

The Conversion of Sir Allan MacNab, Baronet (1798-1862)

BY

THE REV. BROTHER ALFRED [DOONER], F.S.C., LL.D.

Sir Allan MacNab, “the gallant Knight of Hamilton”, to his friends and admirers, and, to his enemies and his political opponents, “a bluff old Scotch bully”, occupied for over a quarter of a century a prominent place on the political stage of Upper Canada. In many ways, he was ever an interesting character, from the day of his sudden entry into public life, in 1830, until his last appearance in the House of Assembly in 1856, when he was carried in, with his limbs swathed in flannels, a victim of gout, to protest against the actions of members of his own political party who were crowding out the “old Chieftain” to make room for his young and active lieutenant, John Alexander Macdonald, whose star was rapidly rising on the political horizon.

In the church-register of St. Mark’s Anglican Parish of Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake), under date of June 24th, 1799, we find a record of the baptism of “Allan Napier MacNab of York (Toronto)”. That was the future Sir Allan MacNab. The baptismal ceremony was performed by the Rev. Robert Addison, who had already been rector of St. Mark’s and military Chaplain of Niagara for seven years. The infant MacNab¹ was then over a year old, having been born at Niagara, February 19, 1798. He was the son of Lieut. Allan MacNab, who had come to Canada as an officer in the Queen’s Rangers, and Anne Napier, daughter of Captain William Napier, Commissioner of the Port of Quebec. The MacNabs resided for some time at Niagara but had moved with the Government to York, where Lient. MacNab² was Usher of the Black Rod.³

¹ The MacNabs, one of the smallest of the Scotch clans, is thought to be a branch of the Macdonald family. Their ancestral seat was at Loch Earn in Perthshire. After the Battle of Culloden, in 1745, the estates of the MacNabs were confiscated to the British Crown, because of the clan’s fidelity to “Bonnie Prince Charlie”; so the last chief of the clan, who always proudly styled himself “The MacNab”, died in poverty in Scotland, May 25, 1816. Archibald MacNab of “Kennel Lodge”, Arnprior, Chats Lake, on the Ottawa River, Ontario, a relative of the last chief, came to Canada in 1823 at 42 years of age, and assumed the title of Chieftain. Sir Allan was inclined to dispute his right. The family motto is “Timor omnis abesto” (All fear be absent). Cf. *The Clans of Scotland*, by Smibert, p. 152, and *The Last Laird of MacNab*, by Alex Fraser.

² *Toronto of Old*, by Henry Scadding, D. D., p. 215.

³ The “Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod” was an officer of the Legislative Council of Upper Canada, as he is to-day of the Senate at Ottawa. He is sent to desire the attendance of the Commons at the opening of parliament, and he is responsible for arrangements for invitations, seating, etc. Bourinot’s *Parliamentary Procedure*, page 168.

Lieutenant MacNab, Allan's father, was an incurable spendthrift and for the non-payment of his debts was frequently in gaol. The sheriff was always on his heels. In the "Upper Canada Gazette" of April 14, 1798, published at Niagara, we read the following notice: "Two Hundred dollars reward! Home District⁴ of Upper Canada, Newark, April 14, 1798. Broke the gaol of this district on the night of the 1st instant [the 1st of April, let it be noted], Lieutenant Allan MacNab, a confined debtor. He is a reduced Lieutenant of Horse on the half-pay list of the late corps of Queen's Rangers, aged 38 years, or thereabouts, five feet three inches high, fair complexion, light hair, red beard: much marked with smallpox, round shouldered, stoops in walking, a native of the Highlands of Scotland." Such is the description of the person of Sir Allan Napier MacNab's father as given by the wag Alexander Macdonell⁵ the then sheriff of the Home District.

The money spending habit descended from Lieutenant MacNab to his son Allan who, as a young man, was, like his father, ever in debt and continually dodging his creditors. To keep out of gaol he was forced to turn his hand to manual work and so he soon became an adept at the carpenter's bench. He later turned successively actor, soldier, and sailor.

The MacNab residence⁶ in Muddy York was situated just off King Street in the woods, east of Berkeley Street,⁷ near the Don River bridge. One of Allan's sisters was considered "the belle of the day" in York society. A frequent visitor to the MacNab home was Laird MacNab, "the MacNab", as he styled himself, from Kennel Lodge, Arnprior, Ont.

Allan's family were members of the congregation of St. James' Anglican Church. In fact, most of the Protestant families of early York were members of the Church of England and, with the Governor, worshipped at St. James'. There were met the Baldwins, the Jarvises, the Macaulays, the Ridouts, the Chewetts, etc.

Young Allan attended the Home District School taught by the Rev. Okill Stuart,⁸ the pastor of St. James' Anglican Church, on the southeast corner of King and George Streets. That school was opened about 1800⁹, and young MacNab entered at nine years of age. It may be of interest to note that amongst his school companions were to be found several Catholic boys: Angus Macdonell and

⁴ The Home District included all the country between the Trent River on the East and Long Point, Lake Erie, on the West.

⁵ Alexander Macdonell was a Catholic. He was grandfather of the late Senator Claude Macdonell and great-grandfather of his Honor Judge J. C. M. German, of Cobourg.

⁶ *Toronto of Old*, by Henry Scadding, D.D., page 212.

⁷ The first parliament buildings where Allan's father was employed stood at the foot of Berkeley Street.

⁸ The Rev. George Okill Stuart was born at Fort Hunter, N.Y., June 29, 1776; B.A. from Harvard, 1801; MA. 1815. He taught school in Quebec, in Kingston from 1795 to 1799; at York from 1800 to 1812. From 1800 to 1812 he was rector of York; 1812 to 1862 was rector of Kingston. Died Oct. 5, 1862.

⁹ *The Parish Register of Kingston, Upper Canada, 1785-1811*, ed. by A. H. Young.

Donald Macdonell;¹⁰ Edward Hartney, son of the Barrack Master of York; Bernard, Henry and Marshall Glennon, sons of Dr. Glennon; and also the sons of the Frenchmen Belcourt, Hamell and Marian, famous bakers and caterers of York, in the early days.

