

JAMES WILSON ROBERTSON;
PUBLIC SERVANT AND EDUCATOR

by

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ABSTRACT

As a result of rapid industrialization, urbanization and immigration, Canada underwent great social and economic changes in the final years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries. These changes affected many dimensions of Canadian life including those of agriculture and education. The hypothesis of this study is that no Canadian during this period contributed more to change in these two areas than James Wilson Robertson, 1857-1930.

This thesis, biographical in form and chronological in development, examines and analyses Robertson's career in agriculture and education from the time he emigrated from Scotland at the age of seventeen. He embarked on his first job as a cheesemaker in Western Ontario at a time when too little Canadian cheese reached first quality. By turning out from his factories a product which sold well in foreign markets, Robertson demonstrated that Canadians could find a large market for prime grades of cheese. The consequent interest in his methods presented Robertson with the opportunity to display and propagate those better dairying practices which, as they gradually overcame the conservatism of local dairymen, produced improvements in both the quality and quantity of Canadian cheese.

His initiative brought Robertson a rapid succession of promotions, from managing dairy cooperatives, to Professor of Dairying at Ontario Agricultural College, and finally, in 1890, to the newly created post of Dominion Commissioner of Dairying which was later extended to include agriculture. During these years Robertson taught students, developed travelling dairies, issued informative bulletins, and encouraged legislation governing standards of quality. In discussion and print he lauded the virtues of country life, preached the gospel of excellence and taught the principles of cooperation. Through a wide variety of educational techniques and devices, and with the aid of a competent staff, he regenerated Canadian agriculture, showed farmers how to exchange a subsistence wage for a decent profit, and brought about a dramatic increase in agricultural exports. In achieving prestige for Canada abroad, he also gained a national and an international reputation for himself.

Robertson firmly believed and constantly reiterated that agriculture and education were the nation's most profitable and beneficial forms of investment. By the early years of the twentieth century, having proved the value of agricultural education to adults, Robertson turned his attention to the rural young. At this point in his career his ideas coincided with those of Sir William Macdonald, millionaire benefactor of higher education. A fortuitous meeting between the two led to a plan for the improvement of rural life and education

called the Macdonald-Robertson Movement. This scheme combined elements from two prevailing educational philosophies: that which tried to apply in the classroom pedagogical principles deduced from research in child psychology and the social sciences, and the other which called for a more practical and less "bookish" curriculum in order to prepare young Canadians for life in an intensely technological and competitive age.

Sustained by Sir William's money and Robertson's enthusiasm and drive, the Macdonald-Robertson Movement (later known as the Macdonald Movement) provided school authorities, and the public with practical examples of the new educational ideas. They funded three-year demonstrations of manual training, nature study, school gardens, and school consolidation. In addition, Sir William endowed two teacher-training establishments, the Macdonald Institute in Guelph and Macdonald College of McGill University to train the leaders needed for rural regeneration. Robertson became the principal of the latter institution. The successes and failures, contemporary opinion and present ramifications of the Macdonald Movement form a large part of the study.

During his lifetime Robertson achieved wide professional recognition. The Dominion Education Association elected him its president. The Federal Government appointed him to the Commission of Conservation and made him chairman of the Royal Commission on Industrial Education and Technical Training. In 1913, this Commission issued its remarkable report, a landmark in Canadian educational history, which formed the basis

for Federal Government involvement in provincial technical education.

The thesis concludes with a summary of contemporary impressions of Robertson, a description of his war-time and other public and private activities, an enumeration of the honours he gained and a survey of subsequent historical writing in which his work is cited.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS IN ONTARIO (1875-1890)

James Wilson Robertson, born on 2 November 1857, in the village of Dunlop, in Ayrshire, Scotland, was the fourth of ten children. While he was still young, his oldest sister, an older brother, and his youngest brother, all died of scarlet fever leaving James the oldest boy in the family--a position of some importance and responsibility.¹

James' early formal schooling, obtained at the parish school of Dunlop, ceased there at the age of fourteen, after which he attended the Cunningham Institute, Glasgow,² before being apprenticed to a leather merchant in that city.³ A testimony written by the Headmaster of the parish school shows James to have been an excellent student. Dated 27 April 1875, and signed by John C. Lindsay, F.E.I.S., it warmly and prophetically stated:

¹ Ishbel Robertson Currier, Brief Biography of James Wilson Robertson, p. 1. (Mimeographed.) Box 1, Folder 2, Robertson Papers. Robertson Papers hereafter *cited* as R.P. with the box number the first numeral, and folder number the second numeral.

² See Chapter Six for further reference to the Cunningham Institute.

³ Currier, Biography, p. 5.

I have much pleasure in certifying to the character and qualifications of Mr. James Robertson, Hapland, in this parish.

He was placed under my tuition in his early boyhood, and by his diligence and close application, he soon acquired a thorough (sic) good useful Education.

His attainments are considerable, and his character and conduct deserve very special commendation. He has been engaged in a business situation in Glasgow for several years and has always conducted himself to the entire satisfaction and high approbation of his employers.

Altogether, I consider him a superior young man, very upright and trustworthy in all his dealings, and regarding whom, I have the highest confidence in his success where his lot in life may be cast.⁴

According to his daughter, Ishbel, (Mrs. Ishbel Robertson Currier), James Robertson often mentioned to her how much he owed to the business training he had received whilst with the firm:

He learned to keep accurate accounts and all the detailed commercial records that form the basis of any business enterprise. All his life he was meticulous in his records of financial matters and he seemed to keep a sort of running balance in his mind of the statistical aspects of his various enterprises.⁵

When James was seventeen, his family emigrated to Canada. Mrs. Currier gives the reasons for the move as partly religious and partly economic. The religious reason stemmed from a sectarian rift which occurred between James' father and grandfather and is well described in her Brief Biography. The

⁴ R.P., 1, 3.

⁵ Currier, Biography, p. 5.

economic reason was that:

Canada was a dairying country and the occupation of James' grandfather was that of a cheese importer in Dunlop. The family thus had their own farm background for training and also a contact with an available export cheese market for their produce.⁶

The Robertson family settled on a farm, "Maple Grove," near London, Ontario. There James took a job as Assistant Manager of a cheese factory at nearby Ingersoll. When the manager fell ill, James accepted the whole responsibility for the management of the operation. His efforts were so successful that his products won prizes at local exhibitions. The next year, 1876, James was made manager of the North Branch cheese factory near London.⁷

During the winter of 1878-79, he attended the college at Woodstock, Ontario, "where he received an inestimable impulse at the hands of that born teacher, Prof. S. J. McKee."⁸ On returning home he resumed his former occupation.

Leaving North Branch in 1881, he bought a cheese factory at Fullarton. Within a few years he was managing eight factories in Western Ontario, which made cheese for the export market.

A young man with tremendous drive, James taught new methods and tried to encourage the local dairymen to improve

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸ George Iles, "Dr. Robertson's Work for the training of Canadian Farmers," The American Review of Reviews, (November 1907), pp. 576-84.

their cheese production. Mrs. Currier writes:

With his energetic temperament and the deep seated strength of his convictions, James continually urged the establishment of more cheese factories, the production of more and better milk for this profitable market, the side line of pig raising to make economic use of the whey and always insisted on the highest standards of quality in every field.⁹

This matter of quality milk for the manufacture of quality cheese was important to Robertson both in his capacity as a cheese producer and as a cheese exporter. Most of the exported cheese went to Britain where it competed with the exports of other countries. Thus quality was vital, and James to the end of his life advocated at all times the continued quest for improvement in agricultural products.

There is no doubt that Robertson "knew his cheese." A note of commendation from Heath and Finnemore, London, Ontario, Produce and Commission Merchants, dated 22 February 1881, declared:

During this past three years while you have been at the North Branch Cheese Factory, we have bought some thousands of your make and we have pleasure in certifying to their uniform excellent quality, and to the universal satisfaction they have given to our friends in Great Britain¹⁰

Such educational efforts directed towards the development of cheese factories, and in the application of standards of quality in milk production, gained for James a reputation

⁹ Currier, Biography, p. 6.

¹⁰ R.P., 1, 2.

which did not go unnoticed by leaders of the industry. In 1886, his accomplishments led to his appointment as Professor of Dairying at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph.

During his stay at Guelph, Robertson travelled, as did other staff members, the length and breadth of Ontario, addressing farmers' institutes on his specialty, and making plain the necessity for intelligence in the planning of a sound, progressive and expanding industry. In his annual reports Robertson gives details of these visits and of his additional duties as Superintendent of Dairying for Ontario.¹¹ In the latter capacity he was closely connected with the Dairymen's Associations, and was a frequent speaker at their conventions. At the Annual Convention of Western Ontario Dairymen, 1888, Robertson spoke on the need for dairying education, a theme he was to repeat constantly in succeeding years. He believed this kind of education to be "a matter of life to the farmer" who requires to "know more of the principles of agriculture" in a period when "competition is keener." "I think," he said "dairymen should have as particular and thorough a training as doctors, lawyers and clergymen. Dairymen need it equally with them and may profit as much by it." Robertson concluded that the primary aim of education "is to enable a man to make a living"¹² His definition of the

¹¹ Annual Report of the Ontario Agricultural College contained in the Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Ontario, for the years 1886, 1887, 1888, 1889.

¹² Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1888, no. 21, pp. 90-91.

purpose of education was not to change, and he reiterated it in various ways throughout the many pronouncements on the subject which he made over the whole of his career.

To Ontario dairymen Robertson gave talks on such subjects as "The Hog as an Adjunct to the Dairy," "The Use of Ensilage," "Notes on Butter Making," "Experimental Cheese Making."¹³ Speaking at a Convention in 1889, Robertson urged the use of intelligent operational methods. He stated categorically:

I would not have a cheese maker blindly grinding out blind results by routine practice. I would have him so think out his business that his thought will go ahead of his curd knife or steam pipe.¹⁴

In his 1889 report, Robertson expressed his opinion that:

Until recently there has been no general, systematic or comprehensive effort put forth the improvement of the methods or the investigation of the principles that underlie those practices that invariably lead to success and profit. . . . The true aim of all operations are threefold I) the production of food in such a way as to leave a satisfactory profit to the producer II) the preservation and augmentation of soil fertility III) the provision of remunerative employment for the rural population.¹⁵

Of his service at the College, Robertson recalled that he learned a great deal:

The first year I was a member of the staff . . . I gave more than one half of my time to attending farmers'

¹³ Ontario, Annual Report of Minister of Agriculture, 1889, Pt. II, pp. 151-204.

¹⁴ Ibid., Pt. IV, p. 22.

¹⁵ Ibid., Pt. II, pp. 151-52.

meetings. I frankly confess that I learned more from what the farmers said, than they did from what I said. A man with an open mind cannot go to sixty farmers' meetings and listen to discussions and answer questions, and hear of the best methods of doing things without getting a college education of a superb sort¹⁶

With other members of the staff of the College, he was responsible for the writing of information bulletins which were made available to Ontario farmers. One of the first he wrote entitled "Care of Milk for Cheese Making,"¹⁷ described procedures for the better handling of milk.

In the summer of 1887, Robertson visited Wisconsin, a leading dairy state, where:

While going about . . . I saw every silo I came near. I learnt all I could from the practical men who had been successful. When I returned I got one built at the College . . . and proclaimed Indian corn and ensilage all over the province¹⁸

In 1886, the Ontario Government entrusted Robertson with the task of supervising the Province's cheese and butter display at the Indian Exhibition in London, England. On his return he submitted a most comprehensive and descriptive report to the Hon. A. M. Ross, Ontario Commissioner of Agriculture, concerning his experiences and observations in that country

¹⁶ James Wilson Robertson, Address on Education for the Improvement of Agriculture, Halifax, N.S., 4 March 1903. R.P. 1,3

¹⁷ Ontario, Dept. of Agriculture, Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, Bulletin No. 28, 1 May 1888.

¹⁸ Robertson, Address.

and in other parts of Europe. Denmark particularly impressed him. He stated:

For a small country Denmark deserves much praise for the long and thorough attention given to agricultural investigation and education. . . the Government of the country has financially and otherwise borne most of the burdens inseparable from the establishment and maintenance of educational means and facilities which have enabled the Danes . . . to gain the foremost place in the world for quantity and quality exported per acre The Government all along has maintained a friendly and fostering attitude towards the improvement of agricultural methods . . . and has given liberal grants towards furthering scientific investigation and the dissemination of sound knowledge relating to land and its cultivation, as well as to stock and the manufacture of their products.¹⁹

Danish governmental paternalism and leadership appealed very much to Robertson. His conviction that governmental influence was necessary in the development of the Canadian dairying industry was to come to fruition when later he became the Federal official who was to implement this principle.

During the course of this engagement in London, Robertson wrote a number of newsy and descriptive letters to one of his sisters. In part they form a social commentary on events and conditions of the time. Also made obvious in these letters is his supreme self-confidence. They were of course private letters and as such reveal thoughts which in public life had to be concealed with a mask of modesty. He wrote in one such letter of a banquet he had attended:

¹⁹ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1897, no. 6, p. 204.

"Fancy my surprise on opening the programme to find that I was down to reply to the toast of visitors Then the Master of Ceremonies shouted. 'Silence for J. W. Robertson, Esquire, I pray you.' I commenced, went on, got through and had the honour of being congratulated on making the best speech of the evening. I observed on passing that I received the best attention and the most frequent applause"

He concluded his letter with, "I'm often very tired but am doing good work for my Province and self."²⁰ A further letter informed his sister that he would be addressing a Dairying conference in Scotland: "Quite an occasion for a young fellow."

Inside the month he had been at the Exhibition:

"More attention has been attracted to the Dairy exhibition than during the whole season to any other department My letters to the papers and interviews with journalists have so won their goodwill, that I have made myself felt thro'out the whole of England."

His penchant for statistics led him to claim:

"The letters and notices have been copied into so many papers (leading and local) that already between 3 and 4 million of copies have been printed and the copying still goes on. I figured the other night that if all the press notices regarding cheese and butter which I have either written or inspired were cut out of several papers and joined into one strip, it would measure--how much?--over 400 miles long, and it is everyday growing."

That Robertson was becoming aware of his present and future value is clear when he explained:

²⁰ Robertson to his sister, (unnamed), 5 October 1888, R.P., 1, 7.

"If I wished I could stay here and enter upon a fine career, but I wish the quiet of Guelph . . . before I grasp what I feel now easily within reach."

Always the observer, James compares the "luxury and misery, opulence and abject poverty" which perhaps "nowhere else meet in such extreme conditions." He went to church and heard Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Henry Ward Beecher evangelize. He hinted at the darker side of London life. "The mental and spiritual advantages are offered here at their best, while moral and physical temptations attend their elbows." He works very hard, becomes very tired but gives indication that he is a just supervisor. "You may know I'm good to the five girls I have working for me."²¹

Robertson's term of duty at Guelph was not continuous. The Principal's report for 1888 noted that:

Early in the year J. W. Robertson, Professor of Dairying, left us to engage in the produce business in Montreal; but we are glad to report that he has just returned and will henceforth devote his undivided attention to the work of the college and to the dairy interest throughout the Province.²²

During the period of his absence Robertson went into business as a produce broker in partnership with his father in Montreal. Unfortunately, this particular venture failed and expected profits were displaced by debts which threatened Robertson with the prospect of a court action. In a letter

²¹ Robertson to his sister, 22 October 1888, R.P., 1, 7.

²² Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1888, no. 16, p. 7.

to his debtor, Robertson pleaded for a chance to pay off the money that was owed. He stated:

"You will suffer no loss by waiting and giving me a chance to pay my share without legal proceedings. I will give you a written acknowledgement setting forth the amount. Will insure my life in your favour for a sum sufficient to protect you in case of my death. . . ."

Anxious to protect his reputation, he continued,

"it will be very hard on me, if you insist on carrying the matter to court. I do not fear any reflections being cast upon, or left on my integrity and honesty; but the public is sensitive and the bringing of such a case into court and the press would damage my standing among dairymen and might lead to my being compelled to give up this situation. By sending the case to court you gain nothing while I suffer . . . I await your reply with anxiety as this matter being in suspense is playing the mischief with my power for work."²³

Since nothing apparently came of it, the problem must have been resolved but Robertson had been frightened. He knew of the mischief, as well as of the good, the press could do to him. As a result, all through his life he was careful to court journalists. Furthermore, his future business speculations involved more secure investments in mining stocks and property.²⁴

When visiting Wisconsin over the years, Robertson became friendly with W. H. Hoard, publisher of Hoard's Dairyman, and later Governor of that state. Hoard was a frequent visitor and speaker at Ontario Dairymen's Conventions. It was,

²³ Robertson to W. H. Clark, 7 November 1888, R.P., 1, 4.

²⁴ Mining stock certificates and details of property transactions are among his papers, R.P., 1, 6.

therefore, in recognition of Robertson's being an expert in the field of dairying that Hoard tried to persuade him to live and work in the United States and especially in the dairying state of Wisconsin. In reply to a letter from Hoard requesting that he consider this Robertson replied:

"With the native caution of a canny Scot added to by ten years of thinking experience, I have been slow to answer your direct enquiry as to whether I could be induced to settle in the United States . . . I could do my work . . . over there as here. The otherside is. Our people need a man like me . . . (sic) But as they have some men almost ready to do my work, if the larger field on your side would give me enough opportunity to earn \$3,000 a year I would go over and earn it. I can get only \$2,000 here. Later in life if not soon, I believe I shall go to your side or back to England."²⁵

Robertson was beginning to measure his worth in terms of dollars and cents and not for the first time, or the last, would the question of salary enter into his thought.

To gain more experience and to augment his income, Robertson lectured in vacation periods at Cornell University. This appointment he acknowledges as being due to the good offices of Hoard.²⁶ He wrote of his experiences in a letter to his sister:

"Cornell, with all its grand equipment, good men and earnest students is now a memory to me as pleasant as the visit was in anticipation. From the first entrance within its campus my experiences were only pleasurable. The agricultural students were very kind to me and very appreciative. Of course I am learning to lecture as well . . . Today two students presented

²⁵ Robertson to Hoard, 15 September 1888, R.P., 1, 3.

²⁶ Robertson to Hoard, 26 November 1888, R.P., 1, 3.

me with a beautiful cane and the Agricultural class trudges . . . through some mud to give me a send off at the station. T'would have done you good to see and hear these young men cheer"27

The experience gained in these years was to form the basis of Robertson's future career. He gained an excellent grasp of the dairy industry, much practical experience in public speaking, in writing official reports, in teaching, and in organization. In short, he had thoroughly prepared himself for what he had earlier told his sister was "now easily within reach."

27 Robertson to his sister 14 April 1889, R.P., 1, 3.

CHAPTER II

SERVICE WITH THE DOMINION GOVERNMENT (1890-1904)

By any standard of measurement, Robertson was becoming, by the late 1880's, a well-known man in the eastern part of Canada and in areas of the United States. His work with the Dairymen's Associations of Ontario was appreciated and his advice actively sought by the dairymen of that province. Thus it was, while making a speech at the annual meeting of the Ontario Dairymen's Association at Smith's Falls, in 1889, on the pressing need for cold storage facilities on ships carrying Canadian produce to England, that Robertson came to the notice of the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, who shared the platform with him. Of this occasion Mrs. Currier writes:

After the meeting Sir John asked him if he could develop such cold storage facilities if there were a government subsidy arranged for the purpose. Without hesitation James said yes, he could. This no doubt influenced his appointment to the position of Dairy Commissioner for Canada in 1890.¹

This position was created by the Dominion Government in response to the efforts of W. H. Lynch, of Danville, Quebec,

¹ Currier, Brief Biography, p. 7.

who advocated the appointment of an official whose duty it would be to promote the dairying industry of the Dominion. Lynch wrote a series of articles on the dairying industry and the Dominion Government, recognizing Lynch's interest, bought 75,000 copies of his pamphlet, Scientific Dairy Practice, for \$4,500, and distributed them to dairy farmers.²

Lynch also lectured frequently at Dairymen's meetings. At the Eastern Ontario Dairymen's Convention, 1886, he presented a masterly statistical analysis based on the exports and imports of eighteen countries during the previous fifteen years, and offered a prognosis for future developments in Canadian dairying. Furthermore, his suggestion that the various provincial associations of dairymen should appoint delegates to a general conference came to fruition in 1889.³

On 9 April 1889, representations of the dairying industries of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and the North West Territories, met in the House of Commons, Ottawa, and formed "The Dairymen's Association of the Dominion of Canada."

A deputation from the newly formed association waited upon the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, and other members of the Cabinet. The deputation made two specific

² For details of the initiatory movement which led to the creation of the office of Dairy Commissioner see Canada, Sessional Papers, 1891, no. 6D, pp. 1-8.

³ Annual Convention of the Dairymen's Association of Eastern Canada, Proceedings, 1886, pp. 124-25.

requests: first, that a grant of \$3,000 be made to the new Association and, second, that a Dairy Commissioner should be appointed.⁴ A spokesman for the delegation was James Robertson who later informed his sister:

"As usual your humble brother was the main spokesman A dozen or more members told me afterwards that mine was the best speech ever delivered before the committee. Sir John A. was very kind and gave me (apparently) a most appreciative hearing . . . and asked me to submit in writing to him a memorandum of all that I had urged. I got off one good joke on the old man at which he laughed heartily The Government need and want a man quite badly to undertake the work of Commissioner of Dairying for the Dominion. I happen to be the only man quite big enough and of the right shape to fill the place, but, I begin to value my services in dollars very highly. Whoever fills the place . . . will get a reputation from Newfoundland to Vancouver and the chance of a trip to Europe, Japan, South America etc. etc."⁵

Both requests were granted, but as a preliminary step the Association was asked to name a committee to confer with the Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable John Carling, with respect to the selection of a Dairy Commissioner. The committee selected Robertson to fill the post on a three year basis, with J. C. Chapais as Assistant Commissioner, with Quebec his area of special responsibility.⁶

Robertson was the logical choice for Commissioner; as he had explained to his sister, he was the only man "of the right shape" to fill the post. His work in Ontario, the leading

⁴ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1891, no. 6D, pp. 1-8.

⁵ Robertson to his sister 14 April 1889, R.P., 1, 3.

⁶ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1891, no. 6D, pp. 1-8.

province, told in his favour. There he had proven himself as a cheese manufacturer, as manager, as an administrator, and as a publicist. He was known both in Canada and abroad. He had the common touch, was popular, was friendly with the press, was a Presbyterian in a day when such an affiliation counted socially, and he was a Scot, a considerable asset among an ethnic group which played a very large part in the political, economic, and social life of the Dominion.

On his resignation from Ontario Agricultural College, he was presented with a paper knife and book, as tokens of esteem from some members of the staff there. In an accompanying letter they declared:

"During the whole period of your term of office here we have observed with much satisfaction and pride the success which you brought to your own special departments and the prestige which came along with this success to the entire Institution.

"In view of this fact and of the very pleasant relations that have all along subsisted between us, we feel that we would be errant in our duty and privilege if we allowed you to go to another sphere of labour without giving you a token of the true and deep regard that we bear towards you . . . also of our sense of loss in knowing that so much of manly, honest, sterling worth is going from us."⁷

Such was the respect in which James Robertson was held by his associates then, and in the future.

In congratulating the Minister for Agriculture in the House of Commons, a member expressed his appreciation of the Government's initiation of the post, stating that the selection

⁷ Letter from members of the Staff of Ontario Agricultural College on the occasion of Robertson's resignation from the College. R.P., 1, 3.

made for the position was "the very best that could be made inside of Canada, and perhaps, outside of it either." Another member referred to the "important services to the dairy interests of the country" rendered by Professor Robertson.⁸ So was Robertson given a position of tremendous responsibility--his to initiate, to develop, to organize, to make known: in short, to cause to earn respect in terms of usefulness and value to a developing Dominion. He had performed well in Ontario; could he do as well for the Dominion?

An Order-in-Council dated 10 February 1890, gave official recognition to his appointment at \$3,000 per annum and set out his duties. They were formidable.

In view of the great importance to Canada of the Dairy interest, and the fact of the very great extension of both production and trade found to arise from improved methods of manufacture, particularly in cheese, in the Province of Ontario, it is advisable to appoint a Dairy Commissioner, to be affiliated with the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, for the purpose of diffusing practical information among the farmers of the Dominion by means of Bulletins, Conferences, and Lectures on the most improved and economical methods of manufacturing Butter and Cheese and of feeding Cattle to produce the best results in obtaining milk.⁹

Robertson's first report to the Minister of Agriculture¹⁰ shows that he had faithfully performed his task. He pointed out that:

⁸ Canada, Debates, 1890, p. 2400.

