
CHAPTER XIX

ANOTHER IMPERIAL SCOTSMAN—DOUGLAS

THOUGH the operations of the Hudson's Bay Company were carried on in British Columbia as well as in Rupert's Land, the Rocky Mountains formed such a barrier between the two that British Columbia, Vancouver Island, and the portions of the United States known as Oregon, formed an almost independent suzerainty under the Company. Of necessity the Transmontane region was largely left to a separate management. Thus there developed on the Pacific Coast a man, who in his sphere was as great as was Sir George Simpson—and he, too, was a Scotsman. James Douglas, the son of a scion of the noble House of Angus in Scotland, was born in Demerara on August 14, 1803. On the death of both father and mother the boy returned home to friends in Lanarkshire and was educated in Scotland. When only a boy of twelve years of age he emigrated with his brother to Canada, and, like others of his countrymen, became an apprentice in the North-West Company of Montreal. He grew to great size and strength, and his intellectual qualities entirely kept pace with his physical development.

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He acquired the French language, a necessity for those dealing with the French voyageurs, and did so as though by magic. Of a high determined spirit, he had also a remarkable faculty of dealing with men, savage or civilised. The veteran fur trader, Chief Factor John McLoughlin, of whom we shall speak again, took a fancy to the lad on seeing him in a party on Lake Superior. After the union of the two Fur Companies in 1821, young Douglas remained in that paradise of the fur traders—the Athabasca region. Here he learned to undergo hardship, and in three years he was sent by McLoughlin's wish to the rugged country at the crest of the Rockies, where Fort St. James stood on the mountainous shore of Lake Stuart. The master of the fort here was a warm-hearted and impulsive Irishman, James Connolly. McLoughlin went on to Fort Vancouver, then the great fort of the Columbia River, now near Portland, Washington State. At Fort St. James young Douglas gained experience of the hardships of the fur traders' life in New Caledonia. But his active mind could not rest satisfied with mere routine. He studied the geography, mountain and river systems of the country, and learned what was still more useful to him, how to carry on business with the different races of British Columbia, who speak many different dialects. Douglas became proficient in them all. James Connolly had married a handsome Indian maiden of the country, and Douglas learned to love the daughter, Nellie Connolly. No doubt the days of labour passed

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quickly by, and in time Douglas married the fair daughter of the fur trader, who became a Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1825. Nellie Connolly proved a true and clever wife to the young trader and lived to become Lady Douglas. Douglas had many adventures among the wild and revengeful Indians of the mountains. An Indian had murdered one of the Hudson's Bay Company men. Douglas saw that the case was critical, and captured and executed the offender. The Indians, enraged, overpowered his fort, when Douglas seized a musket and was about to defend himself with it. However, a half-breed woman, daughter of old Trader McDougall, spoke out in his defence and declared that the Indian executed had been guilty of murder and deserved death. The effect of the woman's voice was magical. The Indians withdrew ashamed and confounded. Douglas built a new fort on the river Skeena and called it after the old trader Connolly, who deserved the honour.

Now that Douglas had served his apprenticeship in what was a hard, but had proved to be a delightful school, he was summoned in 1830 to the West Coast to assist the doughty chieftain, John McLoughlin. In a short time he was promoted to be Chief Trader, and in 1840 was made Chief Factor, the ambition of every Hudson's Bay Company clerk or officer. He now entered on a most important work upon the Pacific Coast. He established a number of forts, examined the trade and possibilities of extension in the different de-

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partments of the service, and paid annual visits to all the forts under his care.

While McLoughlin was busy with his farms and local improvements about Fort Vancouver, of which we shall afterward speak, by a mutual consent Douglas attended to all works of negotiation and diplomacy. The energy with which Douglas pushed on trade up the coast aroused the jealousy of the Russians, who were then the possessors of Alaska. The Treaty of 1825 between the English and Russians had provided for the free navigation of all the rivers running into the Pacific Ocean from the British possessions. Douglas had pushed out a fort on the Stikeen River, one of those mentioned in the treaty. The Russian Governor succeeded in inducing his Government to withdraw this privilege, and likewise charged the Hudson's Bay Company with selling firearms and firewater to the Indians of the Stikeen. The Russian Governor erected a small fort at the mouth of the river, and when Douglas and his party appeared in their little vessel, the *Dryad*, at the Stikeen, forbade entrance. The *Dryad* withdrew, but sent a request to be allowed to enter the river. The Russian Commander refused, and the *Dryad* returned to Victoria. But the Scottish blood of Douglas was aroused. The Hudson's Bay Company appealed to the British Government and claimed £20,000 of loss. Negotiations ensued. The loss of money was waived on condition of a lease being given to the Company of Alaska from its southern extremity north to Cape Spencer.