Allan MacNab was but a lad in his 15th year when, on June 18, 1812, the Americans declared war on Canada. The “skirl” of the bagpipes awakened the Highland blood in his veins, so he shouldered his rifle and took part with his father in the defense of York when it was attacked by an American army under General Dearborn and Admiral Chauncey with a total force of 1600 men, on April 27, 1813. He later served as a midshipman on Sir James Yeo’s fleet, on board “The Wolfe”, in the attack on Sackett’s Harbor. He also played a brave part in the capture of Fort Niagara on the American side of the Niagara river, on December 18, 1813; and on the 29th of the same month, under General Riall, he took part in the burning of Black Rock and Buffalo. He was very active, for we meet him again in September, 1814, with Sir George Prevost, in the attack on Plattsburg on Lake Champlain.

The War over, he returned to York where he secured a position as a copying clerk in one of the government offices. He was soon, however, articled as a law student in the office of the Attorney General, the Honorable D’Arcy Boulton. As usual, he was ever in debt, so to bolster his finances he engaged, for a time, in real estate enterprises. Acting as a land agent for the Hon. Henry J. Boulton,¹¹ he undertook on Yonge Street, just north of Finch’s Corner, south of Thornhill, the foundation of a village to which he gave the name of Dundurn. The undertaking was a failure.

On graduation in law he moved to Hamilton¹² where he began the practice of his profession. At the time the town contained less than two thousand souls. His law practise and popularity grew rapidly. In 1826 he was called to the Bar, and he became the first Q .C. ever appointed in the Province.

His work must have been very remunerative for he soon bought Dundurn Park and began the construction of “Dundurn Castle” on a magnificent site overlooking Burlington Bay. The property, which cost MacNab £2,500, had been originally owned by Richard Beasley, who settled there in 1777. MacNab planned to make out of it a miniature of Dundurn, the ancestral estate of the MacNabs on Loch Earn in Perthshire. The Chateau in Hamilton, an immense stone building of 72 rooms, was begun in 1832 and finished in 1835.

¹⁰ Son of Hon. Alexander Macdonell, former sheriff, who was speaker of the Assembly from 1804 to 1809.

¹¹ The Honorable Henry J. Boulton was the second son of the Honorable D’Arcy Boulton. In 1828 he was Attorney General of Upper Canada. His wife was a Jones, daughter of Ephraim Jones, a devout and practical Catholic. Her name appears in the history of Toronto first Catholic Church, where she held a pew. She was a great friend of Sir Allan MacNab’s family, and Aunt of Mrs. MacNab. She was present with the Baronet when he died.

¹² Hamilton is named after George Hamilton (son of the Honorable Robert Hamilton) who moved to the district from Niagara in 1812 and bought land there. Hamilton became a city in 1846, with a population of 6,832 souls.

In 1829 an event occurred, which, perhaps, changed the whole course of MacNab's life and started him, all unexpectedly, on a long parliamentary career. He accidentally acquired great notoriety and sympathy on the occasion of what is known as the "Hamilton Outrage", by which is meant the parading by the Tories of the effigy of Sir John Colborne, the lieutenant governor, through the Hamilton streets. At the parliamentary inquiry which followed MacNab refused to testify, as he did not wish to incriminate friends or clients. He was, therefore, sent for contempt of court, on the motion of William Lyon MacKenzie, to the common gaol. He thus immediately became a popular hero, with the result that in the following year, 1830, he was elected Tory member of the legislative assembly for Wentworth County, which seat, or that of the City of Hamilton, he held for 26 years. He soon made his presence felt in the Assembly. In 1830 he seconded Mr. Sampson's motion to expel MacKenzie from the House. A life-long opponent of MacKenzie, and of his ideas and policies for democratic reforms, MacNab took a prominent part in the suppression of the rebellion of 1837. He organized the "Men of Gore"¹³ and led one of the three divisions of government troops that marched to Montgomery's Tavern on Yonge Street, to meet the rebels, December 7th, 1837. He was responsible for the burning of the "Caroline"; he pursued and chased the "rebels" who, under Dr. Duncombe, disturbed the London district. He captured numbers of them, crowded them into the jails, and sent many of them to the gallows. For his loyal services in the rebellion he was knighted in 1838. Wellington designated him, "The right arm of British Power in North America".

As a member of the Assembly he was ever busy. From 1841 to 1844 he was leader of the Tory opposition. From 1844 to 1848 he was a second time speaker of the Assembly. From 1848 to 1854 he was again opposition leader. In the latter year, on the defeat of the Hincks Ministry, he became Prime Minister of the Province of Canada and formed with Merin and Taché an administration which lasted for two years and settled the questions of Clergy Reserves and, Seigneurial Tenure.

In 1856, much against his will, he was forced to resign the premiership. Broken in health and in spirits, he went to England where, at Brighton, he gradually grew better. While in England in 1858 he was created a baronet. In 1860 he accompanied the Prince of Wales, later Edward the Seventh, on his visit to Canada. The Prince was received at Dundurn. MacNab settled down again in Canada and was elected to the legislative council of which body he was speaker when he died rather suddenly in 1862.

THE MAN AND POLITICIAN

Sir Allan MacNab was for years Hamilton's outstanding citizen. He had a wide circle of friends, and the leading men in both the social and political life of Canada were frequently and splendidly entertained at his hospitable board. He spent money lavishly and was a perfect host. In fact, like his father before him, his prodigality often ran him into debt. His large heart and his open hand, however, won him many friends and disarmed many enemies. In 1832, in the terrible

¹³ What was known as "The Gore" comprised the counties of Wentworth and Hamilton.

cholera which afflicted Hamilton and the other towns and cities of Upper Canada, he personally gave bail for all the impoverished debtors who had been shut up in the Hamilton jail. Because of his sociable and friendly nature, “he seemed to possess a charm all his own with his ‘ready’ wit, his good humor, and his devil-may-care manner.” An admirer has written of him: “His face was his fortune; he possessed a handsome person, a dignified manner, a graceful address and a pleasant voice. He had great physical strength and was both courageous and active. No difficulty deterred him, no labor distressed him. We need not, therefore, be surprised that he pushed his way successfully through many scenes of public life.”¹⁴

He had no great knowledge of the law; he was not an astute politician, or social economist; nor was he an orator; but he had an abounding confidence in himself and, like Caesar of old, he trusted implicitly his star of destiny. His political opponents cursed his “cheek” and his good fortune; they feared his aggressiveness and his fiery temper and dubbed him “the stormy petrel of the House.”