⁹ Copy of Order-in-Council, Ottawa, 10 February 1890, R.P., 1, 3.

The time intervening between the date of my appointment and October, was given almost entirely to the discharge of the duties arising from and pertaining to my position as Dairy Commissioner I was relieved of much of the superintendence of farm work in order to enable me to carry out the instructions of the Honourable the Minister of Agriculture, to the effect that I should visit the several Provinces . . . for the purpose of delivering a series of lectures in each on "Dairy Farming" and kindred topics. My journeys enabled me . . . to inform the farmers . . . of the nature, variety and extent of the service which it is the object of the Dominion Experimental Farms to render.¹⁰

Dr. J. A. Ruddick, who succeeded Robertson as Dairy and Cold Storage Commissioner for the Dominion, made reference to Robertson's first year in his new post, explaining how,

he travelled throughout the length and breadth of Canada addressing meetings, interviewing leading dairymen and making a general survey of the whole situation. His fluency as a speaker, coupled with his wide knowledge of the subject, and his general optimism and enthusiasm made a great impression on the farmers of Canada and created much interest in the dairy industry in a short time.¹¹

In one such address delivered at Shoal Lake, Manitoba, on 21 August 1890, the Dairy Commissioner announced that the purpose of his visit was:

to learn the conditions and possibilities of farming in the West than at present to teach anything new . . . I am more eager to observe than to advise, and more anxious to gain information than to express opinions When I return to the eastern part of the Dominion, I will be furnished with such a knowledge of this country as will enable me to answer the enquiries

¹⁰ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1890, p. 54.

¹¹ J. A. Ruddick, "The Origins and Development of the Dominion Dairy and Cold Storage Branch," Scientific Agriculture, VII (December 1926), pp. 131-4.

of some young farmers and others who are bound to come or "go west," even if they have in some respect a good land where they presently reside Some farmers . . . in eastern Canada, from not knowing . . . our own West, are induced to go to the States, probably afterwards to lament the haste which led them to accept, without further enquiry, the extravagant statements of railway-lands advertising circulars and agents from the other side.

In the same address, Robertson made a plea for diversity in farming, his concern being over a reliance of the Western grain grower on one crop:

The reputation of Manitoba is excellent, its superior wheat, has I think, told against the province, instead of in its favour. The wheat growing of Manitoba has been "cracked up" so much, that many people have been led to believe that it is good for nothing else The place that has been the home of countless herds of buffalo, cannot fail to support . . . cattle in health and comfort.¹²

His report for 1891 included information on meetings and lectures he had given:

I attended and delivered addresses at forty-nine conventions or meeting of farmers and dairymen They were distributed in . . . Ontario, 19; Quebec, 8; New Brunswick, 2; Nova Scotia, 4; Prince Edward Island, 3; Manitoba, 3; North-west Territories, 1; British Columbia, 9. My assistants also attended and gave addresses upon 242 occasions The number of applications for my presence at conventions of farmers has outgrown all possibility of compliance on my part with one quarter of them. . . .¹³

The Dairy Commissioner had certainly complied with his original instructions. His department was arousing keen

¹² Canada, Sessional Papers, 1891, no. 6D, pp. 55-67.

¹³ Ibid., 1891, no. 7, p. 24.

interest in scientific farming and in the Dominion Government's supportive and advisory role. And he made quite sure the Canadian public knew about it, since he enjoyed the confidence of the newspaper world which cooperated exceedingly well in reporting his speeches.

Numerous bulletins were issued offering advice on all aspects of the Dairying industry. Robertson wrote many himself with expertness and with an eye to the type of reader he wanted to interest, to persuade, and to move to action.

In November 1892, Robertson again visited Britain in order to negotiate the sale of dairy products from the experimental dairy stations and at the same time:

To call attention to the food producing resources of Canada, the purity and wholesome excellence of Canadian dairy products, and the nature and scope of some of the educational work which is being done by the Government in connection with dairy farming Critical and appreciative articles on the progress and possibilities of Canadian agriculture appeared in many of the leading journals of Great Britain¹⁴

While in Great Britain, Robertson addressed meetings on a number of topics including "Canada and the Agricultural Crisis"; "Remedies for Agricultural Depression"; "The Food Producing Resources of Canada." He was also reported in The Scotsman, The Grocer's Gazette, London, and the Free Press, Aberdeen.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 1894, no. 8B, p. 4.

¹⁵ Canadian Gazette (London), 15 December 1892; North British Daily Mail, Glasgow, 17 December 1892; Daily Post, Liverpool, 21 December 1892; 24 December 1892; 14 January 1893.

A unique feature of the Chicago World's Fair held in 1893, was a mammoth cheese exhibited by Canada. Robertson wrote that,

I was authorized to manufacture a mammoth cheese, which was intended as an advertising vehicle which would carry news-paragraphs about the Canadian dairy industry and the opportunities which this country enjoys and affords for successful dairy farming, into all lands whence we might hope to attract desirable settlers.

The cheese, according to a leaflet distributed at the fair, "weighed 22,000 lbs. net, was twenty-eight feet in diameter and six feet in height. The total quantity of milk used in its manufacture was 207,200 pounds. That quantity is equal to the milk for one day in September to ten thousand cows¹⁶

Towards the end of his three year appointment, Robertson wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, in order to summarize what he had done. By this time, he was aware of his value not only in terms of service rendered to the Dominion, but also in terms of what he was worth in salary. Surveying comprehensively the work he had done and of the innovations and improvements he had brought about, Robertson pointed out in unmistakable language that his acceptance of the post in the first instance had been in the nature of a financial sacrifice and that if the government wished to take advantage of his abilities in the future, then it would have to pay for them.

Since it reviews Robertson's accomplishments to date, and provides at the same time both a record and an analysis of his own attitudes and sense of personal regard, the letter is worth quoting at length.

¹⁶ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1894, no. 8B.A, pp. 174-75.

"OTTAWA, March 18th, 1893.

"Hon. A. R. Angers,
"Minister of Agriculture.

"Sir:-

"Permit me to present the following facts for your consideration:-

"1. When I was first invited to become an applicant for the position of Dairy Commissioner for the Dominion, I replied that I would not accept such a position at a salary of less than \$3,500 per annum to begin with.

"2. At that time, it was within my power to accept a situation of a somewhat similar nature in the United States, having greater financial value to me than the figures I have mentioned with an assured prospect of increase.

"3. These matters were laid before the late Minister of Agriculture at the time. In view of the opportunity for good work and for winning a good name in the Provinces of Canada, in which at that time I was known only through the press, I consented to accept the situation from the Dominion Government for a limited period of three years.

"The Order-in-Council by which I was appointed added the duties of Agriculturist of the Central Experimental Farm to my work.

"4. In my communications with the Minister of Agriculture, I assured him that during the three years I would endeavour to demonstrate to the Government and to the country the value of the work which would be done and the wisdom of the Government in creating the office and in appointing me to discharge its duties.

"5. I stated that I would accept a substantial increase in salary at the end of the three year period. I received no assurance from the Hon. Minister that my expectation would be granted, beyond the impression left on my mind that, after the work was done, the Government would give fair consideration to my application.

"6. It is not necessary that I should make a categorical statement of what I have been permitted to do and have been able to do; but I venture without affectation to claim that everything which I predicted

should be done and could be done by a Dairy Commissioner has been done, and that much greater success has attended my efforts - (always liberally provided for by the Government and ably seconded by the officers of the Department of Agriculture and my assistants) - than I had even dared to expect within three years.

"7. From among the prominent features of the work which has been undertaken and carried out successfully the following may be mentioned:-

"a) The addressing of hundreds of meetings in all parts of Canada by myself and assistants; (The estimate of value put upon such services elsewhere may be appreciated by the fact that during the winter of 1892-93, I declined invitations from the authorities in no less than 7 different States of the Union to attend one convention in each at \$100 per meeting besides travelling expenses);

"b) The improvement in the quality of the cheese mainly in Eastern Ontario, the Province of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, which has brought hundreds of thousands of dollars into the country annually from the same quantity of milk;

"c) The extension of the cheesemaking business in Ontario and Quebec and more particularly in the Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

"d) The improvement in the quality and the increase in the quantity of butter; and the establishment of branch Experimental Dairy Stations for the introduction of winter butter making in creameries;

"e) The extension of growing fodder corn and the use of ensilage for feeding cattle economically; and the managements of experiments in the feeding of swine resulting in demonstrating the great value of frozen wheat as a feed for swine and cattle;

"f) The discovery and introduction of the "Robertson Combination for Ensilage" (Indian Corn, Horse Beans and Sunflowers) which promises to save the country several millions of dollars annually in the feeding of cattle for beef and milk;

"g) The service I was able to render Canada by my visit to Great Britain during the present winter.

"8. I do not desire to obtrude my personal affairs upon your notice; but while I live simply and frugally, I may

state I need a higher salary than I now receive. I have reason to believe I can obtain one much higher in the United States and I believe I could get a higher one in Great Britain.

"In view of these facts I respectfully submit:-

"a) My definite engagement with Government terminated at February 1st, 1893;

"b) I venture to hope I have fulfilled in every particular my side of the contract;

"c) The opportunities of my position have enabled me to do work which has resulted and will continue to result in great financial benefit to the Dominion;

"d) I am willing to renew an agreement for three years at a salary of \$5,000 per annum;

"e) In any case I shall hope for permission to carry on and finish the work immediately on hand at the branch Experimental Dairy Stations and in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago until the autumn of the present year;

"f) In case the Government do not see their way to grant my request, it is my duty to myself to intimate that my services will not be available in my present capacity after that time.

"I have the honour to be,
Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"(sgn) Jas. W. Robertson"¹⁷

Whether a similar letter could be written today is a matter for conjecture--one can suppose that Robertson had excellent grounds for writing in the way he did. There is no doubt that he was worth every penny of his salary and that he could reasonably expect a raise provided he was re-engaged.

¹⁷ Robertson to Hon. A. R. Angers, Minister of Agriculture, 18 March 1893, R.P., 1, 3.

His letter suggests in face of his vast accomplishments, that his services, in his own estimation, were indispensable. His department had grown in size and in prestige, while he himself had become a nationally and internationally-known figure. And whatever Robertson did, he did well. His educational work was outstanding; he had fostered communication between producers and the Government. His efforts were resulting in an improved cheese, and in consequence, an improved export market; happy circumstances which appealed to the ruling powers of a developing Dominion.

Thus the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization of the House of Commons was not slow in recommending the re-appointment of Robertson:

. . . the Committee having learned that the time for which Professor Robertson was originally engaged has now expired, and recognizing as we do the invaluable services which he has rendered to the Dairy interests of this country, we would strongly urge the Government the necessity of placing the Professor upon the permanent staff of the Central Experimental Farm, and that he be paid a liberal salary for his services.¹⁸

A report of a Committee of the Honourable, the Privy Council, was approved by His Excellency, the Governor-General-in-Council, on the 18 April 1893:

. . . The Minister further states that the services of Mr. Robertson, by placing himself in active touch with the farmers of the Dominion, have tended largely to promote increase of the dairy products of Canada, and that the prospect is of a further large extension of increase from the continuation of his services.

¹⁸ Canada, Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization. Copy of Recommendation, 24 March 1893, R.P., 1, 3.

The Minister therefore recommends that the request of Mr. Robertson be acceded to and that he be re-appointed with a salary of \$5,000 per annum, for three years.¹⁹

Having amply justified the trust placed in him by those who had been responsible for his appointment, Robertson continued with the organization of the dairying interests of the Dominion. In an endeavour to protect Canada's good name he was partly responsible for the "Dairy Products Acts, 1893," which sought to prevent the manufacture and sale of adulterated cheese, and provided for the branding of dairy products "Made in Canada."²⁰ He was also largely responsible for the opening, and sometime director, of a dairy school at St. Hyacinthe, P.Q.²¹ His observations on the application of Federal funds, and his attitude towards Provincial responsibility for such agricultural education, are recorded in his Evidence Before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization, 1903.

However, since Robertson's involvement with the dairying aspect of his responsibilities occupied most of his time, the Privy Council's report of 31 December 1895, which extended his appointment, also allowed for his resignation from his position as Agriculturalist at the Experimental Farm, and

¹⁹ Copy of Report of Privy Council No. 1129, 18 April 1893, R.P., 1, 3.

²⁰ Canada, Statutes, 56 Victoria, 1893, Vol. 1 and 2, pp. 131-34.

²¹ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1893, no. 7, pp. 18-9.

designated him "Agricultural and Dairy Commissioner." This new appointment now enabled Robertson to devote his whole attention to his specialty.²²

It was during 1895, that a significant phase in the history of Canadian farming began. In the House of Commons that year, concern was expressed that something should be done to develop cold storage facilities in order that butter for export should be transported in good condition and thus compete on equal terms with the product of other countries. A resolution was passed:

To enable the Dairy Commissioner to promote the dairying industry of Canada by making provision for the placing of fresh-made creamery butter on the British market in regular shipments without deterioration in quality, and for securing recognition of its quality there.²³

In Canada prior to 1895, there was no organization in respect to the carriage of butter in cold storage. No one could get a refrigerator car unless he had a car-load to ship. There was no cold storage on ship-board and few creameries had any facilities of that kind. Robertson, with government support, arranged with the railway companies to run refrigerator cars once a week over stated routes for purposes of developing the butter trade. Under this arrangement, the small butter

²² Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, no. 3885,
31 December 1895, R.P., 1, 3.

²³ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1895, pp. 4465-70.

producer could have his consignment carried as safely as the bigger man. The government guaranteed two-thirds of the earnings of a minimum car-load (20,000 lbs.) and paid \$4 per car for icing. The creameries were encouraged to erect cold storage rooms by the payment of a bonus of \$100 for those who provided such equipment. Plans and specifications were furnished free by the Commissioner. By 1897, the steamship companies were providing refrigerated ships and the government paid half the cost of installing the machinery on a number of trans-Atlantic vessels.²⁴

During the same year, the Laurier Government introduced Imperial preference and sent Robertson to Great Britain where the press reacted most favourably towards both the economic policy and the Canadian representative.

The Liverpool Daily Post, in a leading article said of the Dairy Commissioner:

Professor Robertson's individual skill as a cheese and butter maker has been demonstrated long before his appointment. But his resource as an organizer on the larger scale had still to be proved, and the proof is found not only in the number of establishments now successfully at work, but still more forcibly, in the steady annual increase of butter and cheese exports and the continuous improvement in quality²⁵

The Liverpool Courier observed:

It stands to reason that if the colonies can produce foodstuffs of as good a quality as those which at

²⁴ J. A. Ruddick, "An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Dairying Industry of Canada," Bulletin no. 28, (Canada: Minister of Agriculture, 1911).

²⁵ 10 May 1897.

present we take from the United States, Russia, Denmark, France, etc., it is the duty of the mother country to give preference to her children across the seas. Of course it lies with the colonies to show that they can produce exactly what we want, and this is the effort which Canada is now making in her Commissioner of Agriculture and Dairying they have one of the ablest agriculturists either in the Dominion or anywhere else to his skill, energy and resource, not forgetting the hearty support of the Board of Agriculture, are due the rapid strides which Canada has made during recent years.²⁶

A Daily Chronicle (London) Special, stated:

Canada is pursuing with singular boldness her policy of commercial alliance with the Mother Country under her new tariff preference for British goods. Buying more from England, Canada means to pay for her purchases in produce and seeing that we must import two-thirds of our foodstuffs, we may watch in sympathy these colonial efforts to beat foreign rivals in British markets.

Today Canada is our biggest source of supply of imported cheese In 1889, before the new methods were applied, she sold cheese to British consumers to the value of 8,750,000 dollars; by 1894 the increase was nearly fifty per cent., and in 1896 the total was nearly 15,750,000 dollars. In the same period the butter exports to Great Britain have increased one and a third million dollars, making a total increase of 8,250,000 dollars in British dairy purchases since the initiation of the policy of which Professor Robertson is the exponent.²⁷

Entitled "Canadian Trade with Great Britain," the London Times commented:

Further investigation of British trade methods and marketing is at this moment being carried on by the Canadian Dairy Commissioner in this country Professor Robertson has been engaged in delivering a course of lectures on Anglo-Canadian trade in the principal provincial and manufacturing towns

²⁶ 13 July 1897.

²⁷ 4 August 1897.

The paper further noticed the improvement in quality and in quantity and in the place taken by Canadian dairy products, which effect,

is no doubt to be attributed . . . to the development of demonstration as well as to the system of experiment and investigation carried on by the Canadian Department of Agriculture.²⁸

On his return to Canada, Robertson told a representative of the Winnipeg Free Press:

The outlook for Canadian agricultural products in the markets of Great Britain is of particular interest at the present time . . . great and continuous prominence has been given to Canadian matters in British papers They may lead to a decided advantage in the demand for Canadian products The consuming public of Great Britain, have been made persistently and continuously aware of the fact that Canada is the premier colony of the Empire I was able to arrange for the sale in Great Britain of the trial shipments of peaches, pears and grapes, which are to be sent from the Niagara district I saw the members of many firms and also British officials and received and gave information in Canadian products which will help to develop trade along lines creditable to Canadians²⁹

In 1899, Robertson once more visited Great Britain, and it was at Dundee, Scotland, where his wife christened the Minto, a mail steamer ice-breaker, that he made a speech extolling the virtues of Canadian agricultural produce.³⁰ He announced:

Canada in 1896 exported over 10,250,000 pounds worth of farm produce and in 1898, the exports had

²⁸ 13 August 1897.

²⁹ 21 September 1897.

³⁰ He married Jennie Mather, of Ottawa, on 6 May 1896. Currier, Biography, p. 7.

risen to 15,750,000 pounds, and there was every indication that they would keep at that rate of increase for some years to come.

And he went on to mention:

that in country districts (in Canada), the deposits in the Savings Banks were a third more than a few years ago, and that there was room in Canada for a population of 100 millions.

Referring to the great advances being made in mining, in fishing and lumbering, and with an increasing use of electricity, of the abundance of water power, Robertson looked forward to the time when, with the harnessing of this power, Canada could "thus become a manufacturing as well as an agricultural country."

Mr. Wm. Thompson, shipowner, thanked Professor Robertson for his speech and remarked how from his own experience of the Dairy Commissioner:

he knew he had done a very great deal indeed for the development of the resources of Canada. In connection with the butter and cheese trade he had been instrumental in instituting a system of refrigeration right from the place where it was made, and now he had come to this side of the water to see what was the right kind of stuff for the makers on the other side to send³¹

In the early years of the twentieth century, Robertson could look back with satisfaction on the changes he had wrought within the Canadian dairy industry. From coast to coast he had raised farming and dairying to a new height by persuasion and persistence, by education and demonstration.

³¹ From an unnamed newspaper clipping, (most probably a Dundee, Scotland, publication), 13 July 1899.

Aided and supported throughout by a sympathetic Dominion Treasury, dairy exports rose from \$9,700,000 in 1890, to \$25,000,000 in 1900.³² Farmers, dairymen, railroad managers, steamship owners and government co-operated in developing a trade which grew very rapidly. His constant visits to Britain, the main support of Canada's export trade, and his observations whilst there and on the Continent, provided the dairy industry with an invaluable source of intelligence in its task of building for Canada a reputation for dependable products.

By his middle forties Robertson was a well-regarded Canadian personality whose gifts as a speaker were in great demand. It was this gift, enhanced by an attractive Scottish brogue, that enabled him to win the attention of that most conservative of men, the farmer. Once the individual farmer could see that by using the methods advocated by the Dairy Commissioner and his staff he could improve his product and his output and thus raise his standard of living, then success for the whole dairying industry was assured.

The method he used was simple--education. By telling the farmer and better, by demonstrating what was best and encouraging him to do his best, Robertson succeeded over the years in gaining the dairyman's trust and confidence. In all this, he was aided by the work of the Dominion Government Experimental Farms, travelling dairies and by an excellent staff.

³² Canada, Sessional Papers, 1901, no. 15, pp. 19-20.

He provided leadership in a time when the industry and all that it meant for Canada, needed strong and wise direction.

That the farming interests of the country were enjoying prosperity is borne out by the 1902 report of the President of the Ontario Agricultural College. He noted that many agencies in which Robertson was involved contributed to these results:

The condition and prospects of agriculturists in this country are improving. The farmers of Ontario, not to speak of the other Provinces of the Dominion, are in a much better position now than they were in fifteen or sixteen years ago: they are on a higher plane of intelligence; they dress better and live better, - they are getting a larger share of the necessities and comforts of life for their labour; and as a class they stand higher socially than they did in the years gone by. Many agencies have been contributing to these gratifying results, - the Public and High Schools all over the Province, the Agricultural College, the Dairy Schools, Travelling Dairies, Farmers' Institutes, Women's Institutes, Live Stock, Dairy, and Poultry Associations, Entomological Society and Fruit Grower's Association, Winter Fairs, other great fairs, provincial sales of live stock, and the annual distribution by the Minister of Agriculture to all members of Farmers' Institutes throughout the Province free copies of all reports and bulletins issued by the Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural College, the Farmers' Institutes, and the various associations under the control of the Minister - many agencies and a great work.³³

The practicality and profitability of educational methods were noted by overseas visitors to Canada who wrote:

The Dominion Government and the Provincial Governments have applied themselves to assisting the farmer in conducting his industry in the most scientific and profitable manner possible Whether it is in the administration of the central department at Ottawa

³³ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1902, no. 14, p. 6.

or in the experimental farms . . . or in the teaching of scientific agriculture or in the nature of the experiments conducted, or in the methods adopted for conveying the results to those who should profit by them, we find everywhere examples well worthy of imitation here [Great Britain].³⁴

As Robertson was urging, guiding and directing, so he was learning. Frequently he made reference in his reports to information he had gained from visits to parts of Canada and abroad. He had learned to co-operate with Ministers and with the leaders of agricultural institutions and of the general dairying industry. Above all, he had learned to achieve cordial relationships with the press, a most valuable ally in his project for the propagation of the gospel of excellence. Building up his department from nothing, Robertson had created an organization which was widely respected and which formed part of the Canadian national development, with its emphasis on immigration and its concomitant need for a stable and progressive agricultural industry to attract settlers to the West. In his travels, in his exposure in the newspapers, in his speeches and in his every day contacts with other government departments and leading figures in Canadian life, how did Robertson view himself?

There is no evidence among his documents that he committed his personal thoughts to paper, but one can reasonably suspect

³⁴ E. S. Montague and B. Herbert, Canada and the Empire, (London: 1904), p. 40.

that he began to visualize himself as a public man, one constantly in the limelight and doing as all public men are expected to do, to utter some profound remark at the drop of a hat. If Robertson did see himself in this role then he was substantially correct, for he was to become in the future exactly that--the genuine public man.

A graph of Robertson's life to date would show a gradual rise with the advancing years. From a poor farm boy, and later clerk, he had become after his arrival in Canada, a factory hand, a manager, a teacher, and latterly an administrator. From an unknown Scottish lad with no important family connections, he had become the best known Canadian agriculturalist, not only in Canada, but also abroad. From the management of an insignificant cheese factory he had become the head of an important and influential Government department which exercised a benevolent influence over scores of such factories. And as he progressed through life so he gained in maturity--a maturity which was to be recognized in the future by leading people in Canada when they sought a man to fill important positions in Canadian affairs.

CHAPTER III

PARTNERSHIP IN THE MACDONALD MOVEMENT (1899-1910)

Part 1

The Manual Training Scheme

One man who noticed with particular interest the increase in bank deposits in areas where creameries had been located was Sir William Macdonald, a Montreal tobacco manufacturer, a millionaire benefactor of higher education in eastern Canada, and a shareholder of the Bank of Montreal. Upon enquiry, he learned that the moving spirit in the reform of agricultural methods in the east and particularly in his own native province, Prince Edward Island, was the Dominion Dairy Commissioner, James Wilson Robertson.¹

In a reminiscent mood Robertson later recalled how one day in 1897, he:

received a letter from Sir William Macdonald asking if he could give Sir William some time for a meeting at Ottawa In their interviews at Ottawa Sir William said that one of his dreams was to give to

¹ Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Children of the Land," The Outlook, (23 April 1910), p. 891; Gazette, Montreal, 26 June 1922; for a biography of Sir William Macdonald, see J. F. Snell, Macdonald College (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963).

the English-speaking people of Quebec the means of a better education. He had crystallized his thought in the slogan: "Build up the country in its boys and girls." Sir William sketched . . . his idea of an institution which would take boys at seven years old and retain them until twenty one, then sending them out to become leaders. Robertson said the plan would not work. "Mothers would not give up their sons for fourteen years. During fourteen years these boys would be entirely out of the life of the country, and at the end would not have the qualifications to be leaders."²

Robertson added that in parting Sir William had requested that if he had any thoughts on education to impart, to come again. Later he took up the challenge, and going to Sir William, said that he would like to see manual training in the schools.