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In return an annual rent of two thousand otter skins was paid to the Russian Government, and the lease was again and again renewed. Scottish pluck and skill again won the day.

In the year 1840 it became evident that a settlement of the International boundary-line would soon have to be made. The Americans were insisting on the 49th parallel of N. Lat. being adopted as marking the line drawn east and west through the sources of the Mississippi River. It seemed unreasonable to think that the country south of this to the Columbia River, which included Fort Vancouver and forts up the Columbia River and its tributaries to Okanagan and Fort Colville, all occupied for many years by British fur traders, should be claimed as American territory. Douglas, however, was shrewd enough to prepare for any emergency. His confrère McLoughlin, as we shall see, was to play a curious part in the negotiations on this subject, and it was necessary for Douglas to act with decision and skill in preparing for the crisis.

He decided to construct a fort north of the proposed boundary-line of 49° N. Before taking active measures, however, he sailed north to Sitka, the capital of Alaska, to take possession of the country for trade under the new lease and to occupy the two posts on the Stikeen and Taku Rivers. The character of Douglas was well illustrated by an incident on this journey northward. In crossing country from Fort Vancouver to Puget Sound to take the steamer *Beaver* to Alaska the rapid

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Nisqually River lay across the trail. It was in April and the river was swollen. One of the employees—Lassertes—was swept from his horse by the current and was carried down to the drift of logs and rubbish, to be taken into which would be certain death. Lassertes had seen this and had caught the branches of a fallen tree. The air and the water were very cold and the current so swift that the unfortunate man could do nothing but cling on, and this he would soon fail to do. The party were all appalled by the danger. Douglas could not see a fellow-mortal perish without an effort to save him. On his fine horse he dashed forward, urging him with spur and whip till he nearly reached the opposite bank, then springing from his horse into the water he dashed toward the man and succeeded in gaining a hold of the fallen tree, upon which he crept and descended until he could reach the man in danger. Seizing him by the coat-collar with a Herculean grasp he held him until a canoe could be obtained to come to the rescue. He was a man among brave men.

The new site selected by Douglas for the future chief trading-house, and incidentally capital of the British West Coast, was on Vancouver Island. Adopting the Indian name of the locality, it was first called Fort Camosun, but we know it to-day as the fine city of Victoria. Douglas pointed out the easy access to the harbour from the Gulf of Georgia, and also saw the adjoining sheet of water at Esquimalt, where, landlocked, a navy can ride

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in safety. This selection was made in 1842, and on his return to Fort Vancouver the new site was approved by the factors and traders in council assembled, and orders given for its construction in the following spring. About this time a most startling episode occurred which led to important consequences. Sir George Simpson was at this time on his journey round the world and had returned from the Sandwich Islands, between which and British Columbia there was communication. The world-traveller was on his way back to Sitka before leaving for the Siberian coast. On the approach of his vessel to Fort Taku in Alaska the Governors-in-Chief saw the Russian and British flags at half-mast. This marked a tragedy. The son of Chief Factor McLoughlin had been in charge of the fort and on the previous night a number of Indians had become intoxicated and some dispute over a question of trade had arisen. There were about two thousand savages assembled and the outlook was most serious. The total number of whites in the fort was only twenty-two, and what could they do against the infuriated horde of Indians? Several shots had been fired, and unfortunately young McLoughlin had been killed. On his arrival Governor Simpson interfered; but the Indians maintained that they had come with no evil intent, and that it was a few young and impetuous braves who had made the attack against the will and remonstrances of the "old men." The frenzied state of the Indians was further shown before the eyes of Sir George and the Russian

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Governor by the stabbing of one Indian by another. About a thousand infuriated savages turned out with knives to avenge the crime. The Russian Governor endeavoured to interfere, but would have failed had not the shades of night put an end to the threatened attack. The presence of the two Governors was fortunate. They had seen with their own eyes the danger of giving strong drink to savages, and they immediately agreed to make a treaty on the subject and to prevent the sale of rum at Sitka and at all the other ports upon the coast. The Indians could not at first believe that total prohibition had set in, but so it was. They retired in sullen contempt for the white man, and their opinion of the wisdom and common sense of Governors—especially one of them being Scottish—received a rude shock.

The year 1843 was thus a year of note—"annus mirabilis"—for the West Coast, when the suppression of the liquor traffic was accomplished. Notable also for the erection of Fort Victoria by Chief Factor Douglas was this year, the fiftieth since the arrival in 1793 of Vancouver with his ships on the Pacific Coast, and of Alexander Mackenzie overland from Canada. The Scottish people of Victoria—through the medium of their fine patriotic organisation, "The Sir William Wallace Society"—celebrated in 1893 the two events—the centenary of Vancouver and Mackenzie's voyages and the half-century from the founding of their charming city of Victoria.