Sir Allan was an uncompromising Tory, was wedded to the old ideas of class privilege and autocratic rule, and was truly the last survival and the last die-hard of the Family Compact régime. Though stubborn and uncompromising in his political views, we must admit that his many fine qualities were remarked and appreciated by the public. It was no small feat for him to retain for twenty-five successive years the confidence of the electorate of the City of Hamilton and the County of Wentworth.

Sir Allan MacNab ever boasted of his loyalty to the Crown and of his respect for the authority of government. With the Tories, loyalty was supposed to be a cardinal virtue. How, therefore, he could reconcile his actions on the occasion of the passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill in 1849¹⁵ with his much vaunted principles of law and order, respect for his sovereign and the sovereign’s representative in Canada, and with obedience to the rightfully constituted government, has always been a puzzle to honest and unbiased historians.

He was the leader of the Tory opposition at the time, and as a result of his wild invective,¹⁶ his uncompromising stubbornness, his opposition to the will of the majority of the House and his inflammatory speeches, disgraceful riots broke out in Montreal. The homes of his political opponents were wrecked, blood was shed, the Parliament Buildings¹⁷ were burnt, with their beautiful library and state

¹⁴ *Life of Colonel Talbot*, by Ermatinger.

¹⁵ The Bill passed by a vote of 47 to 18, on May 9th, 1849.

¹⁶ MacNab disliked the French and he was ever raising the racial question. Speaking in the Assembly in 1849, he called the French Canadians “aliens” and “rebels”. Hume Blake, an Irishman of great power of invective, answered him effectively and showed who was the real rebel on the occasion. MacNab roared: “It is a lie; I am no rebel”. Then followed a scene of tumult in which the authority of the chair was disregarded, members indulged in disorderly cries and the people in the galleries added to the excitement on the floor by hisses and shouts.” From *Lord Elgin*, by Bourinot.

¹⁷ April 25th, 1849 *The Montreal Gazette* and other papers made frantic appeals to party passions and racial prejudice.

records, and Lord Elgin, the Queen's representative, was grossly insulted and pelted with stones and rotten eggs in the streets, by the English-speaking, Protestant, Tory mob.¹⁸ The die-hard "loyalist" Tories shouted "No pay to rebels!" and later they issued a manifesto,¹⁹ signed by the Abbotts, the Redpaths, the Molsons, the Galts, the MacPhersons, etc, in favor of annexation with the United States.²⁰ Consistency, thou art a jewel!

Of course Sir Allan saw the Tory fabric crashing down upon his head. The ideas of reform, championed by such men as Baldwin, Lafontaine, Hincks, Blake,²¹ etc., terrified him. The old order was being ruthlessly swept away, carrying him with it. In an effort to stem the torrent, he threw overboard to expediency his boasted principles of loyalty and thus marred by disgraceful conduct an otherwise honorable and useful public life.

We cannot agree with Stephen Leacock when he says: "The opposition of Sir Allan MacNab and the reputable leaders of Conservatism was based on a genuine conviction that the safety of the Country was at stake". We are inclined to believe rather that it was based, in great part, on racial prejudice, a warped and narrow vision and the hope of embarrassing the government, by inflaming the passions of the Tory mob.

ENTERS CATHOLIC CHURCH

The reception of Sir Allan MacNab, Baronet, by the Right Reverend John Farrell, D.D., bishop of Hamilton, into the Catholic Church shortly before his death, which occurred on Friday, Aug. 8th, 1862, came as a sudden shock to his many Protestant friends and Protestant political associate. This is not to be wondered at, when we consider what many honest but unenlightened Protestant people in Upper Canada, one hundred years ago, believed the Catholic Church to be. Three centuries of persistent and villainous anti-Catholic propaganda had done its work. Even today, many Protestants are suspicious of things Catholic. Only last week I read in one of our Catholic papers the following lines: "We must face the fact that many non-Catholics mistrust the Church. They suspect her aim, methods and her very nature. Vicious propaganda has caused this feeling to be deep-seated and widespread. Even among those who are friendly disposed towards us, there remain some lingering misgivings."²² If that is true today, matters were far worse a hundred years ago. Allowing for all that, Sir Allan MacNab's conversion would have attracted, perhaps, but little attention outside of Hamilton, and would have created but little commotion in the country, had it not been for the shameful and slanderous attacks made upon Bishop Farrell by George Brown, the bigoted and fanatical editor of the Toronto "Globe". The Hamilton "Times", a Protestant newspaper, defended Bishop Farrell and showed that the prelate had only done his

¹⁸ Following the riots in Montreal, the Catholic Clergy of Toronto sent Lord Elgin a letter of sympathy and loyalty.

¹⁹ *The Governors-General of Canada*, by L. J. Lemieux.

²⁰ Sir John Macdonald refused to sign the manifesto.

²¹ Hincks, Blake and Baldwin were Irishmen.

²² *Western Catholic*, August 4th, 1943.

duty when called by written invitation from Sir Allan to his dying bedside for “spiritual purposes”.

To George Brown and the “Globe” the Catholic Church was something not to be trusted. To him the poor “deluded” Catholic layman was an intellectual slave who dared not think for himself and who was ever the victim of wile, priestcraft and every deceit. Sir Allan MacNab in his dying hours, said Brown, when sickness had weakened his powers of intellect, was seduced by a “Roman” bishop into the betrayal of the religion of his fathers and into the renouncing of his Protestant faith. Brown seemed to forget that the “clan MacNab” was of Catholic birth, and that it had remained Catholic for hundreds of years, until the ancient faith was torn from it by violence and persecution. The clan MacNab had inherited, with the other Highlanders, the Catholic faith of Iona which Columba, in 563, had brought from Ireland to “Abyn’ Hills” If, therefore, Sir Allan did become a Catholic before his death, it was simply the return of a child to the paternal roof tree, the ancient Catholic Church of Scotland.