From this interaction between the two men grew the great effort known initially as the Macdonald-Robertson Movement and later as the Macdonald Movement. Financed solely by Sir William Macdonald and managed brilliantly by James Robertson, it developed into an unique educational partnership for the reform of the rural school programme and for the improvement of the status of the rural school teacher. In basing their programme on the recognition of the need to prepare most rural children for life in the home, on the farm and in the workshop, the partners were convinced that the Canadian rural schools were far too bookish, and denied the child the

² Ottawa Citizen, 15 July 1922.

opportunity to develop his intelligence to the full by the promotion of hand and eye skills, which he would later require.

Manual training had been advocated for a number of years in Canada. In 1868, for example, Egerton Ryerson, Superintendent of Education for Ontario, felt that "the tendency of the youthful mind of our country is too much in the direction of what are called the learned professions and too little in the direction of what are termed industrial pursuits."³ In 1872, J. Howard Hunter, addressing the Ontario Education Association, expressed the need for technical education "for young operatives and farmers both in primary and in secondary schools."⁴ In 1884, James L. Hughes, Public School Inspector for Toronto, pleaded for "the right of every man to be given an education that will fit him for his sphere of labour, and as the apprentice system was dying out it became more and more the duty of the school to provide the training." The "broadest aspect of his subject" he said, "was anything that will tend to enable the hand to represent more accurately in material form the thoughts of the mind."⁵

Thomas Shaw, of Guelph, addressed the Ontario Education Association in 1888, on "Agriculture in our Rural Schools."

³ Edwin C. Guillet, In the Cause of Education (University of Toronto Press), 1960, p. 425.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

He found that though some provision was made for it in school regulations, the fact that it was optional resulted in neglect. Out of a total attendance of 487,496 in Ontario public schools, only 1,489 pupils were studying ^{agricul} architecture, or one in every 327, and the subject was not taught in high schools. What was wanted in schools was "a plain, practical, teachable book on agriculture, with its teaching obligatory in all rural schools and optional elsewhere." The farmer had a low position in society yet two-thirds of Canada's population were on the land. "The flower of rural communities drifted to the cities and denuded the farms."⁶

Manual training was also the subject of a paper by W. H. Huston. At the Association's 1890 meeting, he expressed his approval of shopwork's "wonderful uplifting influence on neglected boys in that grandest of educational institutions in this Province the Industrial school at Mimico." "There were people" he said, "who ridiculed bread-and-butter education, but surely the first duty of a school is to put the child in the way of a living. If it was in the interest of the State to have well-trained doctors, teachers and lawyers, the same applied in all occupations and there can be no turning back." Nor was it only the learning of trades that resulted, for shop-work "disciplined the mind and trained the student in

⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

order and method." He foresaw "an integrated system of manual training from kindergarten to university."⁷

A committee of the Association dealing with Mr. Bryant's paper entitled "Agriculture," in the same year recommended that the subject "be given prominence with others on the curriculum, that it should be published in pamphlet form, sent to schools and Farmer's Institutes and brought before the Ministers of Agriculture and Education."⁸

In 1897, James Hughes noted that manual training was progressing because of the recognition that it was "really educational and not merely economic in its advantages." It was too, "a great aid in discipline, for much of all children's restlessness and irritability lies in their not having enough to keep them busy." He believed it was not natural for most children to love books, but that "real things were of interest to them." He outlined further to the Association the advantages of manual training "in the preparation of the youth for life."⁹

The theory that it was not natural for a child to learn only from books "but that he must work with things and learn through his senses and physical activity was inherent in the educational philosophies of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel."¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁰ F. Henry Johnson, A Brief History of Canadian Education (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 86.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and his disciples had stressed the importance of agricultural and manual training and nature study in education, ideas which belatedly permeated North American education largely through their adoption in Scandinavian countries. Thus the Pestalozzian "head, hand and heart" so well expressed in the twentieth century in the educational philosophies of the Progressives and in the enterprise method of Canada's Donald Dickie, were being discussed, at least in Ontario, by the end of the nineteenth century.

In the United States, these methods became an educational issue when John D. Runkle, President of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was influenced by an exhibition of the work of Victor Della Vos, and students of the Moscow Imperial School, of which he was Director. The key theme of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, 1876, had been the relation of education to national progress, and the Russians had developed a pedagogical system at least as old as Comenius, whereby "the mastery of any art . . . is readily attained only when the first attempts are subject to a law of gradation, the pupil following a definite method . . . and surmounting little by little and by certain degrees, the difficulties encountered."¹¹

Runkle became an enthusiastic promoter of manual training and later elaborated a more general theory of education based on the manual training idea in which lay the key to "a new

¹¹ Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 24-25.

balanced schooling" that would again marry the mental to the manual, thereby preparing people realistically" for life in an industrial society."¹²

His idea was promoted by Calvin C. Woodward, who made a new philosophy of it. Woodward began teaching tool work with no immediate vocational goal. During the 1870's, Woodward criticized the public schools, charging them with adherence to an outmoded ideal of gentlemanliness and culture. The old style of education was useless; "it oftener unfits than fits a man for earning his living." A broadminded man, sincerely committed to a broad and liberal education, he was less unwilling to make a preparation for a specific trade the goal of general schooling."

Sharply critical of the existing "lopsided and impractical education which concentrated on the "so-called learned professions" to the "detriment of true education," Woodward's remedy was manual training. "Put the whole boy in school and educate him equally for all spheres of usefulness."¹³

The subject of Manual Training formed part of the 1898 Report of the Minister of Education for Ontario.

For many years past the educators of America and the continent have given a great deal of attention to . . . manual training, by which is meant a knowledge of the principles underlying the construction of industrial value. As a subject of school work, Manual Training is said to possess special value. It gives variety to the exercises in the schoolroom and has

¹² Ibid., pp. 26-28.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 26-28.

special interest for pupils of a mechanical turn of mind who otherwise might give little attention to the regular subjects of the curriculum

It promotes the development of manual dexterity accuracy of form, dimension, colour, proportion, etc. In any pursuit of life, these are intellectual aptitudes of great value, but more particularly to the artisan and labouring classes.

Knowledge gained from Manual Training . . . is a great stimulus to the mental activity of the child and can be made to minister to his usefulness in afterlife.¹⁴

Among the sources of Robertson's inspiration for manual training were reports from Boston, U.S.A., and Ireland, extracts from both being included in his booklet, The Macdonald Sloyd School Fund.¹⁵ The Annual Report of the School Committee of Boston, for 1892, showed some of the excellent results from manual instruction in the school there. It stated:

Manual training in the form of wood-work combined with drawing has now been a part of every pupil's education in the upper grades of the Agassiz school for three years: It was claimed "that there was a gain in accuracy, that pupils became more thoughtful, more attentive, more observant, created more interest in school, and made for improvements in drawing and in arithmetic."

The Royal Commission on National Education in Ireland, set up in 1896, to determine how far, and in what form, manual

¹⁴ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1899, no. 12, p. 21. For an account of the swing towards nature study, rural gardens and manual training in Ontario, see J. M. McCutcheon, Public Education in Ontario (Toronto: 1941), Chap. 5.

¹⁵ J. W. Robertson, The Macdonald Sloyd School Fund: Manual Training in the Public Schools (Ottawa: 1899). Sloyd is a Swedish word meaning handwork. The system was originated by Cygnoeus (1801-1888), a Finn, in 1858, and introduced into Sweden in 1872.

and practical instruction should be included in the Education System of the Primary Schools of that country, reported in 1899, that they were convinced that:

manual and practical instruction ought to be introduced . . . into all schools where it does not at present exist, and that in those schools where it does exist, it ought to be largely developed and extended.

The Commission felt that it was important that children:

should be taught not merely to take in knowledge from books, but to observe with intelligence the material world around them, that they should acquire some skill in the use of hand and eye to execute the conceptions of the brain - such training was valuable to all, but especially valuable to those whose lives are to be mainly devoted to industrial arts and occupations. Since the great bulk of the pupils attending such schools would have to earn their bread by the work of their hands, it was important that they should be trained from the beginning to use their hands with dexterity and intelligence.

Robertson quoted freely from the latter report considering it:

peerless . . . for the thoroughness of its information. Its statements are clear as sunshine, strong as the words of wisdom, and convincing as truth itself.

Why was such a great interest being taken in manual training at this time in Canada? Perhaps the Minister of Education for Ontario explains it as well as anyone in his 1899 report. The transition from theory to practice, "this modern apartment of educational work," has been brought about by "the progress of science in this latter part of the nineteenth century," which "has revolutionized all our industries and it is safe to predict that in the approaching century many changes may be expected regarding the relative values of

different branches of study." In referring to the United States, Germany and England, he pointed out that in those countries "manual training had become a well recognized department of elementary and secondary education." "Technical education must" he urged, "in its more elementary forms such as manual training, be taken up in the public schools, if we are to have well-trained mechanics, farmers and merchants." He warned, "The curriculum of fifty years ago will not do to-day, and unless the Province realizes the important changes in the world's progress, it would be unreasonable to expect the laudable position which our schools have held in the past, to be retained."¹⁶

By 1900, the Minister was able to announce that "the addition of Domestic Science to the school programme, marks another epoch in the development of education in Ontario." To the Normal School of Domestic Science in Hamilton had been added a similar institute at Toronto--The Lillian Massey Normal Training School of Household Science--through the liberality of Mrs. Massey-Treble.

Other private institutions for the teaching of Domestic Science had also developed in Toronto, and the subject was being taught in a number of school districts in the Province.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1899, no. 12, p. 21.

¹⁷ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1900, no. 12, p. 34.

Thus influences were at work to prepare the way for the institution of manual education in the public schools of Canada, and the "strongest support for manual training"¹⁸ came from Sir William Macdonald, who in 1900, donated \$40,000 on Robertson's recommendation, to start a manual training programme in selected Canadian schools. Robertson was to be director of the programme.¹⁹ Sir William's philanthropic gesture in supporting Manual Training was similar in concept to that of an earlier experiment which took place at Menomonie, Wisconsin, when in 1889, James Ruff Stout initiated a project of manual training for which he supplied a building and equipment, and paid the teachers and all expenses for a period of three terms.²⁰

In The Macdonald Sloyd School Fund, Robertson explained what he meant by manual training and what the Macdonald plan intended to do. He pointed out in his introduction that if Manual Training "were in any sense one of the 'Gods' which every now and then are pushed to the front as a sovereign remedy for the ills of humanity . . . I would not for one moment advocate or promote it." Instead of that, he said:

¹⁸ Johnson, Brief History, p. 86.

¹⁹ Sir William Macdonald wrote a memorandum, 14 Oct. 1899, in which he had copied, from a list supplied by Robertson, the estimated costs for manual training equipment, teacher's travelling expenses etc., to the amount of \$37,770. On 11 July 1900, Sir William deposited in the Bank of Montreal the sum of \$40,000 to the credit of the Macdonald Sloyd account. R.P., 4, 2.

²⁰ Cremin, Transformation, pp. 143-46; Morang's Annual Register (Toronto: 1901), p. 318.

it is the practical application of an educational movement, which, during the last ten years particularly, has won an ever-widening place in the school system of the foremost countries in Europe and also in the United States. It is already correcting some of the school influences which have been complained of alike by parents and teachers. It has been said that the schools, where book studies are the only or chief ones, turn the children from contentment with occupations in which bodily labour plays an important part, and also incline them to leave rural homes for cities and clerical and professional pursuits. While much has been said and written about the danger of over-educating the rural population and thereby leading them to leave the farms, I do not believe it is possible to over-educate anybody. Perhaps one of the many causes which have helped to bring about a preference for clerical, professional and scholastic occupations in those who have no natural fitness for them, and a corresponding distaste for manual and bodily labour, has been the too exclusively book and language studies of the common school. But when scholarship and practical and manual instruction, join hands in the schools to train the whole child, and not merely the language and language faculties, the children will leave school facing aright, capable and happy in making the right things come to pass, at the right time and in the right way.

As Commissioner of Agriculture, Robertson proclaimed:

I find that the efforts of the Department to help farmers are chiefly intended to increase intelligence, to develop skill and to promote cooperation. These are all educational objects Education begins with a child's life and should continue throughout. It seems unnecessary and wholly undesirable that the school period should be different from the years which go before and follow it Before a child goes to school, it is receiving most of its education, by its senses bringing it into conscious relationship with the material world around it, and by doing things with its hands Manual training is a means of developing mental power. These, - systematic training of the senses, of the hands and eyes, and of the mind, are some of the objects of practical and manual instruction.

Robertson believed that manual and practical instruction was "not a short cut or a long step towards learning a trade," but was an "educational means for developing intellectual and

moral qualities of high value, in all children, without particular regard to the occupation they are to follow afterwards"21 From this it can be deduced that he was obviously abreast of contemporary pedagogical advances.

In 1899, Robertson visited some London, England, primary schools to see manual instruction in action. This training was begun in London about 1886. Since woodwork was not recognized by the Board of Education as a subject to be taught in Elementary Schools, the London School Board was unable to use public monies to maintain it. However a grant of money was obtained from the Draper's Company to start woodwork in schools until 1890, when the subject was recognized by the Board as a school subject. By 1889, there were in London about 150 manual training centres instructing about 50,000 boys from age nine to fourteen.

Robertson went on to describe the physical plant of a typical instructional area, the models which were made and the spirit of "earnestness, self reliance and careful perseverance" which seemed to "pervade the whole school." He explained the system was called "English Sloyd." This kind of work was "a series of exercises so arranged as to have educational results."

Manual training develops in children habits of industry and leads them to thoughtfully adjust their

21 Robertson, Macdonald Sloyd School Fund, pp. 1-2.

acts to desired ends. That of itself is of great educational value. It helps to keep out of later life whimsical and capricious conduct. It prevents the dull boy from being discouraged with school life, and from any sense of inferiority to the quick children. It gives them self-reliance, hopefulness and courage, all of which react on their mental and physical faculties. It also is a soothing and strengthening corrective to the quick and excitable children who become over-anxious about examinations on book studies.²²

Statements about the educational aim of manual instruction often led to misunderstanding, both in Canada and in the United States, on the part of the trade unions. The fact that initial advances in this kind of enterprise were advocated and actively supported by business men was not lost sight of by American unionists who felt that this practice was inimical to their interests.²³

The Trades and Labour Council of Toronto on hearing an address by James L. Hughes on the subject of manual training in schools to be sponsored by the Macdonald plan, opposed it on the grounds that "it practically involved the teaching of trades in schools to the detriment of the free mechanics outside." The members, as a whole, "appeared hostile to the principle of introducing any manual training in the schools."²⁴ Mr. John Seath, Inspector of Schools in Ontario writing in the Mail and Empire on 11 January 1901, tried to point out

²² Ibid., pp. 30-31.

²³ Cremin, Transformation, pp. 36-41.

²⁴ Morang's Annual Register, pp. 316-17

the difference between three terms often used synonymously.

Manual training was, he declared,

any instruction in hand-work designed to improve the powers of the mind and included domestic science and art. Technical education meant the same as the other phrase. Industrial education, and its usual and limited sense involved the teaching of those who were to be engaged in the industries or commercial production in general.²⁵

Claims both education and economic, were made on behalf of manual training as a subject suitable for inclusion in the public school curriculum. Robertson himself considered that both these virtues were inherent in the activity:

It is now generally admitted that manual training work should have a recognized place in the course of study from the Kindergarten until about the 11th or 12th year of age, for cultural or self-realization purposes. After that the "Manual Training" (the term is used to represent all the others) might be directed more definitely towards discovering aptitudes and tastes and developing skill and ability for some occupation.²⁶

This conviction at once enabled his ideas to be accepted by educators and businessmen alike--a most happy circumstance at this stage of his career.

The Macdonald scheme was begun in a modest way in 1900. The first plan was to open one good centre in Ottawa. A later extension of the plan authorized Robertson to make a similar

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education, 1913, Vol. 1, p. 11.

offer to the school authorities of Brockville, Ontario; Charlottetown and Summerside, P.E.I.; and to some place in the Province of Quebec; in Truro, N.S.; in Fredericton, N.B.; in Winnipeg, Man.; in Calgary, N.W.T.; and in Victoria and Vancouver, B.C.²⁷

The rationale of this plan bore the hallmark of Robertson's genius. By a careful selection of locality he hoped to make each centre a focal point of interest and one that would claim the attention of all sections of society. His basic experience and long practice of "seeing is believing" would serve to allay the criticisms of potential "Doubting Thomases." He was out to persuade trustees, teachers, parents, education departments, business men and anyone else, that here was something satisfying for everybody. From these first object lessons it was hoped the idea would spread throughout the provinces.

To implement the programme, to begin it on right educational lines, thoroughly trained and experienced teachers were brought from Britain and appointed to these centres, since there was at that time, "hardly any manual training in Canada." Sir William offered to pay for the equipment required for educational manual training, to meet the salaries of qualified teachers, and to pay all maintenance expenses for three years.²⁸

²⁷ For a descriptive account of the Macdonald Manual Training Schools in Canada see J. W. Robertson and Albert H. Leake, "Manual Training," Canadian Magazine, April 1901, pp. 521-39.

²⁸ J. W. Robertson, Evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization, 1903, Canada, House of Commons, pp. 19-20. Printed copy, R.P., 3, 7.

Robertson, a public servant, was given permission by the Federal Minister of Agriculture to carry on the work of publicising and administering the manual training scheme while undertaking his normal duties. Recognition by the Government is indicative of its regard not only for the scheme, but for the Dairy Commissioner who was to manage it. This further example of "paternalism" is described by Robertson who stated, "I have the happiness of working in the fullest harmony and cooperation with the department of education of every province, so I am not in any sense trespassing on the administration of educational matters by provincial authorities."²⁹

The scheme was reported widely in the newspapers on the occasion of opening of the Ottawa Manual Training centre by the Governor-General, Lord Minto. The Winnipeg Free Press quoted His Excellency as saying,

The introduction of manual training should not be in the nature of adding a new subject to the already overburdened school course. The aim should not be a formal literary education, plus manual education but education of which manual training is an integral and highly valuable part.³⁰

The Calgary Herald made reference to a speech given by Prof. Robertson before the city board of school trustees, citizens and teachers, in which the speaker praised Calgary which was considered in the East as being "the educational headquarters of the west."

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ 14 November 1900.

The report assured that Professor Robertson's speech was followed with the keenest interest and that all expressed their "unqualified approval of the entire scheme." Consequently, the board passed a resolution adopting the plan and hoped that manual training could be started in the New Year.³¹

In the Canadian Magazine of April 1901, Robertson declared that provision had been made for "about 6,000 boys in the public schools and teachers attending Normal schools to receive Manual Training" On Saturdays, classes were arranged for teachers, "from whose schools the boys go to the Manual Training centres." Centres had been established in all provinces. The original twenty-four British teachers were augmented by two from the United States and one from Sweden, while other teachers were forthcoming from Canadian sources.³²

During November 1901, Robertson received reports from his various Provincial directors of Manual Training Schools. From Fredericton, N.B., E. E. MacCready wrote:

The Macdonald Manual Training School for New Brunswick is situated in the Normal School and occupies two rooms on the upper floor each equipped for classes of twenty, thus accommodation is provided for four hundred students per week.

During the summer vacation of 1900, the first Summer School of Manual Training was conducted . . . and continued four weeks.

During this vacation the second room was opened . . . so that when the school reopened in Sept. we were able to give instruction to all of the students

³¹ 19 November 1900.

³² Canadian Magazine, April 1901, pp. 521-39.

at the Normal School, the young women as well as the young men The Saturday class for teachers was also continued

From British Columbia, Harry Dunnell reported on the four centres in his care: Central School, North Ward, Victoria; Old Burrard School and Strathecona School, Vancouver; all of which had been opened a matter of months. A firm believer, like Robertson, in publicity, Dunnell opened his centres for public inspection.

These inspections and the late Public Exhibition have done much good in bringing before the public the work executed by the boys, and the value of the training in conjunction with other school subjects.

The treatment and encouragement we have received from the Educational Authorities of Victoria and Vancouver are gratifying to us.

But Dunnell and his men were apparently not completely satisfied with their salaries, "if our financial position is put on a satisfactory basis, we shall not regret having left our homes in England to become pioneers of Manual Training" The cost of living in B.C. caused this cri-de-coeur. "We certainly have felt considerably damped in our work this last two months since you wrote and gave us no hope of our salaries being readjusted for the extra cost of living in British Columbia."

Both reports contained fulsome praise for the work of manual training, and Dunnell reported how "the mother of one of the boys, who wishes to see what the merits of our work are; and the brother of one of the lady teachers who had some

way to go home," were allowed to attend the class.

In his 1901 report, Thomas B. Kidner, Director of Manual Training for Nova Scotia, noted that:

With the idea of disseminating information as to the aims and methods of Manual Training Schools and the best means of starting them, I attended meetings of . . . school boards and gave particulars of cost and plan of working . . . also of the principle The majority of these boards sent deputations to visit and report on our school . . . half a dozen of these towns have definitely decided to establish Manual Training Departments

That they have been able to do so is largely due to the way in which the Council of Public Instruction of the Nova Scotia Government has taken the matter up

In the session of 1900, the Council determined to offer assistance to school sections desirous of providing facilities for Manual Training and accordingly a Short Act was passed authorizing the payment of the liberal amount of 15 cents per head per lesson for instruction in "Mechanics or Domestic Arts" ³³

Robertson had good reason to be pleased with this information--the scheme showed real success--at least one Province saw fit to implement manual training and support it financially.

Robertson's advocacy of manual training, the implementation of and its acceptance by, the various provinces was continuous with the educational work he had been doing long before his association with Sir William. In his travels across the Dominion, Robertson met many influential people who came to regard him as a man of integrity. Thus the Macdonald scheme was merely an extension of his previous endeavours.

³³ Original copies, R.P., 4, 2.

By the end of 1903, over forty schools had been equipped, training centres for teachers had been established, while the actual expenditure had risen from the original estimate of \$40,000 to \$180,000.³⁴ After this time the manual training programme became the responsibility of the provinces and their local school boards. By 1909, over 20,000 boys and girls in Canadian public schools were receiving the benefits of manual training as a result of Sir William's benefactions and James Robertson's initiative and drive.³⁵

³⁴ Macdonald Manual Training Fund, Receipts and Disbursements from 31st. Oct. 1899 to 30th April 1909. MacIntosh and Hyde, C.A., Montreal. R.P., 4, 7.

³⁵ Robertson, Macdonald College Movement, p. 93. R.P., 4, 6.

Part 2

The Seed Competition

What might be called the second part of the Macdonald Movement was initiated by Robertson. He offered incentives to farmers' children who, he felt, were more pliable and teachable than their elders. Having seen the profitability of the application of science to dairy farming, Robertson desired the same success for the grain grower.

As Commissioner for Agriculture, he was vitally interested in the sound selection of seed. In 1899, he gave evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization in which he pointed out some of the difficulties that confronted Canadian farmers at that time. In his section on seed grain, he spoke of the striking results of seed selection he had seen. "If the farmers of Canada can be encouraged to select out of their crops of each class of grain this year, enough heads from the vigorous plants, enough big heads from the largest plants, to yield two bushels of clean grain of each, they will have taken a great step in advance."¹

¹ J. W. Robertson, Evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization, Canada, House of Commons, 5 May 1899, p. 2. R. P., 2, 6.

During his travels in Europe he had become interested in the system of so-called mass selection which was being practised there to quite an extent. "That this system was in marked contrast to the system practised by his former Chief, Dr. Saunders at the Central Experimental farm, Ottawa, did not appear to worry him."²

On 30 December 1899, the Charlottetown Daily Examiner observed:

The gospel of big heads grain for seed and clover crops for manure as well as fodder, taught by Professor Robertson when he visited the Province last winter ought to be adopted in the practice of our farmers.

Robertson felt that good seed was the basis of good crops and ample harvests. Since the children of farmers would have to do battle with the elements on the raw prairie and bushland when they became adults, their struggle would be made easier if good seed was available and they were educated to use it.