Universal testimony is given of the felicity of

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this early choice of Victoria which was to be the capital of British Columbia. The situation itself is perfect, and as a spectator looks across the Gulf of Georgia he sees "the Olympian Heights," with the glistening water for a foreground and cloud-cut midway above their base, as they often are, they seem translated heavenward. "Never were mountains more aptly named than those by the early explorer Meares."

It was decided that in building Fort Victoria there would be no need of the three coast forts to the north—Taku, Stikeen, and McLoughlin. Fort Simpson, alone, of the northern forts was retained. Before his journey to the north Douglas had put his men to work on the newly chosen site, "culling and squaring timber and six of them to digging a well." He explained fully to the natives of Camosun that his object was to bring them "arms and implements, clothing and beautiful ornaments," which they might have in exchange for skins. This was most pleasing to the natives. It was not, however, till Douglas returned from the north with his reinforcements from the dismantled forts that real progress was made in the work of construction. The buildings were completed and the goods for trade were brought into them. Tidings of the building of the new fort spread fast up along the coast, and the Indians came in bands to see the novelty. It was observed, however, that they had not brought with them their women and children as the Indian generally does on his travels. This

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was looked on by the whites with suspicion, seeming to indicate warlike intent. However, Douglas had all told fifty sturdy traders and workers assembled at the fort, and no doubt this prevented any such disturbances as had taken place some thirty years before. Three months after the arrival of the force from the north Fort Victoria was completed, with its "stockade, bastions at the angles, and store and dwelling-houses within."

The possibility of settling Vancouver Island now began to dawn on men's minds. With its traditional policy of seclusion, the Hudson's Bay Company was not regarded as favourable to immigration. The Governor of the Company in England, Sir John Pelly, being written to by Earl Grey on behalf of the British Government in 1849, suggested Chief Factor Douglas as the most suitable man for Governor of the island colony. Instead of this the Government sent out a respectable man in Richard Blanchard, but gave him no salary, and provided him with no shelter on Vancouver Island. He was compelled for a while to go back to the ship that brought him, after he had been proclaimed Governor. He was a Governor without a people—a New World king without either crown or subjects. He made a journey up the coast to deal with a case of murder among the Indians. Boats and men were sent by the Governor to seize the offender, but the emissaries of the law found the Indian villages all deserted. Governor Blanchard's ill-starred reign soon came to an end, his resignation being

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accepted by Earl Grey. During his stay he had reported to Earl Grey that only one *bona fide* sale of land had taken place, and this was to W. C. Grant, a Scottish gentleman, who brought out eight men and with them settled in Sooke, some twenty miles from Victoria. The experiment was a dismal failure, and we are told that Grant, not being "the right kind of Scotsman to make a good settler," sold the property and left the country in disgust.

It was seen that after all James Douglas was, as Sir J. Pelly had suggested, the natural ruler of the island. Accordingly in November, 1851, the Commissioner arrived and he was sworn in as Governor of the island, the mainland not being included. But while Governor Blanchard had received no salary, Governor Douglas was promised £800 a year in addition to his allowances as Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Douglas thus retained the Governorship of the island from 1851 to 1864; during the latter portion of this time the lease of the island to the Hudson's Bay Company was recalled by the British Government. The mainland of British Columbia had also been held by the Hudson's Bay Company from the British Government. But in 1858, after the great Parliamentary investigation by a Committee of the House of Commons, this lease was cancelled. Douglas in that year became Governor of the mainland as well. Now there was the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island, with Victoria as its capital, and the mainland Province

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of British Columbia, with New Westminster as its seat of government. In 1863 Douglas was knighted, and by Imperial Act in 1866 Vancouver Island and British Columbia were united into the one Province of British Columbia, and remained so till they were admitted into the Canadian Confederation in 1871. A few years before the Confederation era Governor Douglas retired and was succeeded by a new appointee from the Mother Country. Sir James Douglas passed away, after years of service, honoured and respected by both British and American authorities. His public career was closely associated with the early history of British Columbia. His courage, manliness, Scottish shrewdness, and large and wide vision of public matters seem to the writer to be his outstanding features. It is well for a new country to have a man who can be its patriarch in the early stages of its existence. No doubt restless spirits felt it to be tyranny that one man should exercise such a remarkable sway as he did. He is suitably commemorated by a statue in front of the Parliament buildings of Victoria, and his memory is cherished by the people of the province of which he was virtually the founder.