We are not inclined to blame much the uneducated Protestant layman who believed Browns wild and gratuitous statements. In every generation of the last century lucre-loving demagogues, impostors and religious fanatics, parading up and down the country, slandered and ridiculed the Catholic Church and excited the mob to violence against her. Strange individuals of the type of George Brown, Maria Monk, Margaret L. Shappard, Tom Heflin and “Judge” Rutherford regularly appear and disappear, even in our own day, but they are soon forgotten. They really represent nobody but themselves. Unfortunately, however, Brown in his day was looked upon as an educated man. The people felt that they could believe him. In reality, he was only a half-educated bigot. Week after week in the columns of the “Globe” he pictured the Catholic Church as a foul and deceitful organization, grossly immoral, the mother of every vice.

The reader may examine for himself the files of the “Globe”, which are to be found complete in the Toronto Reference Library. He will be amazed. As a writer remarks: “The merciless types of the ‘Globe’ tell the facts.” Yes; they tell us the facts regarding Brown’s ignorance and blind prejudice. Never before, or since, did any public man in Canada give such an exhibition of intolerance and stupid bigotry. “He pictured,” says Adam, a Protestant writer, “the Roman hierarchy as an odious system that menaced the well-being of our social and political institutions, and the public were informed that it was their duty to resist the enemy.” Now, in August, 1862, Brown had caught a Roman bishop at his nefarious work! Farrell, the “papist” prelate of Hamilton, by his wiles and craft, had seduced, in his dying hours, Sir Allan MacNab, a great Canadian public man!²³

²³ I must tell the reader that, by a strange irony of fate, George Brown’s own daughter became a Catholic after her father’s death. In 1917, Bishop Fallon of London, Ontario, met her in London, England, when he was in Europe on a mission for the Canadian Government. Cardinal Bourne of Westminster gave a reception in his honor. Amongst those who attended the function was a lady who introduced herself with these words : “My Lord, you do not know me and you will not believe me when I tell you that I am the daughter of George Brown, founder of the Toronto ‘Globe’. When I joined the Catholic Church I sent the story of my conversion to my

Strange as it may seem, these ravings of George Brown were believed not only by many a man of the street but also, as we shall see later on, by men of the so-called “better class”, men of education and social standing, members of parliament, members of the judiciary and others prominent in many walks of life. That is what we find it difficult to explain.

At all events, Sir Allan MacNab, as the lights of the eternal hills began to break around him, had, of his own free will, joined the Catholic Church. He had bent his proud head and accepted the absolution of his sins from a “Roman bishop”. Horrible!! It was clear, therefore, as already remarked, that in his dying hours he was the victim of a dark conspiracy. That was the only explanation. George Brown of the Toronto “Globe” had so decided, so he grasped his trusty sword and buckler, swore a solemn oath to “right the wrong” and plunged headlong into the fray. Sir Galahad was never more ready for the onset. Don Quixote never more valiantly charged a windmill! A fierce attack on Bishop Farrell immediately followed. The “Globe” fumed and spumed with indignation. Its columns were crowded with insinuations, accusations, fabrications, and denunciations. Bishop Farrell had lied! That was plain. George Brown knew it. He was shocked, and so he shouted: “We do not believe that Sir Allan MacNab told Bishop Farrell that he would join the Catholic Church and die in its fold.” He continued: “By a trick of a single relative, aided by the Catholic Church, the deceased had been made a Catholic while in a state of insensibility.” He boldly asserted, too, that Sir Allan would have been guilty of hypocrisy and dishonesty by remaining in the Anglican Church since he, had lost faith in its teachings and had come to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was the true Church of Jesus Christ. He should, to be honest, have become a Catholic immediately. The story of his conversion, as told by Bishop Farrell, made him out to be a hypocrite.

We may state that, as a rule, converts move slowly towards the Catholic Church. Much prayer and study must ever precede the final step. It may take months; it may take years. Grace acts quietly, is not precipitate. Few converts are struck down suddenly, as was Saul on the road to Damascus. It took Newman, with his giant intellect, from 1832 to 1845, thirteen years, finally to admit, beyond all doubt and cavil, that Rome was right. Such being the case, how can anyone accuse his fellow man of dishonesty in the things of the soul? Newman’s prayer: “Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead thou me on!” is the prayer of every convert.

Now, let us examine the facts of the case. Stubborn facts they are. To begin with, we may remark that Sir Allan MacNab was not without his faults and peculiarities. He was stubborn by nature, slow to accept a change, slow to admit that he was wrong. This is shown by his dogged and unreasonable adherence to “old Tory” principles when all the younger Tories around him were demanding a change of policy to meet new conditions. Afflicted with gout, he was rather bad tempered in his later years. He could, too, be violent and intolerant, as he was in Montreal on the occasion of the burning of the Parliament Buildings in that city. He was a strong character. His motto was “No surrender!” Yet strangely enough he quietly surrendered to Rome.

father’s paper in Toronto but the editor refused to publish it.” Testimony of Brother Alfred, F.S.G., who heard it from Bishop Fallon himself.

In the realm of religion, we must say, however, that Sir Allan was ever cool, deliberate and broad minded. He practised his own faith and he was tolerant of the religious ideas of others. He was never a religious bigot. Though an Anglican himself, he did not favor an Anglican State Church, which In Upper Canada would enjoy, at the expense of the other Protestant denominations, wealth and privilege, as did the Anglican Establishment in England. He admitted also the legal status of the Church of Scotland in the Province. In the House of Assembly, he showed himself friendly to the demands of the Catholics. It is true that in the House he defended the Orange Order, very turbulent and disorderly at the time, when Honorable Robert Baldwin and other enlightened Protestant gentlemen of the day, wished, for the sake of peace and order in the community, to abolish it entirely, but that issue was really political. There were many Orange votes in Wentworth County and the City of Hamilton. He had many Orange friends.