Thus, in 1899, Robertson put aside \$100, his own money, not public funds, to offer in prizes to Canadian farm children for submitting the "largest heads from the most vigorous plants of wheat and oats from their father's farm, partly to learn whether the country could be got ready to accept the principle and adopt the practice and partly to interest and

² L. H. Newman, "My Forty Years with the Canadian Seed Growers Association," Canadian Seed Grower's Annual Report, Ottawa, 1943-44, pp. 28-44.

educate the boys and girls." Encouraged by letters and suggestions received, Robertson approached Sir William and in substance said, "here is a great chance to do some educational work in progressive agriculture" and suggested that \$10,000 for prizes "would set and keep this thing going for three years."³

Robertson recalled how he was sitting in his study at Wilbrod Street "toasting my feet before the fire at Christmas, talking over these things, - and thinking of them with some care, with the result that I decided to go to Montreal the next day and ask Sir William C. Macdonald for \$10,000, which was a reasonable and modest application for one Scotsman to make to another." Sir William provided the money with "all goodwill"⁴ Thus with a view to stimulating interest in the growing and systematic selection of seed grain, the competition among the boys and girls living on Canadian farms was enlarged in the spring of 1900, by Robertson and Sir William.

³ On 12 January 1900, the Charlottetown Daily Examiner announced the prize winners in this initial round of the competitions. In the Tenth Annual Report of the C.S.G.A., 1913, Robertson, in his Presidential Address, related what a wonderful response was forthcoming. "I remember the bags containing those selected heads coming in almost like a deluge upon us. And all the boys and girls got out of it was \$100 in prizes, plus much enjoyable education, enlightening enthusiasm and intelligent encouragement to go on with growing better crops through better seed"

⁴ H. G. L. Strange, "The Spirit of Dr. Robertson," address at the Fortieth Anniversary meeting of the C.S.G.A., Saskatoon, June 1944.

The Toronto Mail and Empire announced the "Regulations for the Seed Grain Selection Competition, \$10,000 in cash prizes," on 4 January 1900, and went on to inform its readers that:

By the kindness of a generous friend, Commissioner Robertson is able to offer \$10,000 in cash prizes for the selection of seed grain on all farms in all provinces on a plan that should lead to a great improvement in the crop throughout the whole country . . . the competition will be open to all boys and girls who have not passed their eighteenth birthday before 1st January, 1900

The generous friend was Sir William Macdonald. As a result of the competition there were over 1,500 entries with 450 completing the three years' work. The experimental plots were inspected by departmental officials, prizes were distributed by the Department of Agriculture, and it was learned from them that the plants contained in these plots and grown from hand selected seeds were "heavier and better . . . more vigorous" Robertson concluded that, "when results so notable as those can be gained by three years of intelligent labour, what do you think is possible in thirty years . . . ?"⁵

The work of the boys and girls taking part in the Macdonald-Robertson competition provided tangible evidence of the enormous possibilities for the improvement of crops by the systematic selection of seed. The results were so significant that it was decided to form an association in order to give the

⁵ J. W. Robertson, Evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization, 1906-07, pp. 191-192. R.P., 3, 7.

selection of seed by farmers official recognition by introducing a system of registration of the seed produced. As a result of this decision by Robertson's department, a letter was sent in 1902, to the competitors who had stuck to the work throughout the competition, inviting them, or their parents, to form themselves into an association of seed growers. In March 1903, a Bulletin was issued announcing the formation of the Macdonald-Robertson Seed Grower's Association. The first annual meeting of the association was called for in June 1904, when its name was changed to the Canadian Seed Grower's Association with Robertson as its first President.⁶

This amalgam of private initiative, private funding, and government support, well illustrates the especial abilities of Robertson as a visionary who could translate his dreams into action.

⁶ Canadian Seed Grower's Association History, 1900-1925, (Ottawa, 1926).

Part 3

Rural School Consolidation

Early in 1902, Sir William and Robertson announced their proposed plan for the improvement of education in rural schools. In a memorandum of a Plan re Rural Schools published in Ottawa, 6 January 1902, Robertson set out their joint proposals in several parts. Part 1 of the plan was:

intended to give object lessons of improvement in education from the consolidation of five, six or more small rural schools into one central graded school, with a School Garden, and a Manual Training room as part of its equipment.

It was further proposed that one locality in Ontario, and one locality in each of the Provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island should be offered financial assistance to induce the people to undertake and carry on these improvements in education.

Robertson insisted that compared with city children the education of rural children left much to be desired. The lack of money, the isolation and lack of qualified teachers led to a situation in which education was both inefficient and weak. In the United States "the consolidation of rural schools has been carried out to a considerable extent with a very great gain in the quality of the education given in the

locality, and in most cases with no increase in cost to the rate-payers." If milk or cream could be brought to one central place, "it would not be more difficult to arrange for the collection of children on various routes to one central school."

Part 2 of the plan was for the purpose of giving object lessons of the value of school gardens and nature study, at individual rural schools, as part of general education, to be begun by means of a travelling instructor, who would visit and spend one-half day per week with the children and teacher at each school of a group for a term of three years, or until a considerable number of suitably trained and qualified teachers would be available to carry on such work themselves at rural schools.

Part 3 of the plan had for its object to assist in providing short courses of instruction and training for teachers in rural schools, who desire to qualify themselves in these newer subjects and methods of education. To that end it was proposed to offer to the Province of Ontario at the Ontario Agricultural College, a gift of a building, including a Nature Study plant growing house, and such equipment as may be desired . . . for the accommodation of teachers while taking these courses. In order to ease the difficulties of travel to the college a mileage allowance, plus a boarding allowance, would be provided to approved teachers who had taken a full course satisfactorily.

Finally, Part 4 of the plan was intended to assist in providing courses of instruction and training in Domestic Economy or Household Science for young women from country homes, in order "that they may have opportunities for acquiring practical and advanced education not less suitable and helpful to them, than the present courses at the Ontario Agricultural College are beneficial to young men"

There it was proposed to offer a residence to accommodate not less than 100 female students and teachers--students, daughters of farmers and others, and classrooms, kitchen laboratories and other equipment necessary for courses of instruction and training in Domestic Science or Household Science. This plan envisaged that the pupils "might know the relation of those things to health and comfort, and might observe those methods and practices which make for good living in simple, clean well-kept and beautiful homes in the country."¹

For the Toronto Globe of 16 December 1902, Robertson analysed the benefits claimed for the scheme of rural schools consolidation and the transportation of students. Armed with information he had gained from a visit to the United States to study the experiment, Robertson believed that this integrated system:

¹ Plan re Rural Schools, Ottawa, 1902. R.P., 4, 3.

1. Resulted in better attendance particularly of those under eight years and those over fifteen years.
2. Ensured the engagement and retention of more qualified teachers.
3. Created conditions for a proper classification of pupils and placement in which they can work to their best advantage.
4. Permitted a timetable which enables teachers to better supervise and help individual students.
5. Enabled an enrichment programme to be instituted.
6. Enabled students to obtain a high school education without having to leave home.
7. Led to better buildings and equipment.
8. Stimulated public interest and pride.
9. Might lead to an improvement in rural roads.

Robertson's conviction of the value of consolidation grew after his observation of consolidated schools in Iowa and Ohio. He described the unanimity of opinion which existed among the rate-payers respecting the marked success and superior advantages of the system. The few exceptions were the "kickers," those rate-payers without children. Robertson presented some facts and figures pertaining to the Ohio township of Gustavus, a pioneer community, in the direction of consolidation, and gave a description of the type of van used to collect the students, the contracting for such vehicles and their cost. He gave a break-down on over-all costs under consolidation as compared with pre-consolidation costs--the former showing distinct reduction over the latter. Always

the idealist, Robertson went so far as compare the consolidation he saw with the magnificent Library of Congress, which reminded him of a description of the New Jerusalem. But consolidation was in his opinion a far "greater tribute and credit to the enlightenment and advancement and high civilization of the people of the United States than the splendour of the home of books at the Capitol."²

The newer methods of education such as Nature Study, Manual Training and Domestic Economy, would be made easily possible at consolidated rural schools. Centralization of schools, Robertson suggested, would provide for fewer teachers, but better teachers of more experience.

At the present time there are comparatively few, if any, prize places in the teaching profession in rural schools. The coveted posts are in the towns and cities; they draw the teachers of approved ability from the rural districts. Teachers would stay in consolidated schools longer than in the one room schools in country parts.³

In a speech given at Halifax, N.S., Robertson dwelled at length on the subject of school consolidation, and the possibilities of aesthetic appreciation it could promote. The rural schoolhouse he said:

is rarely a thing of beauty, indeed it was sometimes a place of discomforts and a hindrance to the natural development of robust bodies and to the growth of mental vigour and activity. Many a school lacked

² Evidence, 1903, pp. 30-31.

³ Ibid.

suitable desks with comfortable seats. Lighting, heating and ventilation were often inadequate. Everybody admits the high educational value of a well-constructed, well-arranged, well-equipped schoolroom, with windows and floors shinningly clean, and walls decorated with pictures. Day by day beautiful, comfortable surroundings will have their ethical influence upon his development until he comes to abhor anything that is not beautiful, well-ordered and clean.

It is not to be expected that simple consolidation of schools will create at once, all the desirable conditions which have been referred to. If the centralizing plan enables communities and school authorities to do better for education than they can do at one-room schools, it is so far a helpful one.⁴

Robertson wanted something better than mere consolidation.

We want not simply consolidation, but consolidation where conditions are suitable for it, as a means towards an improved time-table and methods of study sufficient for present day needs. The Macdonald Rural Schools Fund would meet for a period of three years the additional expense of the consolidated schools over the cost of small rural schools, with the Fund acting as a ratepayer to be assessed accordingly. The schools would be administered by local authorities. These conditions would apply for three years.⁵

Consolidated schools were located at places chosen or approved by the Provincial Department of Education. In each case a new building was erected and each equipped with classrooms and an assembly hall and also for manual training, household science and nature study with a school garden. A

⁴ J. W. Robertson, Address on Education for the Improvement of Agriculture, Halifax, N.S., 1903, R.P., 3, 7.

⁵ Evidence, 1903, pp. 36-37.

consolidated school board was elected according to the school law of the province concerned, and it was managed as part of the provincial school system. The school in Nova Scotia, at Middleton, was opened in September 1903; in New Brunswick, at Kingston, in September 1904; in Ontario, at Guelph, in November 1904; and in Prince Edward Island, at Hillsboro', early in the summer of 1905.⁶

On the occasion of the opening of Middleton, N.S., consolidated school, the Maritime Farmer and Cooperative Dairyman declared:

The Macdonald School system is an experiment in rural education improvement It places within the reach of sparse rural population the advantages of town or village high school with the addition of some new features hitherto attempted to only a limited extent even in the most progressive city institutions.⁷

The President of Ontario Agricultural College noted in 1904:

The piece of land lying between Macdonald Institute and the Brock Road was purchased some time ago by Professor Robertson for the purpose of erecting a consolidated school and for the laying out of play grounds and school gardens. During the year a splendid three-story building was constructed and six teachers were engaged for the instruction of the children of the several adjacent school sections which had decided to unite and sent the children to a central school. As the land comprising the school grounds joins our College campus, we have, at the request of the trustees, assumed the responsibilities of caring for the same; so that the school may be said to be situated on our College campus.⁸

⁶ J. W. Robertson, Evidence, 1906-07, pp. 197-98.

⁷ 20 December 1904.

⁸ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1904, no. 14, pp. 4-5.

In presenting a statistical table pertaining to consolidation, Robertson pointed out that the increased cost of them over the rural school was caused largely by the better salaries paid to the teachers. He anticipated that when the Normal schools began to turn out teachers qualified to conduct school gardens, some household science work and manual training as well as the ordinary book subjects, they need not be paid so much. The cost of conveyance, a large item of expense, was showing a reduction in Nova Scotia as between the 1903-4 figure and the 1905-6 figure. He felt that when school boards undertook to meet the whole expense themselves, "still more economical methods of management would prevail."⁹

Robertson, in 1903, stated,

I think I am within the mark when I say that in ten years after the Macdonald object lessons have been given, we will have over 1,000 consolidated rural schools in Canada Even if we get only 400 or 500 in ten years, then the boys and girls who come from these schools . . . will become teachers in rural schools which cannot be consolidated.¹⁰

In the same year, Robertson announced that the Government of Nova Scotia would build an Agricultural College at Truro and coordinate its work with the Normal School. The Legislature of that same province voted the sum of money to provide and assist in consolidation.¹¹ By 1907, Dr. Mackay,

⁹ Robertson, Evidence, 1906-07, pp. 197-98.

¹⁰ J. W. Robertson, Evidence, 1903, p. 38. (See MacKay, A. H., "Consolidation of Schools in Canada," Dominion Education Association Proceedings, Toronto, 1905, pp. 134-141.)

¹¹ Ibid.

Superintendent of Education, reported that in Nova Scotia, 53 schools had been consolidated into 22 effective ones. In the province of New Brunswick there were four large consolidated schools.¹²

Consolidation of school districts in the present time is generally accepted by the public as being beneficial to education. But at the beginning of the century this was not necessarily so. Hence the anxiety of both Sir William and Robertson that the experiment should succeed. Even in Nova Scotia, a province in the van of educational progress, a note of concern can be detected in the General and Financial Report from Middleton Consolidated School, 24 June 1905.

The final year of the experimental stage of the school is before us. The necessity for sympathetic action on the part of all concerned is apparent, and will have an important bearing on the future of the school. The school board earnestly hope that the rate-payers of consolidated district will more frequently visit the school and become acquainted with the working of the different departments and thus become able to judge more fully the worth of the school to our boys and girls.

¹² Robertson, Evidence, 1906-07, p. 199. For contemporary descriptions of the Macdonald Consolidated Schools see E. A. Howes, "Macdonald Consolidated School, Guelph, Ontario," The Teacher's World, 1 (Toronto, December 1906), pp. 123-27; Ibid., pp. 145-47; T. B. Kidner, "Municipal Consolidated School in New Brunswick; Ibid., pp. 133-140; D. W. Hamilton, "Macdonald Consolidated School, Kingston, N.B."; Ibid., pp. 128-32; A. H. MacKay, "Consolidated Rural Schools in Nova Scotia," Ibid., pp. 141-44. (MacKay also wrote an article in The Farmer's Advocate, 1 December 1904, in which he explained the contractual arrangements for consolidation at Middleton and presented statistics pertaining to it); J. W. Jones, "The Macdonald Consolidated School, Hillsboro', Prince Edward Island," The School Trustee, (Toronto, January 1907), pp. 162-66.

This, in spite of the fact that Robertson, according to the same report, had instituted two interesting experiments, the provision of:

warm dinners at the average cost of two and one half cents for 353 children by the domestic science department, and arrangements for the school to be kept open during the summer vacation in order that each child may attend one day a week, the time to be spent in caring for the garden and in nature study, with drives to places in the district where plant and animal life can be studied to best advantage.¹³

There was to be no expense to the tax-payer.

When Hillsboro' Consolidated School was officially opened on 3 August 1905, the Charlottetown Guardian proclaimed:

A New Era for the Province. Never in the history of educational progress in Prince Edward Island has a larger or more representative gathering been held than that of yesterday afternoon at an epoch marking period in the Province--the formal opening of Hillsboro' Consolidated School. There were present many prominent men from all walks of life; leading politicians of both political parties, business men, physicians and many of the representative farmers of the Southern side of Hillsboro¹⁴

In an address, Robertson stated the purpose of the school was:

to help in the progress from the helplessness and selfishness of babyhood to the intelligence and ability and unselfishness of the grown man. Consolidation is only a means to that end--an attempt to get children together in sufficient numbers to make an object lesson. For its success the school depends upon the parents and the people of the locality for

¹³ R.P., 4, 3.

¹⁴ 4 August 1905.

their perseverance and patience to the school and teachers. In no country in the world do the people pay less for education than in this province.¹⁵

A report by J. Walter Jones, Principal of Hillsboro', showed that six districts were consolidated, that six teachers were employed including a manual training instructor and a domestic science teacher, that the total salary bill was \$3,300. Children enrolled were 161 with an average daily attendance of 119. Six vans conveyed the children to and from school at an average daily cost of \$1.67. These figures compared with six teachers before consolidation at a salary cost of \$1,190 and a pre-consolidation average daily attendance from 140 children of 89.¹⁶

Attendance was up, but so were costs.

Of the closing exercises in 1908 of the Macdonald School at Hillsboro', the Daily Patriot remarked:

This was a year memorable in the history of our educational progress, for it marked the parting of the ways, the end of the three-year period when the financial assistance of Sir William Macdonald would in a large measure be withdrawn, and the people given an opportunity of saying whether they wished the school retained or the old order of things resumed.

The Daily Patriot also quoted the principal speakers.

Mr. MacLean, now Principal, gave a review of the school's work:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. Walter Jones to Robertson, 13 January 1906, R.P., 4, 3.

The school was well-organized into eight grades, and had five teachers. They not only did the grade work presented by the Board of Education, but also taught the special branches of school gardens, Manual Training, Household Science, and Music. A number of these branches are self-sustaining. From the school gardens . . . a sale of the plants brings in a snug revenue

The Premier of the Province "had no doubt that the school would be carried on by the people" He pointed out that "taxation for school purposes is far lower here than in other provinces," and urged upon the people to realize their responsibilities in the grand work of educating their children.

The Chief Superintendent of Education for the Province made an eloquent appeal for the carrying on of the school, and for the confirmation, therefore, of the progressive movement in education.

The Rev. Dr. Morrison threw in the weight of the church. He said that the manner in which this school was established was in line with the natural development of such educational institutions. He believed consolidation to be the solution of the school question on Prince Edward Island. Any steps "made to retard the progress made in consolidation would be disastrous to the cause of education in Prince Edward Island."

Dr. Robertson, as always, had some practical suggestions for carrying on the school. He estimated that \$4,369 would be required to finance its operation, and proposed that a tax of 40 cents on every \$100 be levied on the present valuation of property in the district. This would raise \$876. The

government would supply \$1,015 and from the Macdonald Rural Fund \$1,400 would be available. Each child would be levied \$2, while \$100 would be available from parents of children outside the district. For every \$1 raised by fees, Robertson said he would give \$2 from his own pocket or \$800 altogether. The total receipts would be \$4,491, leaving a surplus of \$122.

At the close of the meeting, reported the Daily Patriot, other meetings were held in the districts under consolidation to see if they would remain in consolidation or not.¹⁷

The meetings were held and the Patriot reported the following day that "four out of six schools in the consolidated district of Hillsboro' had voted against remaining in the consolidation." The opposition "came chiefly from those who had no children attending, and who feared the increased taxation." (These people of course were the "kickers," as Robertson had earlier referred to them.)

Robertson, on being asked what the result of the decision on these four districts would be, gave out the following statement.

The five teachers . . . are as competent as any that can be obtained. They are willing to continue The assessment on the districts which have decided to continue will be at the rate of 40 cents per \$100; the fee charged to pupils from other districts will be fixed at \$5 per pupil per annum. The government grant will be at the regular entitlement. The Macdonald Rural Fund will contribute at

¹⁷ 3 July 1908.

the rate of \$1,200 for three years, and any balance required . . . will be provided by Dr. Robertson for three years.¹⁸

Hillsboro' Consolidated School carried on until 1910-1911. The school finally closed in 1912.¹⁹

¹⁸ 4 July 1908.

¹⁹ J. F. Snell, Macdonald College, p. 231.

Part 4

Rural School Gardens

Robertson, a fervent advocate of the scientific method, recognized the importance of the rural school garden as a place where a knowledge of modern principles of agriculture could be successfully taught. Despite the great progress made in agriculture, there were still areas in need of development. From this teaching he hoped would emerge an appreciation of the value and importance of scientific farming which in turn would act as a stimulus to local effort in education generally. The effect of the rural school garden would be to beautify the country school-houses, and to train the students to observe, investigate, conclude and finally do for themselves. He wrote:

when a child does anything with its own hands, such as planting a seed, pulling up a plant, making an examination of the changes which have taken place during its growth, making a drawing of it, mounting it and putting its name on it, he receives impressions by the sense of touch, he sees, he hears the noise of the movement he makes, and he smells the part of the soil and the part of the plant with which he is dealing. These impressions are definite and lasting; they add to the sum of sensuous knowledge; they prepare for the perception of logical knowledge, in a common sense way.¹

¹ Memorandum of a Plan re Rural Schools, Ottawa, 1902. R.P., 4, 6.

(Text books were being written on Nature Study by this time. However, the authors of one such text were not fully confident of the reception their book might receive as the following preface shows.

In placing this manual before Canadian teachers the authors do not feel that it is necessary to advance any plea for Nature Study. It finds its justification in the conditions of modern society, and rests upon the same psychological basis as Manual Training and Domestic Science. The necessity for nature study has been recognized by the most advanced educators both in Canada and the United States, and it is only a matter of time till it will find a permanent place among the subjects of study.)²

In an address to the National Education Association, in 1909, Robertson spoke on the Macdonald Movement in general and on school gardens in particular.

The school garden was an effort to give children training in three important matters in connection with agriculture: the selection of seed; the rotation of crops; and the protection of crops against weeds, disease and insects. Children find something by doing, observing and recording results themselves, and I say it over again that all worthy progress in matters that are worth thinking about, spring from learning the lessons of consequences. As soon as a child understands that, and governs his life accordingly, he becomes a better pupil and the promise of a better citizen in every sense.³

To train teachers for this new venture, Robertson recruited in 1903, a class of Canadian practising teachers which was sent

² S. Silcox and O. J. Stevenson, Morang's Modern Nature Study, (Toronto: Morang, 1902).

³ J. W. Robertson, "The Macdonald College Movement," address to the National Educational Association, Denver, Colo., 7 July 1909. N.E.A. Proceedings, 1909. R.P., 4, 6.

for courses to the Universities of Chicago and Cornell, to Teacher's College, Columbia University, and Clark University, with a final course at Ontario Agricultural College.⁴

In Teacher-Builder, the biography of John Wesley Gibson, the author tells of her husband's selection as one of the Canadian teachers to be trained by the Macdonald Fund to organize rural school gardens. She writes of his experience at Cornell under Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey who "inspired everyone with his fresh approach to laboratory methods" We must remember that Robertson was equally impressed with that institution.

On his return to Canada, Gibson was engaged to supervise the five centres in Carleton County, Ontario, that had been established: at Carp, Galetta, Bowesville and North Gower, each of two acres, and at Richmond a garden of three acres. His salary was \$800 per annum for three years. Provision was made to meet the expenses of a horse and buggy.⁵

Robertson sent a "Memorandum to Teachers" in charge of Macdonald School Gardens in 1905, offering guidance in connection with school garden work.

I think each travelling instructor should request the teacher at every school to devote some time every day, when the weather is suitable, to

⁴ Evidence, 1903, pp. 36-37.

⁵ Belle C. Gibson, Teacher Builder, (Victoria: 1961), pp. 39-44. See also Gibson, "The Educational Value of Agricultural Instruction in Elementary and Secondary Schools," The Phi Delta Kappan, VIII, 1926, pp. 14-18.

work with the pupils in the school grounds and school garden. I would suggest that leaders be appointed each with a committee formed of the pupils of the school.

He reminded the instructors that the garden was:

primarily to be used as a means of education of the children. Incidentally and afterwards it should be used to interest the parents and to let the people of the locality see that the garden has also a practical use, in preparing the children to have a greater love for beautiful premises at their own homes⁶

School gardens were set up in Carleton County, under J. W. Gibson; in Quebec, under Mr. George Fuller; in New Brunswick, under Mr. John Brittain, B.A.; in Nova Scotia, under Mr. Percy Shaw; and in Prince Edward Island, under Mr. Theodore Ross.⁷ Writing in the Queen's Quarterly, R. H. Cowley sketched the advantages of the school garden:

Speaking broadly, the school garden has an educational, and economic, and a national aim. Educationally, it affords a healthful release, in the fresh air and the sunlight, from the present hurtful inactivity of the schoolroom. It provides a control suitably complementary to the otherwise bookish programme of the school It lends itself to the development of literary appreciation . . . enabling the child "to catch the imagery of our best natural poems." The good influence of the school garden "on the discipline and moral tone of the school is remarked on by all the teachers."

On the economic side:

the school garden teaches the constituents of the soil, the conditions of plant life, the value of fertilizers, seed selection, drainage, tillage.

⁶ J. W. Robertson Memorandum to Teachers, (Ottawa, 31 March 1905), R.P., 4, 6.

⁷ R. H. Cowley, "The Macdonald School Gardens," Queen's Quarterly, Vol. XII, (March 1905), pp. 391-418.

