he may not harm you, and all other patriarchs. May your great wigwam be strong wigwam to conquer all your enemies. May you get an abundance of wampum, venision and trout. Give a smile to all the Red Faces, to our squaws, to our papposes, to our wigwams, to our hunting grounds, to our rivers and our lakes.

The catechism had a companion volume called, *Of Ventromile Noble Book, Such as happened Great Truths*. Both publications have the approbation of the Bishops of Halifax, St. John, and Portland, Maine. They are written in our Roman letters, instead of the sign writing invented by the Abbe Maillard, and still in use among the Micmacs.

Chance has also preserved one copy of a catechism printed in French by order of Bishop Walsh. It appeared in 1855 and is called, *Catechism Pour L'Archidiocese d'Halifax*. Paris. *Imprimerie Adrien LeClere*. Only the cover and title page seem to be a special. The work itself is a standard catechism.

Only one work from the Bishops own pen has come to light. It is a tiny volume containing a translation of St. Francis de Sales' beautiful and profound work, *La Vie Devote*.

One of the curiosities of church government in this part of the world is that Bermuda is part of the Diocese of Halifax. It was in the time of Bishop Walsh that this arrangement was made. As often happens in such matters, it was a spontaneous thing, for Bishop Walsh, as the nearest British Bishop, was the logical seat of authority to which the Catholics of Bermuda could turn. The records in Bermuda are not complete. The government has records in its archives of a baptism and two marriages performed in 1850 by a Father Thomas Lyons. However Father Lyons was not the first priest to visit Bermuda from Halifax. Soon after Bishop Walsh came to Nova Scotia *The Cross* commenced to carry items of interest about the state of the Church in Bermuda. The people there subscribed to the Halifax paper, and they began to hold some kind of religious assembly to keep themselves united, and to prepare for the time when they would have a priest.

In 1842 Halifax was visited by a Father McSweeney, a noted Irish preacher. On his way back to Ireland this priest visited Bermuda, and is the first English speaking priest to minister to the people of the islands, at least as far as Halifax records go. Later Father James Kennedy of the Diocese of Halifax was sent down. He took eleven days to reach the islands. There is a tradition that he went in a fishing smack. The other priests who went before Father Lyons were, in 1846, Father Michael Hannon—later Archbishop of Halifax, Father Nugent, in 1847 and Father McLeod in 1848. After Father McLeod came Father Lyons, who seems to have gone to Bermuda to stay, and from that time on both Church and civil records in Bermuda are complete.

Father Lyons belonged to Ireland, but was ordained for Halifax diocese at All Hallows College, on March 8, 1847. Belcher's *Almanac* for 1847 and 1848 list him as having charge of the mission of Lunenburg and Chester. He died in Bermuda of the plague in 1853, probably before he was thirty years old. It is worth recording that the people of the parish at Hamilton, Bermuda still put aside a sum of money each year for the care of his grave.

Of all the undertakings of Bishop Walsh the one which has taken root most firmly in the traditions of Halifax was the opening of Holy Cross Cemetery and the building of the chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows in that cemetery. A cemetery was badly needed in Halifax. From 1783 the burial ground had been where St. Mary's Girls' School now is. In the course of time this place became full. In 1803 Father Burke complained to the wardens of the parish that on hot days he was made aware, even in his house on the other side of the church from the cemetery, that the place was "dangerous and infectious." Some thirty years later the wardens were still discussing the matter. They were even at the point of negotiating with the town for a new site!

Forty years later Bishop Walsh took action. On July 26th, 1843, two thousand men from the parish gathered at the Cathedral in the early hours of the morning. Mass was celebrated by the Bishop. Then a procession was formed and the whole company marched to the recently acquired site of Holy Cross Cemetery. They worked all day and by evening had the ground levelled and the paths made. The day is described in his best style by the reporter of *The Cross*. He notes among the spectators, "several elegantly dressed females." On August 31st a similar demonstration took place. On this day the chapel was finished. The foundations had been prepared and most of the timbers cut. On this day the whole building was erected and made ready for use.

This chapel is a most interesting building. Now almost one hundred years old, it is still in a good state of repair, and is used at times, especially during the month of November. The windows contain fragments of old glass, some of which is dated from the late sixteen hundreds. There is also an old crucifixion group over the altar. Both glass and statuary are evidently Flemish, and must have been picked up by the Bishop during his travels in Europe.

One grave in this cemetery has a special interest. It is that of Doctor Bartholemew Sullivan, and is to be found just

at the turn of the walk leading down from the front of the chapel. Until 1809 the name of Bartholomew Sullivan is to be found frequently in the Wardens' Minute book. He signed as being present at almost every meeting, but there is no record of his ever having said or done anything at the meetings. His open and placid handwriting is all we have to know him by.

Twenty years after the Doctor's death the Wardens note that his monument is in a mutilated condition, a "public menace," a "disgrace to the congregation." They thereupon resolve, "that in consideration of the liberal donations of the deceased to this establishment while living that the said tomb be repaired at the expense of the congregation."