He seems to have ever possessed a keen sense of religious duty and respect for the things of God. Brought up in the faith of the Church of England, he was for years a faithful attendant at the Anglican Church (Christ Church), in Hamilton. To this the Rev. Gamble Geddes, pastor, bears testimony. He thus in public prayer offered public worship to God. He may have been equally faithful to the practice of private prayer. We know that he was a frequent reader of the Holy Bible. Prayer (his own prayers and the prayers of his Catholic wife and Catholic daughters) was, no doubt, at the root of his conversion. It is the source of every conversion. We all know the case of Cornelius, the Centurion of Caesarea, the first Gentile to receive the Faith, as related by St. Luke in the Tenth Chapter of the "Acts of the Apostles". We are told that Cornelius was "a religious man and fearing God with all his house and always praying to God".

No one who understands the Catholic religion and who has studied and weighed the Catholic influences that surrounded Sir Allan in the sanctuary of his own home, will be surprised at his request to Bishop Farrell to be received into the Catholic Church in his last illness.²⁴

Sir Allan had married, on May 6th, 1821, Miss Elizabeth Brooks, daughter of Lieutenant Daniel Brooks. She died prematurely in 1826. In 1837 (some say in 1831) he took in second marriage a very devout Catholic lady, Mary Stuart, daughter of Sheriff John Stuart of the Johnstown district.²⁵ She gave him a very happy family life. Her influence over him must have been very great, for their two daughters, the fruit of their union, were brought up in the Catholic faith and although their mother died in 1846, sixteen years before the baronet, when the daughters were yet very young (under ten years of age) Sir Allan never interfered

²⁴ Writing in the *Toronto Mirror* in August, 1862, Charles Donlevy, the editor, says: "The old Knight, even in the life-time of his truly Catholic wife, had frequently expressed his admiration for her religion and his conviction that it was the only true one. We were, therefore, prepared for the announcement that he died in the profession of the Catholic faith."

²⁵ Sheriff Stuart of Johnstown district was the son of the Rev. John Stuart, first Anglican Rector of Kingston, Ontario. He was, therefore, a brother of the Venerable Archdeacon George Okill Stuart of Kingston, who was the first rector of St. James' Anglican Church, Toronto. The "Johnstown District" comprised the counties of Leeds and Grenville.

with them in any way regarding the practice of their religion; on the contrary, he rather encouraged them, for, on their mother's death, he brought into his home, to look after his house and children, Mrs. David MacNab, his wife's sister, also a Catholic.²⁶ This would lead us to believe that for years Sir Allan had great admiration for the Catholic religion.

We might remark, too, that when his daughters sought Catholic marriages, Sir Allan did not interfere, but expressed himself as pleased that they might find life partners of their own religion. One of the daughters, Mary Stuart MacNab, married George, second son of Sir Dominic Daly, Sir Dominic was a well-known Catholic figure in the political life of Canada at the time. He became successively Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island and Governor of South Australia. The other daughter, Sophia Mary, married the Rt. Honorable William Coutts Keppel, Viscount Bury, later the 7th Earl of Albermarle, and we are told by Charles Donlevy in the "Mirror" that he, too, joined the Catholic Church. Sophia Mary MacNab and Viscount Bury were married in Dundurn Castle by Bishop Strachan, the Anglican Bishop of Toronto, assisted by the Venerable Archdeacon of Kingston, Uncle of the Bride, Thursday, November 15th, 1855. The bride, who was a Catholic, would not agree to the performance of the ceremony in the Protestant Church. With her decision Sir Allan concurred.

It is also remarkable that Sir Allan appointed a Catholic (Mrs. David MacNab, his sister-in-law) executrix of his last will and testament. Mr. T. C. Street was appointed co-executor, but he refused to act when he learned that Sir Allan had died a member of the Catholic Church.

On one occasion, some six months before his death, when entertaining his future son-in-law, the son of Sir Dominic Daly, Sir Allan invited Bishop Farrell and Father Edward Gordon to dinner at his residence, "Dundurn Castle". After the dinner, while they were walking in the beautiful grounds of the Château, the baronet told Bishop Farrell that he intended to die a member of the Catholic Church. The question of becoming a Catholic had apparently occupied him for some time. A rumor to that effect had been circulated, and the Rev. Gamble Geddes had challenged him on the matter, but Sir Allan avoided discussion. He knew only too well that his entry into the Catholic Church would provoke a storm of criticism; his action would be misunderstood, his motives misinterpreted, his sincerity and honesty challenged and he would lose many friends. He appeared ready, however, to make all necessary sacrifices. Months before illness he told the

²⁶ Sheriff John Stuart, on Jan. 2:1, 1803, married Sophia Jones, eldest surviving daughter of the Hon. Ephraim Jones (1750.18.12). Sophia Jones was a Catholic. Her mother was Charlotte Coursolles of Verchères, a French Canadian Catholic lady.

Of the union of Sheriff Stuart and Sophia Jones nine children were born : Charlotte, John, Mary, Andrew, Sophia, Henry Boulton, James, William Jones and Elizabeth. Mary married Sir Allan MacNab and Sophia married David MacNab, Sir Allan's brother.

Three of the Catholic sisters of Sheriff Stuart's wife married respectively into the Sherwood (Mrs. Levius Peters Sherwood), Boulton (Mrs. Henry J. Boulton) and Leavitt families.

Parish Register of Kingston, Upper Canada, 1785-18,11, ed. by Dr. Young and J. H. Coleman, Archdeacon of Kingston.

members of his family circle that he would resign all his offices, retire entirely from public life, leave Canada, and return to England where he would have Dr Manning (later Cardinal, himself a convert) receive him into the Catholic Church. His sudden illness, however, precipitated matters; he grew rapidly worse and so decided to become a Catholic without delay.