In its national aspects, the school gardens develop a wide interest in the fundamental industry of the country The tendency of young people to rush to the cities . . . is likely to deteriorate the national life of Canada The school garden will train the urban population to look to the country. It will train the rural population to remain in the country. It will convince the young mind that the work of the farmer gives scope for intelligence and scholarship.⁸

A lover of beauty and good order, Robertson felt that pleasant and well-arranged surroundings were silent potent educational forces.

The child naturally tries to put himself into harmony with what surrounds him. That effort, often unconscious to himself is part of his education. What a charge that sentence brings against the untidy, uncomfortable, unlovely interiors of many schoolhouses in rural districts, and against their fenceless, uncared for and hardly decent surroundings.

In comparing the over 100,000 European school gardens with the lack of the same in Canada, Robertson urged:

why should not the school house and school premises be the most beautiful and attractive place in the locality? If unsightly and repellent premises are not in themselves degrading, they have a tendency to dull the taste and judgement of young persons as to what should be esteemed Children who observed beautiful things . . . would also be more likely to observe graceful speech, good manners and unflagging truthfulness, and to become respectful and reverent towards the beautiful and the good.⁹

⁸ Ibid. For an account of Cowley's work with the Macdonald School Gardens scheme and his association with Robertson, see Robert Stothers, R. H. Cowley, (Toronto: Nelson, 1935), pp. 112-35.

⁹ Robertson, Evidence, 1903, p. 31.

The Macdonald plan for the improvement of rural schools was but a component of the "New Education"--an effort made to "lead the child into a more sympathetic relation to his environment." J. W. Hotson, M.A., Principal of the Macdonald Consolidated School at Guelph, Ontario, felt that this "New Education" would endure because it rested on "natural, fundamental principles," and quoted Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey as saying,

much that is called nature-study is only diluted and sugar-coated science. This will pass. Some of it is mere sentimentalism. This will also pass. With the changes the term Nature-Study may fall into disuse; but the name matters little so long as we hold on to the essence.¹⁰

¹⁰ J. W. Hotson, "Macdonald Rural Schools," Brandon College Monthly, (June, 1904), p.9.

Part 5

Macdonald Institute, Ontario Agricultural College

The building of the Macdonald Institute as an organic part of the Ontario Agricultural College, cost Sir William Macdonald \$182,500.¹ The provision of the institute and its inclusion in the Memorandum, was in part the outcome of a movement initiated by Mrs. John Hoodless of Hamilton, Ontario, who founded the Women's Institutes of Ontario. As early as 1891, Mrs. Hoodless had taken an interest in the efforts of the local Young Women's Christian Association to instruct girls in intelligent household work. With the cooperation of the Hamilton School Board and the Ontario Department of Education, public school classes had been afforded the facilities of the Association, and in 1900, a normal school of Domestic Science and Art had been established in Hamilton. About this time, Mrs. Hoodless met Sir William and Robertson, and enlisted their interest in her projects. On visiting the Ontario Agricultural College, she decided that it would be of advantage

¹ "The Macdonald Rural Schools Fund" cost Sir William Macdonald more than \$260,000 according to Macdonald Rural Schools Fund, Receipts and Disbursements from 1899 to 1909, MacIntosh and Hyde, C.A., Montreal. R.P., 4, 7.

to transfer the Normal School to the grounds of that institution.²

Dr. James Mills, President of the College, agreed to the idea, and negotiations were conducted by Robertson between Sir William, the Ontario Government, and the College. A sample of the correspondence which passed between the parties follows.

Dr. Mills wrote to Robertson:

"You are aware that Mrs. Hoodless has been trying to interest Sir William Macdonald in Domestic Science and Art. She is anxious to have him do something, here or elsewhere for the promotion of education in that important department; and knowing your relations with Sir William, I am writing to solicit your influence for something handsome at Guelph.

"We have the equipment and staff for a great portion of the work, and I will do anything in my power to meet Sir William's wishes, in case he feels inclined to assist us towards the erection and equipment of a building for a general course and a course of normal training for teachers."³

In answer to Mills, Robertson said:

"I shall be glad to do anything I can to help you and the Ontario Agricultural College to do what might be done for the improvement of education in rural schools, and to provide a course of instruction in domestic science particularly for the daughters of farmers and for young women who will teach in the rural schools I shall be glad to take as early an opportunity as I can make of discussing with you how we can join forces for the improvement of rural schools in Ontario.

"But you will please not think that I have any right at all to be considered as the advisor of Sir William Macdonald who could influence him in the

² Snell, Macdonald College, pp. 35-41.

³ Dr. James Mills to Robertson 31 October 1901, R.P., 4, 1.

matter of donating a building or equipment for the Agricultural College at Guelph."⁴

Robertson received a letter from Richard Harcourt, Minister for Education for Ontario in which he stated:

"The Premier (of Ontario) discussed with me yesterday your ideas as to Guelph. I think one feature of your scheme should be a Summer School for Nature Study and Scientific Agriculture . . . diplomas to be given, etc."⁵

Sir William, however, whose canny scottishness was not far below the surface, wrote to Robertson and quoted from a letter he had received from the Premier of Ontario, G. W. Ross.

"Allow me to say that the government accept with much appreciation a grant of \$125,000 from Sir William Macdonald to be applied for the training of teachers in the elements of agriculture and of young women in domestic science on the terms set forth in the said memorandum." /That is the memorandum of 1902 previously mentioned./

Sir William reiterated that:

"The grant was not intended to be applied as above explicitly stated by the words which I have underlined The terms set forth in the memorandum . . . stated that the \$125,000 was for the erection of buildings."

He added:

"Mr. Ross is a busy man and I have no doubt he means the terms to be as set forth in the memorandum, but as we are dealing with a government which is subject to change the wording of the agreement should be correct."⁶

⁵ Hon. Richard Harcourt to Robertson 11 December 1901, R.P., 4, 1.

⁶ Sir William Macdonald to Robertson 13 February 1902, R.P., 4, 1.

Sir William was not "putting his trust in princes." Robertson, as coordinator of the Guelph scheme was in frequent correspondence with the government. One letter from Ross invited him "to call on the Premier" at the Parliament Buildings "so that I might discuss with you some features of the Macdonald bequest in connection with the Agricultural College at Guelph."⁷ Preliminary planning proceeded well, claimed Dr. Mills:

By the help of Sir W. C. Macdonald of Montreal, the Minister of Education for Ontario, Prof. J. W. Robertson of Ottawa, Mrs. John Hoodless of Hamilton, and other less prominent workers, a distinct step in advance has been taken along the line of adapting our primary and secondary education to what are likely to be the functions and environment (the life work and surroundings) for the great majority of our young people - manual training for boys, household science for girls, and nature study for both. Manual training and household, or domestic science departments are in successful operation at a number of our High and Public Schools; household science is taught in the Ontario Normal School of Domestic Science and Art, Hamilton, and in the Provincial Normal Schools and Normal College; and we hope soon to offer at the Macdonald Institute in connection with the Ontario Agricultural College a valuable course in nature study and a broader, longer, and more thorough course in household science than can be given at the Normal Schools or Normal College. This course, it is expected, will begin about the middle of September next; and as special provision will be made for farmer's daughters in Macdonald Hall (or the Women's Residence) along side of the Institute, it is hoped that much will be done towards improving the management, increasing the comfort, and multiplying the happiness of Canadian farm homes. If this is done, the standard of work and citizenship throughout the Province and Dominion will rise from year to year.⁸

⁷ Ross to Robertson 29 August 1902, R.P., 4, 1.

⁸ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1902, no. 14, p. 6.

The Ontario Government was most grateful for the generous gift of Sir William and the Minister of Education wrote to Robertson:

"I notice . . . that Sir William Macdonald has given another grant to the School of Domestic Science which has been erected at Guelph . . . I assume that we owe this to your kindly intercession"9

Robertson replied:

"There is nothing due to my intercession with Sir William. The desire and anxiety to help in the improvement of education at rural schools are Sir William's"10

However, there were some misunderstandings between Dr. James Mills, and the Hon. Richard Harcourt, Minister of Education, as to the purpose of the new Macdonald Institute. Dr. Mills appealed to Robertson to "come to Toronto at an early date that we may have a clear understanding with Mr. Harcourt and others in regard to the position and work of Macdonald Institute."

Apparently, the Normal Schools, supported by the Minister, felt that the Macdonald Institute should merely conduct short summer courses, and that they, the Normal Schools, should continue with the type of teacher-training for which the new Institute was erected. In his letter to Harcourt, Mills indignantly asked:

"If now the intention is to arrange matters so that this work is all to be done elsewhere, what use will there be in maintaining the Macdonald Institute

9 Harcourt to Robertson, 28 November 1902, R.P., 4, 1.

10 Robertson to Harcourt 29 November 1902, R.P., 4, 1.

at the expense of the government and what is the need of going further with the buildings?"

Mills outlined his clear conviction that:

"we should have two year's course in Guelph for those without Normal training, accepting the one year's training in the Normal School pro tanto as an equivalent to our first year's work"¹¹

That Dr. Mills' view appears to have prevailed is indicated in his 1903 report, in which he also describes the fabric of the Institute:

Early in the spring of 1903, the contractor commenced work on what are known as the Macdonald Building, Macdonald Institute, and Macdonald Hall. The former is to furnish long and short courses in Home Economics (or Domestic Science), Nature Study, and Manual Training, - all three for teachers, male and female, and the Home Economics for farmers' daughters and other young women who desire to learn the theory and practice of cooking, ventilation, general housekeeping, laundry work, sewing, dress-making, millinery, home decoration, etc. The latter is a women's residence, or a large and well-equipped building in which the young women who come to take any of the courses can have good board, lodging, etc. on easy terms, and under proper oversight, during their stay in College.

The Institute is a fine building of red pressed brick, with terra-cotta trimmings, - large and imposing in its general outline, commodious in its internal arrangement, and elegant as regards the quality and finish of the inside woodwork. The Hall (which will be ready for use in September next) will also be a large and imposing brick building, with stone trimmings and of the Elizabethan style of architecture. It will be well furnished, and will provide a very comfortable home for 107 young women, some in single rooms and others in double rooms, with single iron beds.¹²

¹¹ Mills to Robertson, enclosure Mills to Harcourt, 1 April 1903, R.P., 4, 1.

¹² Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1903, no. 14, pp. 7-8.

Robertson was first approached by those requiring financial favours from Sir William Macdonald. Dr. Mills and Mrs. Hoodless sought scholarships from Lord Strathcona for students at Guelph: Dr. Mills wrote to Robertson:

"We first thought of applying to Lord Strathcona for a number of scholarships, as he had promised to assist Mrs. Hoodless in her Domestic Science work and I sent Mrs. Hoodless to Montreal to interview him with that object in view; but before she left, I decided that it would not be fair to Sir William to take steps in that direction without consulting him . . . I shall esteem it a great favour if you will directly or indirectly, use some influence to secure the object in view."¹³

From the above correspondence it can be seen that although people imagined Robertson was the intermediary through whom Sir William could be reached, Robertson himself was quick to point out that the millionaire had a mind of his own, and that any help forthcoming from Sir William was because of a conviction that the need was genuine and beneficial.

Lord Grey, the Governor-General of Canada, visited Macdonald Institute. In a letter to Robertson His Excellency said:

"I must write a line to tell you what an immense pleasure I derived from my visit to the College You have collected around you an admirable body of helpers and the spirit which pervades the whole place leaves nothing to be desired

"I am writing to Sir William Macdonald telling him how much I envy him the satisfaction he must experience when he thinks of all the good his heart, brains and money have accomplished, with your assistance. You call yourself a "back number" but long may

¹³ Mills to Robertson 5 January 1904, R.P., 4, 1.

you remain available for the new annuals to refer to. I hope to see the Robertson spirit go right through Canada and spread its influence educationally into matters municipal, political and commercial"¹⁴

Heady stuff indeed, but indicative of things to come.

Although meeting with general approval the "New Education" was not without at least one critic. Professor James Cappon, in an article in the Queen's Quarterly of January 1905, felt that Robertson, like most reformers, was apt to take extreme views.

Is it really necessary in order to promote the cause of agriculture training that he should dispute the place which the more general and literary elements of education have in our present system, and attack everything from grammar . . . to the study of arithmetic and literature?

Cappon went on to question Robertson's general theory of education.

As far as I have been able to follow, in his utterances to the daily press and in personal reports which have reached me, he seems to be still under the influence of fallacies, some of which belong to the old theories of the utilitarian school of Bain and Spencer about education, while others represent the new pedagogical tendency to set up "concrete" methods and the object lesson in opposition to literary and abstract methods in intellectual training.

Cappon concluded his article by indicating his respect for Robertson "in his own sphere as an organizer of practical

¹⁴ Lord Grey to Robertson 16 December 1905, R.P., 4, 1.

or technical education" but was sorry "to see him identifying a cause which is so good with theories which were so doubtful."¹⁵

In his reply to Professor Cappon, Robertson suggested that for a comparatively small number of children the study of the classical languages was necessary for a later professional life, and for a few of that few, as beneficial as a means of culture.

But, not even Professor Cappon will claim that the study of these languages, to the extent practicable to boys and girls in the elementary or even in the secondary schools, can compare for a moment (in culture value, or in forming and strengthening the character and developing the intelligence of the children, or in fitting them for the work of life) with the training of their faculties by means of Nature Study work, Manual Training and Household Science. I take it that the child in its body, mind and spirit is one and indivisible, and that "the training of faculty" includes the development of whatever capacity he may have towards bodily ability, intelligence and fine spirit of service of his fellows and of truth.

Robertson disclaimed any attack on the literary tradition:

On the contrary I have been doing my best to commend, to encourage and to bring about more effective methods of study in arithmetic, in language both spoken and written, and in literature. The methods and subject matter of the elementary schools in the past, through their bookishness, have hindered the turning out of pupils with ability to read and write well, to speak correctly and to compute accurately and quickly. It is my belief and hope that Nature Study, Manual Training and Household Science as methods of education will supplement books in helping children to express themselves in clear, correct and beautiful language, as well as in actions.

¹⁵ James Cappon, "Sir William Macdonald and Rural Education," Queen's Quarterly, XII, (January 1905), 315-22.

For himself:

Some knowledge of the needs of rural population and of the art of agriculture has taught me more useful and congenial employment for the "literary faculty and instinct" than the mental exercise which that sort of thing affords.¹⁶

¹⁶ James W. Robertson, "Professor Cappon's Article in the Queen's Quarterly," Queen's Quarterly XII, (April 1905), pp. 420-24.

Part 6

Robertson as Principal of Macdonald College

On 1 January 1905, Robertson resigned the position of Commissioner of Agriculture to devote his entire time and energy to the carrying out of yet another scheme of education for the betterment of rural life, viz., an Agriculture College and Teachers' Training School situated in Quebec Province and of which he was to become Principal. To be known as Macdonald College, the institution grew out of the desire by Sir William to help the rural population build up the country and make the most of it and themselves.

Announcing to the House of Commons the news of the Commissioner's resignation to take up this new position, the Minister of Agriculture declared:

I need hardly dwell upon the regret which I personally feel at the loss of so eminent and successful, and painstaking a public servant. My only relief . . . is the knowledge that . . . Professor Robertson still serves the agricultural interests of Canada, having taken a position in the control and management of a great . . . college.¹

A letter to Robertson from J. A. Nicholson, Registrar of McGill University, Montreal, expressed the feelings of the McGill Normal School Committee to which,

¹ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1905, p. 6932.

"the possibility of bringing the Normal School into close touch with the new Agricultural College to be erected at Saint Anne was presented. And I was instructed to inform you that great delight was expressed at the interest Sir William Macdonald has taken in the matter of rural education in the Province of Quebec, and that the Normal School Committee is willing to cooperate with him in this good work"²

On 13 March 1905, a special meeting of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction for the Province of Quebec, was held at McGill Normal School. The Secretary, George Parmelee, announced that Professor James Robertson had been appointed a member by order of the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council, and also represented Sir William Macdonald. He was pleased to confirm that Sir William Macdonald through the Macdonald Rural School Fund would provide fourteen scholarships of \$50 for each female and \$75 for each male teacher to enable teachers from this Province to take a three months course in Nature Study work at Macdonald Institute at Guelph. An increase of \$2.50 would be made to the scholarship of those who completed the course successfully, and an allowance of five cents a mile one way would be made for travelling expenses.

The meeting further heard from Professor Robertson of Sir William's intention to establish a Teacher's College and College of Agriculture at Ste. Anne-be-Bellevue with a residence for female teachers-in-training, a residence for male teachers-in-training, and courses in Nature Study, Household Science, and Manual Training.

² Nicholson to Robertson 3 March 1905, R.P., 4, 8.

It was moved and seconded that "Whereas the proposals made to this committee by Sir William Macdonald . . . in the opinion of this committee it is expedient that all normal training of teachers be done at Ste. Anne"

But Sir William was anxious that any benefaction he made should not be the means "of relieving the government or taxpayers from the duty of providing funds" therefore,

It is proposed that such action taken by the Protestant Committee will ensure that if, and when, the government may be relieved from the necessity of meeting the whole (or part) of the annual expenditure incurred at the present time for maintaining the Normal School in the city of Montreal, the amount to be saved . . . shall be placed at the disposal as follows: a) Not less than one half the amount to assist Protestant schools. b) The remainder to promote education generally in Protestant Schools.

Mr. Parmelee's report of the meeting concluded with a letter to be sent to Sir William Macdonald thanking him for his generous proposals and assuring him that a small committee had been appointed to consider their details.³

Quebec, unlike several other provinces, did not possess an agricultural college supported by public funds. Sir William supplied this deficiency. As early as the autumn of 1904, Robertson purchased land at Ste. Anne-de-Bellevue in the Province of Quebec. The site was a beautiful one, overlooking the Ottawa River at Ste. Anne-de-Bellevue. The main

³ Minutes of a Meeting of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction for the Province of Quebec, held at McGill Normal School, Montreal, 13 March 1905, R.P., 4, 8.

lines of the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Pacific Railways passed through the property, and the stations of both railways were situated within the boundaries.

The purpose of the institution was outlined by Robertson in a speech to the Bedford Dairymen's convention in 1906. The institute would comprise a department of farms, a department of research and a department of instruction. The department of farms would consist of demonstration or illustration farms, each fully equipped and self contained. The department of research was to be equipped with a competent staff and commodious and suitable laboratories. One laboratory building would contain departments of biology, bacteriology and entomology. Original investigation would be undertaken for the benefit of the Dominion at large. In the department of instruction, provision would be made for short courses for farmers, their sons and daughters, in such subjects as livestock, improvement of seeds and soils, fruit culture, dairying, poultry keeping, farm machinery etc. Women's courses would include sewing, cooking, dressmaking, millinery, housekeeping and so on.

In planning for an extension of the assistance which he had been giving towards the improvement of rural schools, Sir William wished to implement a course of teacher training suitable for the needs of rural education especially in his own province of Quebec. Teachers in rural schools would become competent not only in "ordinary subjects as accepted hitherto, but will be qualified to use these newest means of

education known as nature study work, household science and manual training." Teachers undergoing training did not need to take any courses in the department of Agriculture, but would have the opportunity to do so if they desired. In addition to the full term courses, short courses were offered for the practising teachers.

Sir William was anxious to provide the best kind of building for the money expended. Residences for men and women together with the college buildings made "a handsome group . . . standing on a sixty acre field, sloping towards the river, with a fine southern and eastern exposure."⁴

A Provisional Announcement described Macdonald College as incorporated with McGill University. It stated that the college would open on 17 September 1907. Its purposes were 1) For the advancement of education; for the carrying on of research work and investigation and the dissemination of knowledge; all with particular regard to the interests and needs of the population in rural districts. 2) To provide suitable and effective training for teachers and especially for those whose work will directly affect the education in schools in rural districts. Both men's and women's accommodations had gymnasiums and swimming pools. The buildings were of fireproof construction with roof of steel and reinforced concrete. All areas were air-conditioned.

⁴ Address at the Bedford Dairymen's Convention, Cowansville, Quebec, 31 January and 1 February 1906, R.P., 4, 6.

Admission to the School for Teachers was to be as for admission to the McGill Normal School. Tuition was free to residents of the Province of Quebec. "Board, room and washing of a specified number of pieces will be furnished for \$3.25 per week each where two students occupy one room; and \$3.50 for single occupancy."⁵

In a front-page spread, the Family Herald Weekly Star, Montreal, proclaimed the virtues of the new establishment.

With such training as is soon possible . . . the teachers will be able to articulate the country school closely and smoothly with the country home, the neighbourhood and the country at large . . . they should be able to utilize the local community life--its occupations, resources, organizations, traditions and customs for the rural school.

The article concluded with some statistics to the effect that the whole plant would exceed one and a half million dollars and that Sir William had put aside an endowment of two million dollars "so as to make the College self-sustaining for all time." Sir William believed that the new institution:

will be the main factor in the creation of a new agriculture for Quebec, whereby farmers will make more of themselves and their farms. He believes, moreover, that rural schools can be revived and redirected through the College . . . so that they can be real uplifting forces in the rural life of Quebec.⁶

Robertson was formally appointed Principal of the College in a letter from W. Vaughan, Secretary of McGill University:

⁵ Provisional Prospectus of Macdonald College, 1907, R.P., 4, 8.

⁶ 17 April 1907.

"I have pleasure in informing you that at their meeting held yesterday the Board of Governors passed the following resolution.

"Resolved that Jas. W. Robertson L.L.D., C.M.G., be and he is hereby appointed subject to the provisions of the Charter, Principal of Macdonald College, at a salary of \$5,000.00 per annum with free residence, light and water."7

Principal Robertson at all times emphasized the need for good teacher-training, and of the importance of a public recognition of the worth of the teacher. At Charlottetown he asked, "what hinders those who might be teachers from going into this profession, peerless in its opportunities for good? Want of public appreciation for the profession." He complained of the small remuneration offered teachers:

people say, "Oh, well, schools cost a great deal even with the small salaries paid to teachers now." What of that? Instruction and training in youth are the means of bringing an abundant harvest of national wealth If the people will starve the schools the schools may retaliate by letting people starve, mentally, then morally, and in a measure materially also. Salaries for teachers must go up or the people will go down.

In the same speech Robertson permitted himself a look into the school of the future and outlined a programme of study providing for the development of the mind, body and spirit symmetrically, and therefore suited to the ages and powers of children.

7 Vaughan to Robertson, 20 April 1907, R.P., 4, 8.

Probably one quarter of the time will be devoted to doing things with the hands with tangible things, including all forms of manual training, physical exercises, games and physical culture; one quarter to languages, particularly one's mother tongue, history, literature, songs and pictures; another quarter to arithmetic and mathematics and the remainder of the time to science. To be effective, the whole course must necessarily be administered in such a way as to develop a fine sense of proportion and a keen sense of responsibility.

He dwelt on the integrity of the programme, insisting that:

Manual training, household science and school gardens were not put in the school courses to satisfy women's clubs or councils, but to improve the schools fundamentally for the children and to provide for the preparation of teachers with new qualifications.⁸

During the course of a lecture entitled "Education in Relation to the National Heritage," delivered to the May Court Club in 1908, Robertson enlarged on the importance of education and attempted a definition of it:

Education is a word of many meanings - an elusive term, difficult of definition, because used to represent experiences unlike in their nature. It is not a something or a subject detachable from life. It may be held to be, or to result from, a series of experiences arranged to lead to the increase of (a) knowledge, (b) power, ability and skill and (c) good will in the individuals and in the community. Of the "newer education" no matter how new it may be it must still stand for culture. But it must promote culture and knowledge as means and not ends in themselves.

Education, Robertson felt, was:

for the benefit of the pupil as an individual, as a coming citizen, and as one link in the chain of life.

⁸ J. W. Robertson, "Education for the Improvement of Rural Conditions," Address at Charlottetown, P.E.I., 20 July 1907. R.P. 4,7

The powers resulting from it may be applied to the improvement of -

- (1) The home and its comforts, conveniences and safeguards.
- (2) The occupation and the security of its opportunities, satisfactions and remunerations; and
- (3) The social relationships, in order that there may be an increase of good-will and cooperations.

Such applications of education would bring about what has been called the rehabilitation of rural life.⁹

In surveying the Macdonald Movement as helped by Sir William, Robertson hoped that it would--

assist in building up something better than is now known and done, and thereby displace what is poor. It aims at helping the rural population to understand better what education is and what it aims at for them and their children. It plans to help in providing more competent leaders for the horticultural and agricultural population.