When the Doctor was dead forty years his good deeds were again recalled, this time by Bishop Walsh. In 1850 the Bishop caused the remains to be removed from their first resting place to the new cemetery. He caused a table monument to be erected over the grave, and around it a stout iron fence. On the monument we read:

Inscribed by the Bishop of Halifax to the memory of Doctor Bart. Sullivan, a benefactor of St. Mary's Church, who died in the year 1809. His remains, transferred from St. Mary's, repose beneath this stone.

It has not been possible to unearth any information concerning Doctor Sullivan, than what can be gleaned from these church records, but it is indeed a curious dispensation which has preserved his name, so that it interests us even at this distance of time.

After the establishment of the diocese, Bishop Walsh began to organize it along European lines. That is to say, there was a Metropolitan Chapter with a dean, archdeacon and a college of canons. In 1858 there were ten canons listed in the ordo. The chapter was erected by a bull of Pius IX, giving to the Archbishop of Halifax in perpetuity the right to create canons. The same bull determined the choir dress to be used by the canons and in what their duties consisted. It is now many years since the powers granted in this bull have

been used. Halifax has no longer a chapter of canons, but, like other North American dioceses, has a board of consutors.

Likewise the Archbishop, as he now was, called the first Council of Halifax. During the last century and early in this one, church councils were held with some regularity. There were a number of Councils of Baltimore for the United States, Councils of Westminster for England, and Councils of Quebec for Canada. The council of Halifax was held in 1857 and was attended by the Archbishop, Bishop Donald Bernard MacDonald of Charlottetown, Bishop Colin Frances McKinnon of Antigonish, and Bishop Thomas Louis Connolly of St. John.

The acts of the council are mostly concerned with the administration of the sacraments. The disciplinary laws they contain are broad when compared, for example, with those of the Council of Westminster. The Acts of the Council have been printed twice. First they appeared in pamphlet form, under the title, *Acta et decreta Primi Concilii Provincialis Halifaxensis habiti in Ecclesia Metropolitana Sanctae Mariae, mensis Septembrii, anno millesimo octingesimo quinquagesimo septimo, Halifaxae, ex Typis Compton et Boden*. This was printed in 1860. In 1875 the *Actae et Decretae*, a collection of provincial decrees, published at Maria Laach, and printed in Fribourg, contained the decrees of the Halifax council.

These are a few of the activities of Archbishop Walsh. They are not exhaustive, nor do they give us a very good idea of what he did or what he was like. They are the facts that we learn from the documents available.

As to the manner of man he was, we can judge from his pictures. Several photos are in existence, and there is a full length portrait in oils by LeFon. It shows a slight dark man, with distinctive Irish features, a kindly expression, and an intelligent twinkle in his eye. Allison, in his *History of Nova Scotia*, writes,

He was scholarly and devout, and although at the time the feeling between Protestants and Catholics was occasionally somewhat bitter, the *British Colonist*, a newspaper owned and edited by Pro-

testants, said of him at his death, "The Archbishop was distinguished by his attainments as a scholar and a divine. In society the courtesies and affability of his manners and his conversational powers made his intercourse agreeable and instructive."

That his "intercourse" was "agreeable" has an unexpected confirmation. When Newman was founding the University of Dublin he decided on a certain Mr. Pigot as professor in the law school. Pigot it seems was a "republican" and so not acceptable to Dr. Cullen, the Archbishop of Dublin. Dr. Cullen tried to dissuade Newman from making the appointment, and as is related in one of Newman's letters, to be found in the *Life* by Wilfred Ward, Vol. I, page 282, Cullen brought with him, to help him handle the touchy president, the Archbishop of Halifax. Newman writes, "Dr. Cullen brought down with him to me an excellent man, the Archbishop of Halifax, Dr. Walsh, to dissuade me . . ." Walsh must then, have had great charm of manner.

He gave to Halifax a certain position, at least in church affairs, which it has never quite lost. What I mean can best be illustrated by an example. On the marble walls of the choir of St. Peter's in Rome is a plaque containing the names of the archbishops present on December 8th, 1854, when Pius IX defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There is Rheims and Trèves, Toledo, Milan and Florence, and the great patriarchates of the East, and among them is, *Guillelmus Walsh, Archiepiscopus Halifaxensis*. He had placed Halifax among the seats of the mighty.

Archbishop Walsh never enjoyed very good health. For a number of years, towards the end of his life, he resided at what was then St. John the Baptist Church, at the intersection of Mumford Road and the Dutch Village Road, across from the property now used as Mount Olivet Cemetery. Erected in 1847, this church stood in the middle of a pine grove, and its quiet and the fresh air of the neighbourhood seem to have benefited the Archbishop. Later this building was used as a school, but even then, and down to 1928, when it was burnt

down, there could be seen, high up in one of the walls a small window. This window used to give from the tower into the chapel. It was in the tower that the Archbishop, in a good Medieval tradition, had his room. Through the window he could see the Altar, and, when confined to bed, could still follow the Mass being offered there.

On August 9th, 1858 the *Novascotian* says that Archbishop Walsh "is suffering from a distressing and dangerous complaint." The *Acadian Recorder* calls it "a long, and painful illness." His illness came to an end in the night between Tuesday and Wednesday, August 10 and 11th, 1858. He died at "his rural residence."