On the first or second day of the illness,²⁷ which terminated in his death, – before, however, he, or any of his friends anticipated any serious results, – he, Sir Allan, said to one of his most intimate friends “I am about to take an important step”.

Bishop Farrell, having heard that Sir Allan was ill, called on Tuesday, August 5th, at Dundurn, to enquire regarding his condition. Sir Allan, hearing that the bishop was at the Castle, insisted on seeing him and before his Lordship left, the baronet said that he had not forgotten the matter which he had mentioned some time previously. The bishop understood the remark and told him not to delay too long his entry into the Church.

On Thursday, April 7th, 1862, his Lordship received a letter from Sir Allan stating that he wished to see him “for spiritual purposes”. That was clear enough. The Bishop came at once, as requested, found the baronet very ill but in full possession of his faculties. At his request, the bishop instructed him briefly, had him pronounce an abjuration of heresy and renounce masonry,²⁸ heard his confession, baptized him conditionally and received him into the Catholic Church. That was Thursday, August 7th, 1862. Sir Allan died the next day Friday at 4 P.M.

In the register of Baptisms of St. Mary’s Cathedral, Hamilton, we find the following entry:

“On the 7th day of August 1862, we the undersigned bishop received the profession of faith of the Honorable Sir Allan Napier Joseph MacNab, Baronet, A.D.C., have absolved him from heresy and have given him conditional baptism, in presence of his brother-in-law Andrew Stuart, Esquire, and his sister-in-law Mrs. Sophia MacNab.
†John, Bishop of Hamilton”

It is to be noted that Bishop Farrell came at the written request of Sir Allan and “for spiritual purposes”. Bishop Farrell was sent for. Sir Allan in his sickness did not send at all for his former pastor, the Rev. Gamble Geddes.²⁹ Mr. Geddes was not even notified of the baronet’s sudden illness. He came, however, on Monday, Aug. 4th, and read prayers. He had heard down town of the serious condition of Sir Allan. When he called again on Thursday, the 7th, he was met by the news that the Catholic prelate, Bishop Farrell, had been there and that he had

²⁷ *Hamilton Times*, August 12th, 1862.

²⁸ In 1842, Sir Allan was Provincial Grand Master of the Masons for Canada. *Sir Allan MacNab*, by Melville Bailey.

²⁹ In a letter which appeared in the *Globe* on August 15th, 1862, the Rev. Mr. Geddes says: “the first intimation I received of Sir Allan MacNab’s illness was accidental on Saturday August 2nd”. When Mr. Geddes requested to see Sir Allan, Mrs. David MacNab told him that, if Sir Allan wished to see him, he would send for him.

received the baronet into the Catholic Church. As was natural, he was much upset by the “defection” of one of his leading parishioners. He insisted, however, on seeing the sick man and intruded himself uninvited into his room. There he came face to face with Bishop Farrell. The following Sunday the Rev. Mr. Geddes gave vent to his feelings in a pronouncement from his pulpit, in which he denied that Sir Allan had died a Catholic. In a letter which he wrote and which appeared in the “Globe” on Friday, August 15th, 1862, he, said: “I found that a ‘Romish’ bishop and priest had been admitted and had been using their art and machinations to subvert the faith of my poor old friend.”

All this is but a repetition of the case of the Honorable John Elmsley, son of Chief Justice Elmsley, an outstanding member of the Church of England in York (Toronto) and member of the Governor’s Executive Council, a public man of great wealth and influence, who in 1832, much to the chagrin and displeasure of Archdeacon Strachan (later bishop), in the full heyday of his splendid manhood, abandoned, for conscience sake, the Church of England, and entered the Catholic Church. Neither Sir Allan MacNab nor Honorable John Elmsley, both of whom enjoyed wealth, as well as social and political honors, as Protestants, had anything to gain materially by joining the Catholic Church, which in Upper Canada at the time was a small religious body without influence, made up almost entirely of poor, uneducated Irish immigrants, whom English landlords at home had robbed and pillaged and whom English law had, because of their religion, reduced to the state of serfs, helots or slaves.

The conversion of the Honorable John Elmsley in Toronto in 1832 raised a storm of controversy. The conversion of Sir Allan MacNab in Hamilton in 1862, also created, because of the bigotry of George Brown, a temporary disturbance. Archdeacon Strachan in 1832 said and wrote hard words. The Rev. Gamble Geddes was far more moderate, despite his use of the words “Romish” and “Popish”, against which use Mrs. David MacNab protested. Nothing, however, but sin can stop the mysterious workings of divine grace in the soul of man. Sir Allan MacNab in Hamilton (a Scotchman), as did in Toronto thirty years before him, the Honorable John Elmsley, (an Englishman), and as did, in Halifax, some years after him Sir John Thompson, Prime Minister of Canada (an Irishman); abandoned, at great sacrifice, the faith in which he had been raised and which he had been taught to love, and finally found peace and contentment in the bosom of the Catholic Church.

A writer in “Portraits of British Americans” writing of Sir Allan “MacNab’s last hours says beautifully:

“Much was said at that closing scene on which we can offer no opinion; much was published that we care not to repeat. Towards the end of his illness, when time was weary and death was near, when the shadows of evening were lengthening into night, when heart and flesh were failing, when his hand was on the latch and the gates of immortality were opening to his view, the clergy of the Church of Rome, by special request attended him. The mystery of these last days will not be made clear to us; we must be content to scan gently and not presume to pass judgment on what we can now see only in part, and what peradventure in this life, we can never understand perfectly.”