Robertson envisaged a wide and important role for the teacher. He claimed that:

in the Macdonald Movement, the aim has been to aid the teaching profession, to help the teachers themselves to qualify for the new needs of their calling, to help the public to obtain such teachers and to encourage them to appreciate them more highly. If our future as a nation is to be satisfying, it must needs be that the teacher shall be recognized as a leader and not merely as a teacher of letters. For leadership, he must have powers of sympathy, insight and interpretation; and to secure a following of the people, as well as of the children, he must be possessed of skill, scholarship and energy, and with all these, have character animated by enthusiasm, unselfishness and purpose to serve.

⁹ Central Canada Citizen, Ottawa, 31 March 1908, pp. 1-6.

Robertson finally warned, "National suicide lies in the direction of belittling teachers."¹⁰

Macdonald College in the words of his daughter, Mrs. Ishbel Robertson Currier:

was truly the creation of James W. Robertson, working with Sir William's money. The whole project entailed an enormous amount of work of all kinds, travel to see other agricultural schools all over the country, labour disputes in its construction, hiring staff, arguments about housing staff, errors in drainage plans for the farm land, constant visitors and publicity plans, speaking engagements here, there and everywhere.¹¹

Satisfying as his accomplishments must have been as Commissioner for Dairying and Agriculture, their results were spread all over Canada. The College on the other hand, "was a specific contribution to Canadian education and must have given him a solid sense of achievement."¹²

An example of the kind of problem with which Robertson as Principal had to deal is illustrated in a letter he received from a member of his staff. Apparently two professors wanted the same side of a duplex. One of them, H. S. Arkell, complained:

"Dr. Snell and I have had conversation . . . but he definitely refuses to accept the proposition of drawing lots. I had thought over the matter carefully and could find neither justice nor satisfaction

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Currier, Brief Biography, p.11.

¹² Ibid.

in agreeing to go into the north side Under the circumstances I wish to withdraw my proposition to cast lots and definitely make a request for the south side of the house on the strength of my senior position on the Faculty."¹³

Herbert Francis Sherwood, in an article in The Outlook, illustrated contemporary opinion of the College:

Intended for training in agriculture, home-making and teaching, it is probably the best equipped and most advanced institution of its type in the world. It stands for the advancement of education, the prosecution of research work, and the dissemination of knowledge, all with particular regard to the interests and needs of the population in rural districts. It is Sir William's greatest yeast cake. It is the supreme illustration of Dr. Robertson's methods of leavening. The mere fact of its existence is an educational force, for it advertises the underlying idea of the Macdonald movement and sets people thinking about it.¹⁴

Thus it came as a great shock to many people when the resignation of Robertson from the post of Principal of Macdonald College was hinted at in the Ottawa Citizen.

There are various rumours afloat that Dr. Robertson's occupancy of the Principalship has long been something less than a bed of roses. It is reported that he differed on many points concerning the management of the school from Sir William Macdonald It is also said that some of those in Montreal who had the ear of Sir William were not friendly to Dr. Robertson and that considerable friction has been engendered thereby.¹⁵

¹³ Arkell to Robertson, 22 September 1909, R.P., 4, 5.

¹⁴ Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Children of the Land," The Outlook, April 1910, p. 901.

¹⁵ 5 January 1910.

The report was correct. On 17 December 1909, Robertson wrote a confidential letter to William Vaughan, secretary of McGill University.

"I enclose herewith my application for leave of absence for a period of two months. This is the first step in the course which, you already know from our conference, I consider it desirable to take in the interest of Macdonald College. I shall follow this up by asking the board to accept my resignation as Principal at the end of February, 1910."¹⁶

But there had been even earlier rumours of Robertson's problems. On 24 February 1909, J. B. Maclean, President of Maclean Newspapers, wrote in the strictest confidence to Robertson:

"I was told the other day that you had completed your work at the Macdonald College and might shortly give it up to a younger man At that time I made a suggestion for your employment by another government but since then, I have been thinking about it, and if the statement is true, I would like to discuss the future with you before you decide upon other plans."¹⁷

W. D. Hoard, of Hoard's Dairyman, writing on 11 December 1909, requested Robertson to:

"Tell me if the situation is improved any concerning Sir William, and do you find yourself strengthened? I do not feel that you need consider your life work as being wrapped up in Macdonald College entirely. Heaven knows that I wish we had you in the United States."¹⁸

¹⁶ Robertson to Vaughan, 17 December 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

¹⁷ Maclean to Robertson, 24 February 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

¹⁸ Hoard to Robertson, 11 December 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

On 15 December 1909, Robertson received a letter from William Vaughan for his "private information." It revealed that a resolution had been passed by the Board of Macdonald College to the effect that:

The Board expresses great regret that the circumstances attending the construction of the buildings and residences of Macdonald College should have called for such a communication from the founder

It was recommended that a standing committee should be approved:

to discuss with Dr. Robertson the finances of the college, and to authorize such expenditure as they may approve That without the approval of such committee, Principal Robertson should be instructed not to authorize or incur any new expenditure of any amount exceeding say \$100.¹⁹

What had happened, was that Robertson had been spending money which had been appropriated for other purposes on his own College project, an action which must have irritated the meticulous millionaire, and also Mr. Vaughan, of McGill.

The latter set out a long list of complaints which the Committee had considered and stated that "Principal Robertson freely admits that his action in incurring the expenditure without reference to and approval by . . . the Board was a mistake on his part" ²⁰

Robertson's problem was to find accommodation for about forty extra teachers-in-training. Since most of the Governors

¹⁹ Vaughan to Robertson, 15 December 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

²⁰ Ibid.

were out of the city, he was instructed to consult a Mr. Green-shields, the Treasurer of McGill. He appears not to have done so, but he did consult with members of Macdonald College Committee, with the result that certain structural alterations were made at Macdonald College in order to provide and furnish additional bedrooms.²¹

Mrs. Currier said of her father that the \$100 limit must have been "a severe blow to his pride as well as a frustrating restriction to his plans for the future of the College. In resigning, he told no one of his reasons, and the conditions which led up to it were never made public."²²

Consequently, on 27 December 1909, Robertson made his decision. To Vaughan he wrote:

"I hereby respectfully request the Board to accept my resignation as Principal of Macdonald College as from 31st December, 1909."²³

The Winnipeg Free Press devoted three columns on 6 January 1910 to Principal Robertson's impending retirement from the College. It said:

When Principal Robertson requested leave of absence . . . it was remarked that it might be a first step towards a wider field of service for Canadian agriculture, and the betterment of conditions of rural life generally. Dr. Robertson now confirms that expectation by stating that he will leave . . . for Switzerland, France and Denmark, to study at first hand the rural economy of these older countries where notable

²¹ Ibid.

²² Currier, Biography, p. 13.

²³ Robertson to Vaughan, 27 December 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

progress has been made through agricultural education . . . Dr. Robertson will take opportunities of giving . . . information on the enormously extensive and valuable resources of Canada, and also on the wonderful developments of its people. His long experience as Commissioner of Agriculture . . . gave him an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of Canadian agriculture, such as is possessed by few other citizens

The reasons for his action can only be surmised as yet but there has been almost from the beginning, strained relationships between Prof. Robertson and the governing powers of McGill. The latter view with ill-concealed jealousy the pouring of millions by Sir William Macdonald, who has long been McGill's chief benefactor, into educational enterprises which they regard as of less importance than the classical, scientific and medical institutions maintained by the university.

It is quite likely that the Free Press was somewhere near the mark by its assumption of academic arrogance or snobbishness on the part of academia, in its analysis of the situation. Robertson himself was a highly intelligent and intensely practical man and whilst he might insist that there was a place in a university programme for his kind of training, there were many who felt it had no place on a university campus. This argument as between liberal studies and so-called vocational training remains in force today.

On 10 January 1910, Vaughan informed Robertson that the Board of Governors of McGill had accepted his resignation and:

takes the opportunity of expressing to him its high appreciation of the energy and vigorous initiative which he threw into all the preliminary work of the construction and establishment of the College, as well as its great admiration for the forceful qualities which have made him one of the pioneers of scientific agriculture in Canada. They recognize that these qualities, together with the gift of lucid

exposition and persuasive argument, have made Dr. Robertson, in the matters with which he undertakes to deal, a power in the land²⁴

From his many friends and students came letters of regard, and affection. The class of 1911 in Agriculture, hoped that his relationship:

"to us as our Honorary Class President may not be affected in anyway. Many ties already bind us to you, and we appreciate . . . the fact that you were always to us a wise and patient friend and counsellor as well as a beloved principal . . . your spirit and personality under the present circumstances so strongly appeal to us and so win our admiration that in our "Doctor" the truly heroic spirit prevails"25

R. W. Cowley, Inspector of Continuation Schools, Toronto, was:

"painfully surprised at the news that you have severed your connection with the Macdonald Educational Movement The Macdonald Schemes, including consolidation, have all been planted prosperously and have taken permanent root in Ontario Any failures that critics point to are purely local and merely temporary . . . already the Continuation Schools represent the Consolidation of the advanced classes of nearly a thousand school sections scattered all the way from the doors of Montreal to the portals of Detroit, and from the suburbs of Toronto to New Liskeard and from Ottawa to Winnipeg I am in the position to know that the Macdonald Movement has helped most materially to improve vastly our people's view point of education"26

²⁴ Vaughan to Robertson, 10 January 1910, R.P., 4, 9.

²⁵ Class of 1911, Agriculture, Macdonald College, to Robertson, R.P., 4, 9.

²⁶ Cowley to Robertson, 17 January 1910, R.P., 4, 9.

The Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, Dr.

A. H. MacKay, wrote to Robertson.

"The students at Macdonald, I understand, are profoundly depressed by the news of your resignation. I look upon it as merely the carrying out of the plans you have been for some time forming . . . I hope there will be nothing to interfere with your functioning as President of the Dominion Educational Association"27

From Washington D.C. came a letter from Gifford Pinchot.

He declared:

"I am more sorry than I can at all say that you are going to leave Macdonald College. It is wrong for every reason that this necessity should have been forced upon you--a necessity which you recognize by your generosity and which many another man would not see in that light"28

One very interesting letter was sent by J. van der Leek, a member of Macdonald College staff, on 23 December 1909, just before Robertson's resignation.

"When you left us last night, I had the crushing feeling that I was unable to show you how much I . . . respect and admire you. Many of us have since passed a sleepless night, with the fact before our eyes that we were going to lose you I especially want to show you my profound respect and confidence, because there was a time, that I hated you, that I considered you my worst enemy, that I would have rejoiced in the thought, that you were going to leave us. I misjudged you, I did not see, could not comprehend, your broad-minded plans and mistook them for petty egotistic scheming. I am ashamed that I have ever nursed such thought and can at present only admire you as a great man. There was a time Dr. Robertson, that I called you the idol of the farmers, that I thought your influence limited to the more simple minded people. I

27 Mackay to Robertson, 15 January 1910, R.P., 4, 9.

28 Pinchot to Robertson, 5 January 1910, R.P., 4, 9.

know better now, I know how you inspire everyone, from the man who cannot read his name to the scholar with twenty years of University training. It will be my pride to tell the world, in later years that James Robertson was my principal 1907-1910, the years that the college was the educational centre of Canada . . . that it was you who formed us"29

It must have been with the greatest regret that Robertson resigned from Macdonald College although he could look back with pride on a task well done. Of all the decisions he ever had to make, this was probably the most difficult. The first big decision he made was when he joined Ontario Agricultural College in 1886, the second was when he became Dairy Commissioner for the Dominion, the third was when he accepted the Principalship of Macdonald College. As a man of large ideas he could not be fettered by the petty restrictions imposed upon him. Now older, his future was uncertain.

²⁹ J. van der Leek to Robertson, 23 December 1909, R.P., 4, 9.

CHAPTER IV

ROBERTSON'S ACTIVITIES WITH THE DOMINION EDUCATION ASSOCIATION AND THE COMMISSION OF CONSERVATION (1910-1919)

The letters from Dr. MacKay and Gifford Pinchot reveal two other interests to which Robertson gave his attention; the Dominion Educational Association, of which he was president from 1909 to 1917, and the Commission of Conservation, of which he was Chairman of the Committee on Lands. Robertson first addressed a Convention of the D.E.A. as early as 1901, when he pleaded for the appointment of a Committee of the Association to take up the matter of the improvement of rural schools on the lines being developed by the Macdonald movement. Such a committee "could approach the Departments of Education of the various provinces with suggestions and recommendations and offers of cooperation which would doubtless be welcomed"

This committee was constituted, Dr. Goggin moving, Dr. Sinclair seconding--

That it is desirable to test under proper conditions, the educational value and

practicability of certain recent departures
in the courses of study in Elementary schools¹

Robertson also spoke at the 1907 convention of the D.E.A., held in Toronto, on, "Education for the Improvement of Rural Conditions." He warned his audience of some of the problems peculiar to Canada due to:

our youth, our size; to the character, vastness and potential values of our undeveloped resources; and to the large amount of foreign blood pouring into our citizenship. The large inflow of foreigners who come to mix with our people adds difficulties to the ordinary problems of agriculture and of education. These people bring in not merely different methods of doing things, but different social standards and ideals For our safety and their welfare it is necessary that these people should be so educated, so led and so guided by competent leaders that they will be inclined to live on the land, and not herd into the cities²

As President of the D.E.A.'s convention in Ottawa, 1917, Robertson reminded his listeners of the request he made in 1901 for the appointment of a committee to examine the "new education" as supported by the Macdonald Movement.

The results of that Movement, have passed from memoranda and reports into the organization, administration, and methods of education in every Province in Canada . . . it is not too much to say that, in

¹ Dominion Education Association, Proceedings (Ottawa, 1901), pp. 22-23; 99-103. For a history of the D.E.A., see F. K. Stewart, The Canadian Education Association--Its History and Role (M. Ed. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1956). For the early formation of the D.E.A. which consisted of Superintendents of Education, Presidents of Universities, Principals of Normal Schools and Presidents of Teacher's Associations, see Dominion Education Association, Addresses and Proceedings (Montreal, 1892), published by the Association, Montreal, 1893.

² D.E.A. Proceedings, (Toronto, 1907), p. 62.

consequence elementary education in every Province in Canada has been immensely advanced, particularly in rural schools.³

The Commission of Conservation⁴ was a direct outcome of the appointment, by the President of the United States, of an Inland Waterways Commission. On 3 October 1907, that Commission addressed to the President a memorandum suggesting that the time had arrived for the adoption of a national policy of conservation, and urging that a conference of Governors of States of the Union should be held at the White House to consider the question. Such a conference was duly called at the White House in May 1908, with a considerably broadened base of participation. Leading publicists in the United States declared that no more important gathering had ever taken place on the continent. A declaration of principles was adopted and steps taken to promote joint action between Federal and State Governments. Later a national Commission was appointed, which proceeded to make perhaps the first and only attempt to formulate an inventory of the national resources of a nation.

³ D.E.A. Proceedings, (Ottawa, 1917), p. 38.

⁴ Act Establishing the Commission of Conservation, 8-9 Edward VII, 1909. Details of this Act and the subsequent appointment of members of The Commission of Conservation, Canada, see Commission of Conservation, Canada, First Annual Report, (Ottawa, Mortimer, 1910).

Following this action, President Theodore Roosevelt, recognizing that the principles of conservation of resources have no international boundaries, invited the representatives of Mexico and Canada to meet at Washington in a joint North American conference. Upon the report of the Canadian delegation, the Canadian Government determined to constitute a permanent Commission of Conservation.⁵

The Canadian Government, aware of the sensitivities of the various provinces, framed the Provisions of the Act in 1909, in such a way as to preclude the possibility of any ground for jealousy over sovereignty. The Commission therefore secured the most effective representation of the views of each province and was reckoned "probably the most truly national in its composition of any body that has ever been constituted in Canada."⁶

There were various committees of the Commission--Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals; Forests; Minerals; Public Health; Water and Water-Power; Press and cooperating Organizations; and Lands. In his inaugural address to the Commission on the occasion of the first annual meeting, the Chairman, the Hon. Clifford Sifton, pointed out that under the terms of the Act of 1909, the Commission was not "an executive nor an administrative body." Its constitution "gives it power to take into

⁵ Inaugural address of the Chairman of the Commission, the Hon. Clifford Sifton, Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

consideration every subject which may be regarded by its members as related to the conservation of natural resources," but the results of that consideration were "advisory only" and it was for the Governments concerned to accept or reject such advice.⁷

Sifton, surveying the land situation in Canada, proposed that Canadian agriculture was in a better state of treatment than other branches of natural resources. He praised the development of scientific agriculture and expressed his appreciation of men like Dr. Robertson "who have done a work the importance of which it is impossible to over estimate."⁸

In Robertson's first report, entitled "The Conservation of Agricultural Resources," the chairman of the Committee on Lands, gave a masterly review of agricultural conditions and possibilities in Canada and asked:

Can anything more be done to attract our own people to stay on the land, particularly to keep the young men and young women satisfied on the land? What are other peoples doing, and with what success? Let us find out.⁹

Thus in the same report, the Commission was informed that Dr. Robertson would be visiting abroad in the spring of 1910. It felt that he should be given the authority of the Commission "to make inquiry on our behalf as to methods that prevail in

⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

other countries respecting conservation" A resolution was passed to that effect.¹⁰

In a speech to the Conference on Conservation of Soil Fertility and Soil Fibre, Winnipeg, (1919), Robertson reviewed some of the work that the Committee on Lands had done.

The Committee began by ascertaining as fully as possible the condition of lands under cultivation and whether the system and methods of farming were resulting in the conservation of fertility and productivity. For several years it conducted surveys of conditions on groups of farms in representative districts in every province.

As a result of its findings the Committee selected some farms which "stood out conspicuously as examples of conservation." Such farms were chosen by neighbouring farmers in cooperation with the Commission as "illustration farms," to become examples of what could be achieved. From this initial development arose the selection of an Illustration County.

The essence of the scheme is to discover, develop, and call into use the ability and character of the best men and women of each community for local leadership; and to supplement that by helping to bring into each community the best things of any community, in proper relationship to all of the other best community services and conditions.¹¹

The British Government became interested in the concept of illustration farms during World War I when agriculture, so badly neglected before the conflict, was given high priority

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 197-98.

¹¹ R.P., 3, 3.

in administrative planning. A letter from the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, London, dated 24 January 1917, and addressed to Robertson, requests information from him on the work of illustration farms and counties.¹²

Robertson's friendship with Gifford Pinchot,¹³ a member of President Roosevelt's government, began in 1907, when Sir Horace Plunkett,¹⁴ a leading advocate of conservation in Great Britain, wrote a letter to Mr. Pinchot in which he stated:

"I am very anxious that you should meet, and have a good talk with, Dr. Robertson of this institution (Macdonald College). He has, as you know, elaborated the whole scheme out of his brain, Sir William Macdonald finding all the money It is not yet in active operation, but to my mind the scheme as thought out is so comprehensive and so exactly what is required for concentrating public thought on the problem of rural life that it will shortly take the lead of all similar institutions, either in the Old World or the New I am urging Dr. Robertson to come to Washington I think you will find him the same out-standing personality in Canada that Bailey appeared to me to be in the United States."¹⁵

In the same letter, Plunkett hoped for the possibility of a convention in Washington during the Presidency of President Roosevelt, to discuss rural life, an interest which "the President has made his own, during his term of office."

¹² R.P., 3, 3.

¹³ For a brief biography of Pinchot, see Encyclopedia Americana, Canadian Edition, 1970, XXII, 93.

¹⁴ For a brief biography of Plunkett, see Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Edition, 1910-11, XXI, p. 857.

¹⁵ Plunkett to Pinchot, 14 October 1907. Copy to Robertson. R.P., 3, 3.

If such a convention were called "I should like it to embrace the English-speaking world, or if restricted to the United States, I should like to have Dr. Robertson invited as a guest from Canada"

CHAPTER V

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL TRAINING (1910-1913)

Although Robertson was no longer Principal of Macdonald College, he was far from unemployed. During the next four years he not only occupied himself with the Dominion Education Association and the Commission of Conservation, but shortly after his departure from Ste. Anne-de-Bellevue was appointed chairman of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. The investigations and findings of this Commission resulted in important changes in Canadian Education.

Upon resigning from the college, Robertson informed Dr. McKay that he intended to spend six months in Europe with his wife and that he would visit Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom. He hoped "to gether a good deal which I shall be able to turn over to the Dominion Education Association." He would then return to Newfoundland and Canada for six to eight weeks and sail from Vancouver to Japan, then go on to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. He called this tour "a post principal's course."¹

¹ Robertson to MacKay, 20 January 1910, R.P., 4, 9.

A letter to the Hon. Sidney Fisher told of his attendance at the British House of Commons where he had listened to speeches by Winston Churchill, A. J. Balfour, Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain. "I am interested in comparing the methods and style of public speaking with those which I know in Canada." He added:

"if I am wanted for anything in connection with the work of the proposed Commission on Technical Education, I think I would decide to go (to return to Canada)."²

By this time, Robertson was "possibly the most widely known authority on education in Canada," according to his daughter, Mrs. Currier.³ Thus, when the Canadian Government did appoint a Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education in 1910,⁴ Robertson, in view of his educational work, and the reputation he had made, was named its Chairman. A private and confidential letter from Mackenzie King, Minister of Labour in Sir Wilfred Laurier's Liberal Government, reached him whilst he was in the United Kingdom. The Minister informed Robertson:

² Robertson to Hon. Sidney Fisher, 4 April 1910, R.P., 5, 3.

³ Currier, Brief Biography, p. 13.

⁴ "For enquiry into the needs and present equipment of our Dominion of Canada respecting industrial training and technical education and into the systems and methods of technical instruction obtaining in other countries." Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education, 1913, Vol. 1, Parts 1 & 2, p. 5.

"The Government has had under consideration the personnel of the Royal Commission about to be appointed, whose function was to enquire into the needs and present equipment of the Dominion as respects industrial training and technical education, and into the system and methods of technical education obtaining in other countries I have been pleased to mention your name as that of one particularly well-qualified to fill the position of chairman of this important Commission You are so fully seized of the national importance of the proposed work that I do not feel it is necessary to add any words as to the significance of the subject or of the ultimate importance to the Dominion of the services which the Commission's work if properly performed, may be expected to render While I do not want to bind my colleagues (Cabinet) in any way, I would, were you prepared to accept the chairmanship . . . press very strongly for your appointment.⁵

The enactment of legislation by the Dominion Government to provide assistance towards industrial education had been advocated by the Dominion Trades and Labour Council, and by various Boards of Trade, in a joint memorial presented to the Government at Ottawa in March 1901. It pointed out that per capita industrial production in the U.S. was \$143, while that of Canada was only \$98.50. A Royal Commission and a Minister of Industrial Education were asked for.⁶ Again in 1905, the Annual Convention of the Dominion Trades and Labour Council passed a similar resolution to the effect that an appeal be made to the federal and provincial governments to enact "such legislation and make such appropriations as will permit the

⁵ W. L. Mackenzie King to Robertson, 12 May 1910, R.P., 5, 3.

⁶ Morang's Annual Register, 1901, p. 317.

mechanic and artisan of Canada the privilege of education on lines of Electric and Civil Engineering, Chemistry, Wood-carving, Modelling etc." Unfortunately, these importunings were turned aside by reference to provisions of the B.N.A. Act which stipulated that education was the prerogative of the provinces.⁷

The need of industrial and technical education was recognized by leaders in education and industry in Ontario prior to these demands for action. Dr. Ryerson made special reference to the function and value of such training in his Report for 1871. The Toronto City Council made provision in 1900 for evening classes in technical education, while other municipalities, given impetus by the philanthropy of private individuals, as for example, Mr. Lillian Massey-Treble and through the efforts of Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, also established similar classes for workers.⁸

In 1909, Dr. John Seath was commissioned by the Ontario Government to report upon a desirable and practicable system of technical education for Ontario, for which purpose he examined industrial education systems in Europe. His report, considered by J. M. McCutcheon as perhaps "unexcelled as a treatise on technical education" led to legislation in 1911, which gave effect to his recommendations.⁹

⁷ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1907-8, p. 2877.

⁸ McCutcheon, Public Education in Ontario, Chap. VIII.

⁹ Ibid.

That the Government did eventually appoint such a commission in 1910, was in part due to the urging of the member for South Wellington, Hugh Guthrie, who during the 1907-08 session of the House of Commons moved:

That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that a commission of inquiry be forthwith appointed to investigate the needs of Canada in respect to technical education, and to report on ways and means by which these needs may best be met.

In his preamble, Guthrie informed the House that his resolution had been brought at the joint request of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and of the Canadian Manufacturer's Association. Further support came from leading Canadian educationists, University presidents and boards of trade and commerce. Guthrie suggested that the demand, therefore, was by no means "local or sectional, but entirely national in its character." Great changes had taken place in Europe and the United States. These countries were no longer content:

with the old scholastic routine but they are annually spending vast sums . . . upon technical training. They are putting forth efforts to reconsider their methods and systems of education with a view to the immediate needs of the people in the hope that it may assist the people in gaining a livelihood and assist the nation in maintaining its place in the markets of the world.

The manufacturer's demand for technical education:

arises largely from the fact that . . . he has felt himself handicapped in procuring highly skilled labour in sufficient quantities for his purpose while the demand from the workman arises from the very laudable ambition which he has to perfect himself in regard to his own trade . . . in order that his work may become less laborious and more remunerative and that he may be able to fill a higher position than that which he now occupies.

Guthrie expounded at length on the system of technical education applying in Germany--a nation which was making enormous strides forward in an industrial capacity. He went on to review similar schemes in operation in Britain and Switzerland, and reminded the House of the functions of the Morrill Act of 1862, in the United States, by which every state which agreed to establish a college of agriculture or mechanical arts should receive a Federal Land Grant.

He admitted that the:

most formidable question in regard to the matter is to ascertain in precisely what way the Parliament of Canada can take action in reference to it, having regard to the somewhat positive language which is used in section 93 of the B.N.A. Act, which provides "In and for each province the legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to education."

To circumvent this obstacle Guthrie suggested that technical education "is a matter of economics rather than of scholarship. It is a matter which will yield a monetary return rather than a return in culture and refinement." Logically then, since industrial training was so "intimately associated with the general trade and commerce of this country, subjects over which this parliament has authority . . . we may fairly say that it comes within the authority and jurisdiction of this parliament."

During the debate, some members were concerned that Government assistance in this direction was yet another example of paternalism, and as such should be limited to particular

aspects of industrial education. Others felt that such assistance should encompass all of industrial endeavour.¹⁰

Mr. Guthrie, unable to impress the Government with the soundness of his argument during that session, introduced a similar resolution in 1909, and presented arguments as before.

Throughout the ensuing debate, supporters of the motion hammered home the theme of national survival, of the need for expanding markets; in substance, the economics of the situation overcame considerations of provincial jurisdiction.

Consequently, the Government gave its consent to the institution of a Commission of Enquiry on the lines suggested in Guthrie's resolution and wasted no time in composing its membership.¹¹

Robertson accepted the Minister's offer, and the 31 May 1910, received a cablegram from Mackenzie King, informing him that he had been appointed Chairman of the Commission and that the government hoped that the Commission could start work in early July.¹²

A further letter to Robertson from King outlined the personnel of the Commission. There were the Hon. John Armstrong, M.L.C., representing the Maritimes; Mr. Gaspard De Serras, L'Ecole Technique, Montreal, representing Quebec; Dr. George

¹⁰ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1907-08, pp. 2856-2881.

¹¹ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1909-10, pp. 1023-1098.

¹² R.P., 5, 12.

Bryce, of Winnipeg; Mr. Gilbert Murray, Secretary of the Canadian Manufacturer's Association; Mr. James Simpson, Toronto, a representative of Labour; and Dr. David Forsyth, Principal of Berlin Collegiate and Technical School. Mr. Thomas Bengough was to be secretary and reporter. Mackenzie King concluded his letter by saying, "I am pleased at your acceptance of the Chairmanship of the Commission, and that under your guidance I look forward to its work being of real and enduring service to this country."¹³

Speaking before the Ontario Club, Toronto, King proclaimed:

The Commission . . . will meet with employers, the Boards of Trade, the working men. It will study their needs and seek to understand them. It will look for possible opportunities to better industrial conditions.

Dealing with the Commission's investigations abroad the Commission would: "see and study industrial processes."¹⁴

What was further wanted, was as complete an overview of all aspects of industry, commerce, and education pertaining to the Canadian scene as it was possible to get. King, Minister of Labour, and industrial relations expert, was also anxious to receive information concerning the working man's situation, hence his instructions to the committee to look to ways and means of bettering working conditions. King's hand can also be seen in the Government's instruction that a little industrial

¹³ King to Robertson, 1 June 1910, R.P., 5, 3. The Biographies of the members of the Commission can be found in H. J. Morgan, Canadian Men and Women of the Time, (Toronto: Briggs, 1912), Parts 1 & 2.

¹⁴ Canadian Annual Review, 1910, p. 325.

"snooping" should be undertaken while the commission was abroad.

Thus the Government envisaged a very wide role for the Commission.

The Government's selection of Robertson to chair its Commission was indeed fortunate, and indicated the regard in which he was held. He was the obvious choice. As an administrator he had proved his ability; as permanent head of a Government department which he himself had started from nothing, had directed wisely, and had left a thriving concern, he was a success; as manager of the Macdonald Fund, and of the Macdonald Seed Grain Competition, and later as the Principal of a college he had performed well. As a practical man he could communicate with practical men. As leading educator his opinions carried weight. Furthermore, he had achieved distinction both in Canada and abroad. His private background was impeccable--a strong Presbyterian, in the time when such affiliations counted for something, he had a reputation for good citizenship and patriotism. As a speaker his gifts were appreciated, while his written reports and evidence before various Parliamentary committees were models of intelligence and clarity. Finally, he knew how to handle the press in order to propagate such information that he felt was in support of schemes in hand.

Mackenzie King estimated the time allowed by the government for the Commission to do its work as one year.¹⁵ (The Commission in fact commenced its work at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 18 July 1910, and brought out its final report on 31 May 1913.) During this time, the Commissioners investigated the state of Industrial Training and Technical Education in every province in Canada, crossed to Europe to continue in England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, France, Germany, Switzerland, and returned to the United States to complete their enquiry.

Great interest was aroused throughout Canada by the news of the appointment of the Commission and its purpose. The Morning Chronicle, Halifax, announced:

The Royal Commission on Technical Education will assemble in Halifax today, to inaugurate what promises to be a great forward movement for a national system of technical education and industrial training. Never has a Commission appointed by the Government undertaken a more important work and never has a greater opportunity been presented in connection with this work. Under the British North America Act, education is one of the subjects assigned to the Provinces, but in the present instance there is no question of conflict of jurisdiction, for the Provincial Premiers and Governments are heartily cooperating with the Federal Administration, and in fact, have asked for the appointment of the commission The personnel of the Royal Commission inspires confidence, and is fortunate in having as its chairman Dr. W. J. Robertson, who has been described as a great pioneer in education¹⁶

¹⁵ King to Robertson, 12 May 1905, R.P., 5, 3.

¹⁶ Morning Chronicle, Halifax, 18 July 1910.

The same newspaper also printed an article from the London (England) Daily Mail, written by W. Beach Thomas, who interviewed Robertson in London prior to his return to Canada to take up his chairmanship of the Commission.

Robertson is one of the leaders of the world's thought today. His partnership with Sir William Macdonald has helped to fructify the ideas beyond all precedent. The dispersal and the germination of the seeds of their philosophy have given life to half a great continent. Of school gardens, Robertson said, "In Canada the school garden is becoming the foundation of the whole educational system. It is the centre of school life" Of the Royal Commission, which he was to head, Robertson observed, "The Commission will survey the whole of Canada to discover and register its mental resources of the fitness of the growing generation to understand and develop the country Have the children manual skill and mental insight worthy of a great Dominion at the crisis of its development?"¹⁷

To utilize to the full the various talents of this representative group and in order to facilitate its work, the Commission was divided into compartments of study. Murray took charge of the organization of industries and office management as his specialty; Bryce organized the relations of College work to Technical Education; Forsyth had the Collegiate and Secondary Technical Schools and their relations to manual training; Simpson looked after the hours of labour, factory ventilation and light, rates of wages etc.; Armstrong studied especially the relations of industrial training to legislation; De Serras looked after the artistic element in

¹⁷ Ibid.

industrial problems. The Commission furthermore divided itself into two sections--the Western of which Bryce was Chairman, and the Eastern of which Armstrong was Chairman. Robertson, of course, was overall Chairman.¹⁸

Reviewing the work so far done in the Toronto Globe of 29 August 1910, Secretary Bengough explained:

There is everywhere absolute unanimity of opinion as to the great need for more effective measures for industrial training and technical education.

To the Victoria Colonist, 2 December 1910, Robertson confided:

In Canada the general neglect or abandonment of the apprenticeship system is responsible in large measure for the lack of skilled labour in the different industries and trades From every quarter we have heard that there is a strong need for different and better education for those who work in the trades and industries of the Dominion.

At the beginning of 1911, Robertson revealed the Commission's preliminary findings. To the Canadian Club of Ottawa he explained:

We began our work of enquiring into the present equipment of Canada for Industrial Training and Technical Education, our need in respect thereto, and how our folks thought their needs could be met. We visited one hundred cities, towns and important localities. Our course was usually first to visit industrial establishments and educational institutions, then to hold a session to receive testimony under oath. We held 173 such sessions. We have . . . the testimony of over 1500 of the leading men and women of Canada Educationalists,

¹⁸ Canadian Annual Review, 1910, p. 327.

capitalists and employers and workmen gave their evidence. Women testified in regard to the needs of women in Technical Education It is all important that our facilities for industrial training should be better than they are There was in Canada, a general discontent with the product of the schools.

Personally, and not as chairman of the Commission, Robertson felt this was due to the emphasis in school on the three "R"s. What was needed in schools:

was some opportunity when they are past twelve, whereby the boy will reveal to himself and his teachers and parents the bent of his ability in some experience in handwork, as well as book work, before the boy leaves the common school, that will give an indication of how he should prepare for his life's work. Another is the need, in the case of a boy from fourteen to sixteen who intends to go into some skilled trade, to get a chance to learn in school the meaning and use of common tools and the qualities of common materials. Another is the need of schools with an equivalent in educational content and training of our high schools, for the boys who are going into industrial life There is need of some opportunity of secondary education to make up to the boy for what he does not now get, through lack of an apprenticeship system. We need some forenoon, afternoon or evening school to give him the principles as well as the skills . . . we need evening schools for workmen, to fit them for advancement and promotion . . . we need intimate correlations between industrial management and the managers of schools and classes where workers are trained We need training for women and girls to give them fundamental concepts of sanitary conditions making for the safety of the home, hygienic nutrition making for the economical maintenance of the family, and domestic art that will enable them to further enjoy their love of the beautiful by ability to make beautiful things for the house¹⁹

¹⁹ Ottawa Citizen, 28 February 1911. Interim Statement, Report of Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education, Vol. 1, parts 1 and 2, pp. 58-65.

On the arrival of the Commission in England, the London Times reported a communication from its chairman which was similar in content to the views he had expounded shortly before in Canada. Both the Canadian employer and worker were disappointed with the product of the Canadian common schools, that the curriculum did not allow for the development "of close observation" or bring out "any power of management," that the young people, when they came to the factories lacked initiative and were "wanting in the qualities which make a good effective workman." Robertson pointed out how the rapid development of Canada had led to employment, which had yielded high wages for a time "so that a boy of eighteen finds himself too big for the job for which he was engaged and without any kind of training to enable him to increase his earning power, or to help his locality by becoming a good productive member of society." Employers stated that "they could not be bothered to train apprentices."²⁰

After spending six months in Europe, Robertson and his colleagues returned to Canada. The Ottawa Citizen quoted him at length.

The weather was constantly agreeable; and travelling accommodation in Europe, by railway steamer and by road was invariably more than comfortable. The credentials of the Commission, the helpfulness of Lord Strathcona, the cooperation of the educational authorities in England, Scotland and Ireland, and the generous assistance of the British Embassies in the foreign countries, opened every desirable door

²⁰ The Times (London), 14 April 1911.

After giving a general survey of what the Commission had seen and done, Robertson stated:

perhaps from no other country were we able to learn as much concerning efficiency in organization and in carrying out of methods for the training of the workers as in Ireland and Scotland respectively.

He concluded by saying:

one comes back to Canada, not only without any abatement of affection and admiration for her people and her institutions, but with a renewed appreciation of the fine outlook here for all who are able and willing to work honestly and with good will. Our systems of education have raised the general intelligence of the people to a level which compares favourably with that of the other countries. That determines the kind and extent of industrial training and technical education which can be acquired²¹

On 4 June 1913, the Report of the Commission was presented in three volumes to Parliament through the Hon. T. W. Crothers, Minister of Labour. It included a comprehensive survey of the Commission's findings and opinions; its study and analysis of various kinds of education and their relations to the Technical branch; the experiences during their investigations abroad. (The report of what had been done or should be done in the Canadian provinces was not ready at the close of 1913, and correspondence was published in November of that year between Robertson and the Minister of Labour which indicated a feeling on the latter's part that the Report was long overdue and should be completed at once.)

²¹ Ottawa Citizen, 7 October 1911.

The Commissioners were constrained to record their tribute to the character of the men and women who were responsible for the organization and administration of education and of those who worked at the classroom level. In all the countries visited by the Commission educators discussed fully and frankly not only the systems and methods which prevailed in their countries, but also the problems which faced the central and local authorities, and the plans and efforts which were being made to meeting existing conditions.

In compiling the information obtained in other countries, the Commissioners were guided to a large extent by what they had learned as to the needs of Canadian Workers and Canadian occupations and industries. Consequently they arranged the information from each country in such a way as to show the relation of Industrial Training and Technical Education to a general system or systems of education in that country and reported with great detail on those systems and methods, institutions, courses and classes which seemed most likely to furnish examples of usefulness to Canada.

The Commission felt that Canada was behind the times with regard to industrial efficiency and that until recently she was only an interested and debating spectator of movements in that direction. The country's growing wealth was ample for the cost of preparing the young for industrial pursuits but that the educational system had few points of contact with relation to industrial, agricultural, or housekeeping life.

In an effort to rectify the situation the Commission recommended a system which should aim at preserving provincial control, encouraging local initiative and developing local responsibility while basing its operations upon a generous measure of Dominion aid. Many changes were suggested for urban and rural communities. The types of work proposed for those who were to continue at school varied as: intermediate industrial classes, coordinated technical classes, technical high schools, apprentice's schools, industrial and technical institutes, home economics, and fine arts colleges. The proposal was made for those at work that continuation classes, coordinated technical classes, middle technical classes, apprentice classes in work shops, industrial and technical institutes and correspondence study courses be established.

To implement these recommendations it was proposed that the sum of \$3,000,000 should be provided annually for a period of ten years by the Parliament of Canada and paid annually into a Dominion Development Fund, 75 per cent. of this to go to the Provinces direct, on a per capita basis and the remaining 25 per cent. to be retained for expenses through a central Dominion Board. All phases of industrial work should be provided for including agriculture, manufacturing, household science, etc. In order to encourage handiwork, drawing, domestic science, etc., in elementary schools the Commission suggested a fund of not less than \$350,000 a year from which payments should be made to the Provincial Governments during a period of ten years. For the administration of the grants

and of the system in general the Commission recommended the establishment of a Dominion Development Commission. Under this body would be a Dominion Development Conference and under this again Provincial Development Conferences and Councils would operate and afford advice and assistance to Local Development Boards, urban and rural. The objects to be served by the large expenditure were to be, in part, the securing of an adequate supply of properly-qualified teachers in elementary schools, a supply of suitable appliances, exclusive of buildings and furniture, the institution of scholarships, the provision of skilled expert advisers, the establishment of central institutions, and the promotion of scientific research. The Commissioners believed that in public schools more general provision should be made for the teaching of drawing, manual training, nature study and experimental science, as well as for the training of the senses and muscles--the latter by means of organized and supervised play and games.²²

The report occasioned the Victoria Daily Times to compliment the Commission on its work and support its conclusions and recommendations. "The Commission," it said on 10 June 1913,

Deals with a vital requirement in our educational system, and if we are to hold our own in the race of nations steps should be taken at once to carry out the

²² Report of the Royal Commission, Vol. 1, pp. 1-57. Vocational Education, Bulletin, No. 28, Department of Labour, Canada, (King's Printer, 1928), p. 20. John Earl Sager, History of Manual Training and Technical Education in the Dominion of Canada, (M.A. Thesis in Education, State College of Washington, 1936), pp. 20-21. Canadian Annual Review, 1913, pp. 328-329.

recommendations of the report. There is no doubt that Canada's system requires overhauling

It compared Canada's condition with that of Germany's:

The time is ripe for the adoption of some of the German methods of technical specialization.

The article continued with:

In the words of the report, the experience of the schools should tend more directly towards the inculcation and conservation of the love of productive, instructive and conserving labour. This advice should be promptly acted upon.

Vocational training commanded the attention of the Toronto Globe which came out strongly in favour of:

The vocational training of all the people to be contributing earners, good citizens and worthy members of the race is really the world's greatest movement at the present time.²³

The Commission's activities created a great deal of interest in that people began to question Canadian education and its purpose. J. C. Sutherland, Inspector-General of Protestant Schools in the Province of Quebec, suggested that:

We have not yet a supreme national purpose in Canadian education, urban or rural . . . we lack the proclamation of that supreme national purpose of developing national efficiency which marks the educational history of three countries, namely Germany, Denmark and Japan We want a national policy in education. The large measure of local self-government . . . has many benefits but it has tended to . . . obscure the vision of larger national purpose.

²³ Globe, 3 February 1914.

The writer complained of the lack of facilities, of teachers, especially men teachers, in rural areas and recommended the "grand remedy of consolidation."

The efforts of Sir William Macdonald to inaugurate the movement . . . a few years ago, have not entirely failed. They served at least to bring the question before the public Some of the experiments . . . failed. But there are now signs of a far more favourable attitude towards the principle In Manitoba alone, however, is the plan fully alive at the present moment. Progress will be the more certain, and the results the more effective if public policy with regard to education is steadily illuminated by the principle that the schools should exist largely for the purpose of developing the industrial efficiency of the rising generations.²⁴

Albert H. Leake, a former director of the Macdonald Manual Training Schools in Ontario in 1900, later Manual Training and Technical Inspector for the Province of Ontario, wrote:

In view of the interest that is being manifested in industrial training and its place in the educational system, it becomes pertinent at this time to inquire into the part manual training has played in the past and is to play in the future

Household Science . . . was introduced largely for its cultural value . . . now it is being recognized that house-keeping and home-making are just as much a trade and need as careful preparatory training as any other industry, both the cultural and practical values, if these can be separated, are receiving due attention.

The arguments urged for the introduction of Manual Training were deliberately designed to satisfy labour organizations. It was loudly proclaimed that the subject had nothing to do with teaching a trade

²⁴ J. C. Sutherland, "A National Purpose in Education," Canadian Magazine, May 1913, pp. 57-61.

With the proposition that manual training does not, cannot, and should not attempt to teach a trade we can all heartily agree, but the idea that it has no connection with industry will not today find such ready acceptance.

"Our industrial training . . . should begin in our Public Schools," he declared and pointed out the division which existed between grade teachers and the manual training teachers:

There are now throughout the Province of Ontario seventy-two manual training centres and fifty-eight household science centres, but even in these places where the subjects have been introduced it is a difficult matter to bring them to a point where they are looked upon as integral parts of the course of study. They have simply been regarded as additional subjects The grade teacher has held aloof, and the manual training teacher has . . . refused to have any connection with other school subjects or industry. But fortunately, a change is coming over the spirit of the dream. The grade teacher is coming to believe that manual training and household science may be made to help her work The manual training . . . is using more and more mathematical and scientific facts in his instruction, and is establishing a real connection with industry.²⁵

Members of the House of Commons were anxious to know whether the Government intended to implement the recommendations of the Commission. On 10 June 1914, almost a year after its initial appearance, the Member for Cape Breton, North, Mr. Daniel McKenzie, asked the Minister of Labour, if he had given any consideration to the report of the Commission. McKenzie pointed out that the mining engineers of Nova Scotia

²⁵ Albert H. Leake, "Manual Training in The School," The School, (March 1914), 435-438.

had adopted a resolution urging that something be done in the direction of carrying out the recommendations made by the Commission. "We look forward in all parts of Canada" he said, "to something being done to implement that report."

The Minister replied:

This matter has been under the consideration of the Cabinet Personally, I am very much in favour of doing anything within reason for the extension of technical education and industrial training. I think the Parliament of Canada will be willing to materially assist the local legislature in providing for technical education and manual training. I regard it as of very great importance to the people of Canada.

The Commission had gone beyond its terms of reference in proposing recommendations. Mr. Carroll, Member for Cape Breton, South, stated:

I understand that the provinces made some reservations as to the powers that were given to the Commission. But, however they made a recommendation and that recommendation commends itself to industrial Canada and to Canada as a whole. There is nothing . . . that goes so far in keeping the population which we have within our confines, and also encouraging a good class of immigration from abroad, as an efficient system of technical education.²⁶

In 1915, Robertson addressed the Ontario Education Association on "Education for Occupations." It was a detailed account of the advances beyond the three 'R's, and particularly

²⁶ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1910, pp. 5206-5208.

those occasioned by the developments in manual, technical and vocational education.²⁷

Unfortunately, the involvement of Canada in World War I precluded the adoption of the report in any particular. However, Robertson was not prepared to let Canadian officialdom forget the work and recommendations of the Commission. At a morning session of the Dominion Educational Association, on Thursday 1 February 1917, a resolution was moved by Dr. H. H. McKay, Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, and seconded by Mr. R. H. Cowley, Chief Inspector of Public Schools, Toronto, and resolved:

That a Committee be appointed to consider the situation in respect to any means whereby the Government of the Dominion of Canada and the Governments of the several Provinces may arrive at a mutual understanding as to how assistance for the extension and maintenance of industrial training and technical education could be granted by the Dominion and received by the Provinces.

That the Committee be instructed to take up the matter with the Government of each Province and the Government of the Dominion

The Proposer and Seconder, be it noticed, were two of Robertson's closest friends. Both men appeared later as members of the Committee, whilst Robertson's name headed the list.²⁸

Robertson sent a letter to the Premiers of the Provinces in which he asked that he might be "granted the favour of an

²⁷ Guillet, Cause of Education, p. 269.

²⁸ Dominion Education Association, Proceedings, (Ottawa, 1917), copy of resolution, R.P., 3, 9.

informal and confidential conference with you" in order to procure "practicable extensions of industrial training and technical education . . . and what further action may be practicable and desirable for the attainment of that object."

The Ottawa Journal reporting the opening of the Dominion Educational Association's meeting, made a point of reviewing the Chairman's address in a leading article. It said:

Educational reform such as engaged the attention of the Canadian Government several years ago is required now, prosecuted under national auspices, as an adjustment in the country's life to meet changed conditions due to the war. It was evident from the address of the former Chairman of the Commission that the preparatory work in Canada had been done, and that application of the methods for improving the school system suggested by past investigation and research had been made with conspicuous success²⁹

The recommendations of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education were finally partly implemented in 1919 by the Technical Education Act,³⁰ "a measure for the promotion of Technical Education in Canada." \$10,000,000 were provided over ten years to assist the provinces in developing technical or vocational education and facilities. This measure was probably hastened by the experience of war-time expansion of Canadian industry when the shortage of technical skills was keenly felt.

²⁹ Journal (Ottawa), 31 January 1917. See Robertson's "Message to our Returning Soldiers Regarding their Education for Farming," in which he refers to the Khaki University in The Beaver, 14 December 1918, p. 7.

³⁰ An Act for the Promotion of Technical Education in Canada, Canada, Statutes, 1919, 9-10 George V, Vol. 1, pp. 665-67.

In granting the \$10,000,000 subsidy, Ottawa followed the precedent of the Agricultural Instruction Act of 1913,³¹ when a similar sum was distributed to the provinces for "the purpose of aiding and advancing the agricultural industry by instruction in agriculture."³² It is quite likely that the Agricultural Instruction Act resulted in part from Robertson's report.

³¹ An Act for the Granting of Aid for the Advancement of Agricultural Instruction in the Provinces, Canada, Statutes, 1913, 3-4, George V, Vol. 1, pp. 135-37.

³² Johnson, Brief History, p. 89.

CHAPTER VI

WORLD WAR I PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DUTIES, POST-WAR CAREER, AND CONCLUSION

"The fact of the war was a terrible shock to James W. R." wrote his daughter:

All his life his energies and schemes and dreams had been bound up with the progress of the common man towards a more prosperous and happier future and in such a context, war is destruction, tearing down in days what took years to build up. It may have brought a superficial prosperity to the country but to James W. R., the terrible waste of life, the ruin of little towns in the battle zone and the destruction of farm lands was constant underlying sorrow.¹

Within a short time of the outbreak of the war, Robertson was active in the organization of the Red Cross Society of which he became chairman of the Canadian Executive Committee. In its service he toured Canada and England and France, seeing Red Cross activities at first hand. It was during his chairmanship that the Junior Red Cross, which was first formed in Quebec in September 1914, was given the impetus to become the Canada-wide organization that it has, operating within our schools today.²

¹ Currier, Biography, p. 13.