At Sir Allan’s funeral a scene was enacted which shows to what extent George Brown’s false and slanderous accusations were believed. Distinguished Protestant political and social friends of the deceased, men who had been for years

his associates and boon companions, men who had frequently enjoyed the lavish hospitality so generously offered at Dundurn Castle, arrived from Toronto, Kingston, etc., to attend the funeral and pay their last respects to their departed friend. Amongst these men were Chief Justice Draper, Chief Justice McLean, the Honorable Mr. Cameron,³⁰ Chancellor Van Koughnet, and others. When they learned, however, that Sir Allan had died a Catholic and that he was to be buried by Bishop Farrell with a Catholic funeral, instead of with Protestant or Masonic rites, they withdrew, leaving scarcely the pall bearers to lower the body into its last resting place in Sir Allan's private cemetery on the Dundurn Park Grounds.³¹

It is a strange and mysterious fact that few converts to the Catholic Church have escaped the charge of dishonesty and inconsistency. Sir Allan MacNab was no exception. Newman had to write his "Apologia" to defend himself against the accusations of Kingsley and others; and Dr. Silliman Ives, the distinguished Anglican bishop of North Carolina, who resigned his charge and became a Catholic, was similarly severely criticised. The story of their persecution and ostracism is the story of many who took the road to Rome... So will it ever be!

I shall now place before my readers as an appendix, the story of Sir Allan Napier MacNab's conversion as told by Bishop Farrell himself in answer to the attack made upon him by the Editor of the Toronto "Globe". The Bishop's letter bears the unmistakable mark of honesty and is a plain and simple exposition of facts. It clears the name of Bishop Farrell from the charges of dishonesty, wile and deceit, and, it should exonerate the baronet from all suspicion of hypocrisy or dishonesty.

The reader may judge for himself:

"(To the Editor of the Evening Times, Hamilton)

My dear Sir,

After all that has been said and published relative to the conversion of the late Sir Allan MacNab to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church, and his supposed or pretended return to the Anglican belief, an impartial public appears to have a right to expect from me a simple and candid statement of the facts of the case. Before entering upon the subject I must complain of the very unfair stand taken by certain journals, both here and in other places, in attempting to prejudice and excite the public mind by prematurely pronouncing judgment in the case, thereby desiring to force the public to draw conclusions which the evidence, when published, may not, and I firmly believe will not, warrant. I must note especially the "Globe" of Toronto, which appears to have lost none of its wonted venom and hatred against everything Catholic. This journal accused me of being neither careful nor scrupulous. It is not my place, nor my wish, to pride myself on any good qualities wherewith Gad may have gifted me, yet I shall not be deviating from the precept or example of St. Paul, if I

³⁰ "Hon. John Hillyard Cameron induced the Orangemen and other Protestants to go away peacefully". *Parish Register of Kingston, Upper Canada*, ed. by Dr. Young.

³¹ Sir Allan's body now reposes in an unmarked grave in the Hamilton Catholic Cemetery (Holy Sepulchre). When the city bought the strip of land containing the MacNab burial plot, the bodies were removed (1909), seven to the Protestant and eight to the Catholic cemetery. *Dundurn Castle*, by Melville Bailey.

defy the Editor of the aforesaid journal, or any of his rivals in the art of maligning, to convict me of anything criminal or dishonorable. I call upon him, then, to substantiate his vile and malicious aspersions on me, or to stand before the public in his true character, convicted and branded as calumniator.

I shall not, for the present, notice the many groundless assertions of certain other papers, nor shall I occupy time and your valuable space in refuting the absurd argument attempted to be framed upon what is termed by them the consistency or inconsistency of the late baronet. A man must always prove himself inconsistent by delaying his repentance. When he enters upon the path which he knows to be his duty, his act is consistent with eternal truth and though his tardiness may have been blameable, it is wrong to assume as the Reverend Mr. Geddes has done that he is necessarily a coward or a hypocrite when he does right at last. According to, this manner of reasoning all the first Christians who gave up their heathenism must also have been cowards and hypocrites, a conclusion which even the Reverend Mr. Geddes will not dare to accept. Probably the many prominent clergymen, the Willberforces, the Newmans who gave up their rich livings in the Anglican Church also to become Catholics, will likewise be set down as cowards or hypocrites. The public will understand that this mode of speaking of converts to Catholicity is employed because it is found to be a convenient way of avoiding the force of unpalatable facts.

I shall now proceed to state the facts which relate to the conversion of the deceased. Several months ago, while Mr. Daly afterwards Sir Allan's son-in-law was on a visit to the "Castle", I, with my Vicar General, the Very Reverend E. Gordon, dined with Sir Allan and his family. In the course of the afternoon of that day, whilst walking on the grounds in front of his house, Sir Allan stated to me, in the presence of my vicar general, his intention of dying a Roman Catholic. After this statement, no one will be surprised at my taking particular interest in his last moments, as my belief in the words of the Athanasian Creed is practical, that without true Catholic faith, no one can be saved.

On the Sunday evening previous to his death, I called at the Castle for the purpose, of visiting Mrs. D. MacNab and learned from her, for the first time, that Sir Allan was sick. On Monday or Tuesday I called, to enquire about his health and he, learning that I was in the house, sent for me. I visited him, and seeing that he suffered much, addressed him a few words of consolation, exhorting him simply to pray during his suffering. After a very short visit, when I was rising to take leave of him, he seized my arm, and said he had not forgotten what he had said to me sometime ago, I understood his allusion to be to the conversation in the Castle gardens, and told him that he should lose no time, and do at once what his conscience dictated to him.

On leaving, I informed Mrs. D. MacNab of what Sir Allan had said. Once after this I sent to inquire as to the state of his health.

On Thursday morning, I was informed by letter that Sir Allan wished to see me "for religious purposes," so I went at ten o'clock A.M. and was introduced into one of the lower apartments, where I remained for some time in conversation with Mrs. D. MacNab. Shortly after, Mr. Andrew Stuart (brother-in-law to Sir Allan and himself a member of the Anglican Church) one with whom I had had no previous conversation on the subject and whose feelings respecting Sir Allan's conversion I did not know, came down and informed me that Sir Allan wished to see me. It had been suggested to me before I reached the Castle that as soon as it would be known that he became a Catholic, many persons would say he was mad, wherefore, less there should be any doubt as to his state of mind and that I might have a reliable witness, I asked Mr. Stuart, in presence of his sister whether Sir Allan had full possession of his reason. Mr. Stuart's answer was in the affirmative. I went immediately up to his room and found him fully conscious. He recognized me and said he wished finally to become a member of my Church. After a short conversation with him on the doctrines of the Church, he made his Confession in the usual manner of Catholics. He then, in the presence of Mr. Stuart and his sister, Mrs. D. MacNab, in a strong and

clear voice, made his full profession of the Roman Catholic Faith, according to the formula used when Protestants become Catholics; whereupon I received him formally into the Catholic Church. I remained altogether in the house several hours, at least from ten o'clock A.M. to two P.M.

The Globe reduces the whole matter in issue to the settlement of two questions: First, was Sir Allan MacNab conscious and acquiescent on Thursday, when the Roman Catholic Bishop administered to him the rights of that Church? Second, was Sir Allan MacNab sensible when on the Friday morning he declared to the Reverend Mr Geddes that he died a faithful member of the Church of England professing his belief in the death of Christ as his sole means of salvation?

The facts which I have above stated, prove sufficiently that he was sensible when I attended him, and will be fully sustained by the two aforesaid witnesses, one of whom is a Protestant the other a Catholic; and whose veracity will stand a test more rigid than, perhaps, will that of my assailants. The "Globe" says that Dr. Craigie of Hamilton and Dr. Hamilton of Dundas agree in stating that "on Thursday Sir Allan could not give an intelligent acceptance to the rites administered by Bishop Farrel." No such testimony has been published, nor do I believe that either of these gentlemen has testified or will or can testify that, on Thursday, between the hours of ten and twelve o'clock noon, this was the case; for it was between these hours that the essential parts of my ministry were performed.

The Reverend Mr. Geddes says that Sir Allan declared to him "in his clear and lucid moments" his desire to die in communion with the Church of England. When I attended, he had more than lucid moments, but as Mr. Geddes thinks such moments to be quite enough to prove in which church the deceased desired to die, it is incumbent on him, to prove that he, Sir Allan, had not even moments of lucidness between the hours of ten A.M. and twelve o'clock noon on Thursday. The evidence which so far has been adduced does not, I apprehend, make out this part of the reverend gentleman's case. At this period, at least, I have shown that he was in perfect possession of his mental faculties.

After my departure, I am told the Doctors held a consultation and determined upon changing the patient's treatment. Morphia and other drugs, it is said, were administered, and if so, it is not in the least surprising that a change occurred thereafter. This will account for any change which Mr. Burton may have observed when he called late that evening. This was likewise stated by Dr. Hamilton to be the reason why Mr. Geddes was refused admittance that afternoon. Early on Friday morning I was again sent for as the messenger said Sir Allan wished to see me.

When I entered his apartment he recognized me, prayed with me, and spoke to me and requested me to remain with him. I gave him the benediction usually given in such cases. By this time I perceived that he was becoming unconscious, for which reason, anxious as I was to administer to him the Holy Communion, I considered he was too delirious to receive that most holy of the sacraments of the Church. I left between six and seven o'clock A.M. to say Mass for him in the Church. At noon, I learned to my great astonishment that the Reverend Mr. Geddes had been with him for some time, reading and praying. I deemed it my duty to proceed at once to the Castle, where I was informed that the Rev. Mr. Geddes had taken forcible possession of the room, notwithstanding the resistance of those in charge of the sick man. I likewise told Mrs. D. MacNab and Mrs. Boulton in the presence of Dr. Hamilton, who appeared to be of the same opinion that Sir Allan was quite unconscious at the time. It was enough to justify me, that in his senses he joined the Catholic Church, and that since that he had not abandoned it. Certainly, if I believed that having the use of reason, he had relapsed from his profession of Catholicity, I would have retired immediately; nor would I, on any consideration, have officiated at his funeral. I have good reason to believe that he was not conscious when the Rev. Mr. Geddes was present on Friday; and, indeed, it was currently reported through the City on that morning that this was the case. I have likewise good reason to believe that even in this delirious state, he did not acquiesce to the ministrations of the Rev. Mr. Geddes.

Mrs. Boulton and others who were present when Mr. Geddes says he asked the deceased the catalogue of questions which he published in his statement, did not hear Sir Allan give the answers attributed to him. These say that he was in such a condition that he could not understand or answer rationally the series of interrogatories which Mr. Geddes plied him so vigorously, that the Doctor then present thought them quite out of place. Indeed, one would naturally suppose from the manner in which the questions were put, as well as from their number, that the Rev. Mr. Geddes himself doubted whether the patient was in possession of all his faculties. It would be interesting to know whether the Rev. gentleman is on every occasion so vehement in his efforts to make the dying understand him when they are in their senses.

Mr. Geddes said from the pulpit that in Sir Allan's clear and lucid moments our dear departed friend expressed to me on his dying bed his desire to die in the pure and reformed faith of the Church of England. The public have a right to know what he means by clear and lucid moments, and will I think ask the question whether Mr. Geddes does not by these very words prove that he himself is at least doubtful about the consciousness of the dying man.

I have now furnished my statement of at least what I consider material to the present controversy, and I feel satisfied that a discerning and unprejudiced public, will, even from what has thus far been stated, see and admit that the charge brought against me, of having received the deceased into the Church in a state of unconsciousness is without the slightest foundation. I have now simply to say in conclusion that the relatives to whom I referred in this statement as being cognizant of the facts and circumstances which are alleged to have taken place in their presence, are ready and willing to substantiate my statements over their own respective signatures, if it be deemed necessary. But I feel assured that what is above stated will be satisfactory to the public and that they will not seek to drag into the arena of newspaper discussion, the afflicted relatives of the deceased, who, we all feel, have other subjects calling for more serious discussion.

To the editor of the Hamilton Evening Times, who throughout this discussion has shown me every fairness, I feel very grateful. I trust that the journals, that have attacked me so violently, will honestly repair the injury by retracting their aspersions and inserting the above statement which I believe will satisfy every unprejudiced mind that I perpetrated no "outrage" nor have I used any means "dishonest and unworthy". It will be seen that I acted in obedience to the call of duty, in accordance with the clearly expressed wish of the dying baronet. Yours Sincerely †John, Bishop of Hamilton, Hamilton August 16th, 1862."