² A letter headed "The Canadian Red Cross Society" and dated 4 February 1927, shows Robertson as Chairman of Council and Executive. R.P., 7, 6; Currier, Biography, pp. 13-16.

Canadian involvement in World War I brought about the formation of a number of patriotic organizations, some of which anticipated the end of hostilities and a brighter future for the Dominion. Among these was the Civic Improvement League of Canada, sponsored by the Commission of Conservation, Town Planning Branch, Ottawa. A pamphlet issued by the sponsors outlined the general object of the league as being:

To promote the study and advancement of the best principles and methods of civic improvement and development, to encourage and to organize in each community those social forces which make for efficient Canadian citizenship and to secure a general and effective interest in all municipal affairs.³

A large number of civic organizations were represented at a conference held at Ottawa, on 19 November 1915, for the purpose of forming the League. The outcome of the conference was the formation of a provisional committee to prepare a draft constitution and to take steps to promote a National Conference to be held in January 1916.

Sir Clifford Sifton in addressing members, said the function of the Commission of Conservation was "to start things rather than to do things" "Canada," he observed:

suffered from haphazard methods and lack of efficiency. Nothing had done so much harm to Canada as the system of education. Young men were

³ The Commission of Conservation called a preliminary conference in Ottawa in November, 1915, to consider the formation of a Civic Improvement League for Canada. See Pamphlet, Civic Improvement League of Canada, R.P., 3, 2.

receiving education which fitted them for lawyers or professional men and nothing else. It had affected the whole development of Canada. Some improvement ought to be made⁴

As a member of the Commission of Conservation, this new organization was consonant with Robertson's own philosophy of public involvement in the life of Canada. It is therefore no surprise to find that he became a member of that Provisional Committee, along with luminaries of government, business, the church, public welfare, trades and labour, and education.

At the Conference held in the House of Commons in January 1916, and graciously opened by the Governor-General of Canada, a number of eminent speakers addressed the participants. Robertson was slated to take part in a discussion on Immigration and Civic Development after the War.⁵

The Constitution and By-Laws of the Civic Improvement League of Ottawa for the year 1916-1917, listed Robertson as a member of its council. Among the general objects of this group was "the study of the principles and methods of civic improvement and development and also to secure a general and effective interest in all affairs pertaining to the welfare of the citizens."⁶ This statement could quite easily have been written by Robertson himself.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Civic Improvement League of Canada: Programme of Conference, House of Commons, Ottawa, 20 January 1916. R.P., 3, 2.

⁶ Constitution and By-Laws of the Civic Improvement League of Ottawa, 1916. R.P., 3, 2.

In 1916, the Agricultural Relief for the Allies Committee, approached Robertson and asked him to form a Dominion branch of that body. After a visit to the war zone to ascertain the needs of the Allied farmers, he toured Canada organizing groups to collect funds to provide agriculture tools and equipment for use in the devastated areas.⁷

In 1917, Robertson's great ability was recognized when he was appointed Chairman of the Advisory Council of the Food Controller for Canada. In this capacity he was active in exhorting Canadians to rearrange their feeding habits in order that more flour, wheat and beef could be sent abroad.

While at Rome, in 1918, in connection with the discussion of overall plans for food production and control, Robertson was received in audience by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, and also had dinner with the King of Italy. In his diary he gave a most interesting account of his meetings with Italian Royalty.⁸

The Canadian Government had yet one further patriotic duty for Robertson to perform--that of Canadian Director of Food Supplies. The supreme Economic Council of the Allied Governments had requested assistance from Canada--a great food producing nation, in order to underpin European reconstruction. As such, Robertson was a member of the Canadian

⁷ Currier, Biography, p. 14.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

delegation to Paris when the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1919 took place. His letters to his wife and daughter describe vividly the Paris, and the statesmen, of that historic occasion.⁹

One of Robertson's interests was the Proportional Representation Society of Canada, whose first Annual Report, issued in February 1917, showed Robertson to be its President.¹⁰ In the same year his concern for the less fortunate involved him in the formation of the first public relief committee in Ottawa.¹¹ He was active in the Aberdeen Association, founded in Winnipeg in 1890 and named after Lady Aberdeen, which provided books and magazines to settlers' families in Western Canada.¹²

As far back as 1897, the Victorian Order of Nurses in Canada had held his especial interest and he became secretary, and later Governor, of that organization.¹³

Always deeply interested in the welfare of boys and in boys' work, Robertson was appointed Chief Commissioner of Boy Scouts for Canada, in 1919. Active as always in any position

⁹ R.P., 1, 4. Robertson gave an excellent survey of his work and reviewed the part Canada played during the Peace talks in the Ottawa Citizen, 9 August 1919.

¹⁰ The Proportional Representative Society of Canada. Report of the First Annual General Meeting, 1917. Report of speeches Albertan, 17 October 1917.

¹¹ Currier, Biography, p. 17.

¹² Ibid. See also correspondence R.P., 2, 1.

¹³ Ibid. See also correspondence R.P., 4, 18.

that he accepted, he devoted much energy and time in developing an improved central and provincial organization for that institution.¹⁴ Robertson was cognizant of his astonishingly wide range of activities. "Chore-boy of Canada is his self-bestowed title," said the Vancouver Daily Province, 29 June 1921.

In 1905, however, one scheme with which Robertson was identified came to naught. The Governor-General of Canada suggested to Robertson that a Roll of Honor be created, "in which might be inscribed the names of youths and maidens (together with a record of deeds performed or of a course of action followed by them) considered worthy of such recognition." The proposal, containing a number of conditions concerning ages and qualities to be considered, was sent out by Robertson as private and confidential to provincial superintendents of education for their suggestions and possible approval.¹⁵

From P.E.I. came a reply which stated:

"I have read the memorandum on the Governor-General's Roll of Honor with interest and approval. The only suggestion which I would offer is that I would like to see a similar recognition secured for successful work performed by deserving teachers. As the teacher is so is the school"¹⁶

Other replies tended to present the difficulties of selection inherent in such a scheme.

¹⁴ Ibid. See also correspondence R.P., 2, 5.

¹⁵ R.P., 4, 15. See Harold Begbie, Albert 4th, Earl Grey: a Last Word (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp. 128-29.

¹⁶ Anderson to Robertson 21 September 1923, R.P., 5, 1.

In 1923, Ottawa again sought Robertson's help. A Privy Council Order-in-Council, dated 22 September 1923, appointed him Chairman of a Commission to inquire into "The Industrial Unrest among the Steel Workers at Sydney, Nova Scotia." In a strictly confidential letter, the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, thanked Robertson for accepting the Chairmanship of the Commission and outlined some of his personal feelings on the matter. Said King, no doubt with the lessons of the Winnipeg strike in mind:

"I have come to feel that the law as it stands governing the calling out of troops in aid of the civil power at times of industrial unrest needs to be amended so as to prevent corporations from taking advantage of the powers which can be exercised through any judge to whom appeal may be made, where the civil authorities themselves are unwilling to take the initiative required My impression is that there has been a good deal of Bolshevist propaganda at Sydney, and a concerted Bolshevist movement there. Indeed, the statement issued by Lewis of the United Mine Workers, demanding the return of the coal miners to work is all-sufficient evidence of this I am inclined to think that the Company has not appreciated in the past . . . the need of the adoption of a proper labour policy in connection with its relations with its employees It might be well for you to see his Excellency the Governor-General, and ascertain his views on the situation . . . I shall mention to His Excellency that I have asked you to see him Please regard this letter as strictly personal and confidential . . . I should not care for you to disclose its contents even to your colleagues on the Commission. I have felt that it might be of service to you as well as to the Government if you were to know my personal feelings and attitude in the matter. What I am hopeful may be accomplished is that it will be possible for the Commission to indicate wherein a change of relations may be effected which will give to the employees greater facilities for the consideration of their grievance, and just treatment in the matter of wages and hours From what I saw last year of the telegrams sent to the Department of Militia and Defence by the Commanding Officer of the

District the effort then made not only to call out the Militia, but to bring into play the naval service and the airforce as well,--has led me to see how dangerous it is to the whole national situation that a power of this kind should be given to a few men without due restraints in the way of control from a responsible source By all means try to secure a unanimous report."¹⁷

The Commissioners were unanimous in their findings and although they felt that the calling out of the troops was justified, they considered that the company had brought about the trouble by its disregard of its employees' just and reasonable demands.¹⁸

Robertson received recognition of office from a number of groups with which he was connected. Among his awards is a two-volume leather covered Bible of awesome proportions presented to him by the Venus Sunday schools, in 1880.¹⁹ An intensely religious man, Robertson was an elder of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, for many years. In 1905, he was created a Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, having earlier turned down an offer that he be recommended for a knighthood.²⁰

¹⁷ King to Robertson, 21 September 1923, R.P., 5, 1.

¹⁸ "Report of the Royal Commission to Inquire into Industrial Unrest of Steel Workers at Sydney, N.S." Supplement to the Labour Gazette, (Canada, Ministry of Labour, February 1924).

¹⁹ R.P., Box 11.

²⁰ Currier, Biography, pp. 16-17.

Robertson felt that his work and his interest lay with the rural people of Canada and that they would listen better to plain James W. Robertson, than to a man with "a handle to his name." In 1916, the suggestion of a knighthood was again made, but "again declined, and he was admitted instead as a Knight of Grace of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England."²¹

In the field of agriculture he was elected a fellow of the Canadian Society of Technical Agriculturists in 1923, while in 1928, he was given the Order of Agricultural Merit of the Province of Quebec. For his wartime work in Europe he was awarded the Commemorative medal of the National Committee of Help and Food of Belgium in 1919.²²

For ten years he was a member in the Builder's Lodge No. 177, in Ottawa, of the Masons. In 1930, during the last month of his life, he was presented with a watch chain and Masonic emblem in appreciation of his continued interest, by the Canadian Seed Grower's Association.²³

To perpetuate the memory of their founder, the Canadian Seed Grower's Association established a preferred class of membership in the association the members of which would be known as Robertson Associates. "Before a member can enter this preferred class he must show that he has made great

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

sacrifices in the interest of the production of better seed. Ten Robertson Associates were selected as a beginning, and not more than two members will be elected each year."²⁴

Mrs. Currier says of her father:

Few men have crowded so much study of detail, such extensive planning, so much physical travelling and speech making into seventy three years of living. His one serious illness was the nervous exhaustion which forced him to a long complete rest on the Isle of Wight, in 1902.²⁵

This illness was brought about in part by the Boer War, and the strain it put upon Robertson, who as a government employee, had to cope with public criticism of unscrupulous dealers in horses and fodder which were being supplied to the Imperial forces in South Africa,²⁶ and also with the extensive educational developments of the Macdonald Movement. He suffered considerably from gastric disturbances and spent some time at the Battle Creek Sanatorium in 1920. His condition was somewhat improved after that, but on 19 March 1930, he died of a ruptured stomach ulcer.²⁷ He was buried in

²⁴ Globe, (Toronto), 22 June 1931. Canadian Seed Grower's Association: Annual Report 1943-1944, pp. 6, 64.

²⁵ Currier, Biography, p. 9.

²⁶ Copy of letter from Robertson to Lord Strathcona, High Commissioner for Canada, London, England, 8 May 1902, enclosing Memorandum Regarding some Shipments of Supplies Made by the Department of Agriculture of Canada to South Africa on Account of the Imperial War Office, R.P., 3, 8. Copy of letter from Robertson to the Hon. W. S. Fielding, Acting Minister of Agriculture, 2 April 1903, Statement re Shipments of Hay, Oats etc. from Canada to South Africa. R.P., 3, 7.

²⁷ Currier, Biography, p. 18.

Ottawa, his funeral being attended by the Prime Minister.²⁸

In reporting Robertson's death, on 20 March 1930, the Ottawa Citizen said of him:

He was a brilliant lecturer and held his audiences under his magnetic sway by his close reasoning, clever appeal and unfailing power of speech²⁹

The Ottawa Journal of 21 March 1930, declared:

The term eminent can be applied to the late Dr. J. W. Robertson. Throughout his working life he earned that distinction by his continuously active concern for the welfare of his fellow citizens Dr. Robertson was blessed with a very kindly nature and the widest sympathies and it is not surprising that the latter part of his life was devoted to big schemes of public welfare

The Journal, in describing his funeral on 22 March 1930, observed:

Widespread grief was occasioned by the death of Dr. Robertson There was no more popular man in Canada than Dr. Robertson, who by his ardent work in connection with education, agriculture, the Boy Scout Movement, the Red Cross Society and the V.O.N. had become an outstanding figure throughout Canada.

"It was a far reaching influence on many phases of Canadian life that Dr. Robertson exerted" declared the Edmonton Journal on 22 March 1930. In that same newspaper was a tribute to Robertson from an earlier associate, Dean E. A. Howes, of the College of Agriculture, University of Alberta,

²⁸ The Prime Minister, Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King, attended his funeral, Mail and Empire, 21 March 1930.

²⁹ Citizen (Ottawa), 20 August 1913.

who began his work with Robertson in 1903, as one of the group of Canadian teachers selected for special training. The Dean recalled what he had said about Robertson in 1925, in an address on the occasion of the reunion of the Macdonald College Alumni Association:

Back of all great adventures towards making things better for the race we find sometimes one great mind, never more than a few, to point the way and to blaze the trail. And it is a grand opportunity today to speak a few words of appreciation of one who is still with us, and whose name is always honored where agriculturalists gather

Howes revealed Robertson's "Gospel of Agriculture":

- 1) Give the best training to the children who are to make the men and women of the next generation.
- 2) Give the best training to the teacher who trains these children, and pay these teachers salaries befitting the trustee of the nation's intellectual and moral life.
- 3) Give the best training to the girls who are to be the homemakers of tomorrow.
- 4) Give the best training to the farmers and farmers' sons who are to develop our agricultural resources.

These testimonies were but an echo of similar appreciations he had earned in earlier years. As far back as 20 August 1913, the Ottawa Citizen reported a speech given by the Prime Minister of Canada at the Golf Club to visiting educationalists. The paper declared:

when the Prime Minister . . . referred to the good fortune of Canada in having in a position of high authority and influence an idealist like Dr. James W. Robertson, the ready response . . . amply testified to the recognized reality of the statement. Those who have come into touch with him have invariably been urged to higher endeavour and broader view.

He is essentially an idealist visioning life as it ought to be, then vitalizing others that they might be able to do something to make the dream come true He repudiates education as a mere machining of the intellect and makes it the development of the noblest self He believes in man with a capital M. He is essentially a man of the modern spirit, whose fine influence has already done much and will do much to shape to a loftier destiny the future of the country he serves so well. Premier Borden was right. Canada is to be congratulated upon having as a leader in education an idealist like Dr. Robertson.

A eulogy in the Ottawa Journal, 31 December 1924, expresses further the sentiments contained in the preceding paragraph:

I doubt whether any other man has been of more value to modern Canada. The money he has forced into the farmer's pocket by his persistent and persuasive advocacy can only be reckoned by scores of millions. Better still his rare and true vision of education as training and development for right and vigorous action, not a mere filling of brain cells with information, and his insistence of the supreme value of character in farming and everything else, lift him head and shoulders above those who set up the dollar as the chief aim of man.

Perhaps the most extravagant panegyric offered Robertson occurred at the D.E.A. 1909 convention, when he addressed the members on "The Future of Rural Schools." President Robinson in introducing him stated that "he (Robertson) has done more for the advancement of this Dominion than any Premier since Confederation has done."³⁰

Although Robertson was addressed variously as Professor and Doctor, he never received any University education. Among his papers is his correspondence which took place between himself,

³⁰ D.E.A., Proceedings, 1909, p. 100.

and the Registrar of Toronto University, while he was at Ontario Agriculture College.

In 1888, Robertson wrote to the Senate of the University of Toronto requesting that "he be allowed to proceed to the degree of B.A. by an Examination in such subjects as under the circumstances the University shall see fit to prescribe and for this purpose he ventures respectfully to suggest the following." Robertson then set down a course of studies and further requested "that he be granted dispensation from attending lectures at University College."³¹

After leaving his village school, James pursued further studies at the Cunningham Institute, Glasgow. The University asked for information about James' academic attainments, to which he replied:

"I did not try the matriculation exam of the Glasgow University though I was thoroughly prepared to do so when I left the Institute, to be apprenticed to a commercial occupation. At the time of my leaving I stood first in the highest class, and had obtained the first place at the three previous examinations. I mention these latter facts to show that I did fairly good work as far as I went."³²

A statement of the Course of Studies he had taken at Cunningham Institute included:

Latin - Grammar; Caesar, Commentaries; Virgil, Aenid.
Greek - Grammar; Translation of simple fables, Dialogues of the Gods etc.; French - Grammar; Fables; New Testament; Voltaire, History of Charles XII.
Mathematics, English, History, Geography and Drawing.

³¹ Robertson to Senate of the University of Toronto, 9 July 1888, R.P., 1, 3.

³² Robertson to the Registrar, University of Toronto, 11 October 1888, R.P., 1, 3.

Robertson concluded his petition by asking if there was any reason "why all the examinations should be taken next year" as "I have promised to deliver a series of lectures at Cornell University, this winter, and trust that Senate will not limit the time closer than 1890."³³

However, his efforts toward the obtaining of a degree did not bear fruit since there was some difficulty over examination timing which was not reconciled.³⁴

Nevertheless, his merit was recognized by his being awarded a number of honorary doctorates. He was given LL.D. degrees by Toronto University in 1903, by Queen's University and the University of New Brunswick in 1904, and by McGill University in 1909. A D.C.L. was forthcoming from Bishop's College in 1909, while international recognition came with a D.Sc. from Iowa State College in the same year.³⁵ In 1917, he was elected Rector of Queen's University. In 1963, his portrait was hung in the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Toronto, on the recommendation of the Canadian Seed Grower's Association.³⁶

One man who was influenced by Robertson was H. B. Maclean, first vice-principal, then principal of Hillsboro' Consolidated

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Currier, Biography, p. 16.

³⁵ Ibid., R.P. Box 11.

³⁶ Currier, Biography, p. 16.

School, P.E.I., and later a member of the faculties of Victoria and Vancouver Normal Schools. Looking back over the years to his first meeting and subsequent acquaintance with Robertson, Mr. MacLean, now eighty seven years of age, said of him, "He was a lovely man." The originator of the famous Maclean system of writing remembered a visit he paid to Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue, around 1907, when Robertson was supervising the construction of Macdonald College.

He spoke kindly to the workmen and encouraged them to do a good job. His enthusiasm, his vision of what the College should mean was contagious. He was a man ahead of his time, and a fine orator whose Scotch accent was most attractive. His audiences listened with attention to what he had to say. But Hillsboro' Consolidated School failed, some trustees of the contributing areas were not willing to continue the experiment.

Mr. MacLean remembered the fine speech Robertson made at the end of the three year experimental period and just prior to the vote in favour of either its continuance or dissolution. His splendid appeal was repudiated and Mr. MacLean felt down-cast, but he said, "Dr. Robertson was most encouraging to me and to the rest of the staff of the school."³⁷

Dr. John Ferguson Snell, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry and Honorary Historian of Macdonald College, contrasted Sir William Macdonald's reticence with Dr. Robertson's:

love of publicity and his believe^F in its value. Doubtless Dr. Robertson's long experience in the Government service, where informing of the public

³⁷ Mr. H. B. Maclean, personal interview, Vancouver, B.C., 28 November 1969.

was a duty had developed this characteristic It was probably not merely from habit and personal preference, but also from an apprehension of the difficulty of convincing the rural people of the benefits of school consolidation and, afterwards, the need to recruit students . . . that Robertson chose through newspapers, periodicals and public addresses to claim so much public notice for the "Macdonald-Robertson Movement."

Snell remembered during the period of college construction how:

Dr. Robertson laboured diligently in lines that were unfamiliar to him, while at the same time keeping up a stream of articles and public addresses that the publicity demanded. He would read and write late into the night and be up at five in the morning to make a tour of the property. His energy was boundless but the strain told on him and, though he was only fifty years old in the year of college opening, he had the appearance of a man of sixty.³⁸

The Toronto Globe and Mail described Robertson as:

Tall and slightly stooped, face lean and angular, jaw prominent and firm, eyes of the clearest blue deep-set in his head, a high forehead, grey hair, and moustache grey and grizzled, the man betrays his nationality by his speech.³⁹

The breach which occurred between Dr. Robertson and Sir William and which led to the former's resignation from Macdonald College was never healed. Dr. Snell points out that Robertson's visits to the College with the Royal Commission on Technical Education "though distasteful to Sir William Macdonald were welcomed by the members of the staff, especially

³⁸ Snell, Macdonald College, pp. 60-61.

³⁹ Globe and Mail, Toronto, 13 June 1908.

those who had served under him."⁴⁰

From a study of his speeches and from personal accounts it can be determined that Robertson excelled as a speaker, a gift apparent in his early days. His daughter observes:

He must have been a great attraction as an entertainment factor . . . lucid in argument and full of vivid description and funny stories Farmers drove for miles around to attend his meetings.⁴¹

A member of the Vancouver Club, expressed his appreciation of one speech Robertson made:

"Your address today moved me more than any address or sermon I ever heard or any book I ever read. It convicted me I freely confess to you, of living on a very low plane and it made me wish hereafter to do a whole lot better. I doubt not it had the same effect on others . . . I value so much every word of your address

"Permit me to add that I am filled with admiration of your gift of expressing yourself. The words hold the listener and yet the thought never dominates, and what economy of words! It was indeed a treat."⁴²

There must have been an evangelistic quality both in Robertson's delivery and presence. "Through his utterances . . . shone a broad-minded and enlightened Canadianism He stirred a feeling of reverence in his audiences."⁴³ One of the first directors of the Canadian Seed Grower's Association remembered:

⁴⁰ Snell, Macdonald College, p. 62.

⁴¹ Currier, Biography, p. 6.

⁴² J. Goodwin Gibson to Robertson, 29 June 1921, R.P., 1, 4.

⁴³ Sentinel Review (Woodstock), 6 February 1914.

I best recall Dr. Robertson's efforts to educate the hand, the head and the heart, through the medium of consolidated rural schools. Never shall I forget an oration I heard him deliver at the Kingston Consolidated School in New Brunswick, where he seemed to be groping for the stars. One way and another, he left a great impression on Canadian agriculture and Canadian thought.⁴⁴

Another member of that organization recorded:

Dr. Robertson was an optimist and had the faculty of imparting optimism to others⁴⁵

A business man said of him:

Dr. Robertson was a man blessed with a most kindly nature and the widest sympathies; he was quiet, unassuming and genial. He made, as the years went by an increasing number of friends in many walks of life

These activities engaged in by Dr. Robertson and the acknowledgement of the value of these activities as revealed by the many honours showered upon him, show that he was a man of high ideals, of lofty and elevated thought, and that he was supremely gifted with a vision for the future which was far in advance of his times.

It may be said, I think, that the outstanding talents, the vision, the spirit and breadth of view possessed by Dr. Robertson merit us in applying to him the rare appellation of genius, for it is characteristic of men of genius that they are endowed with qualities which are not usually present in ordinary mortals

He was practical to the extent that he realized that man's first concern in this world was with his own relenting struggle for existence, the attainment of sufficient material reward so that he could survive⁴⁶

⁴⁴ W. D. Albright, Canadian Seed Grower's Association Annual Report: 1943-44, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-27.

Robertson's speeches tended to be repetitious as may well be expected when so much distance had to be covered in an era lacking radio or television. But, wherever he found himself, he was able to ally his subject with the locality and thus provide a focus of interest for his audience. In newspaper accounts of his talks there is frequent mention of "loud laughter" and "prolonged applause."

He wrote many bulletins and articles while Commissioner for Agriculture, each a model of clarity and appropriate to the abilities of his farmer readers. His speeches, of which he kept copies, are logically developed, informative, persuasive, and include just the right amount of oratorical embellishment for the occasion. The evidence he gave before the Standing Committee for Agriculture and Colonization drew the warmest appreciation from members of that body.

In his day writing was used much more for communication. Among his papers are copies of many letters addressed to his family, friends, colleagues, Cabinet Ministers, Prime Ministers, Governors-General and English nobility.

Robertson's favourite sports were golf and fly-fishing.⁴⁷ There is no evidence that he took any interest in art or music. But there is no doubt that he found an aesthetic satisfaction in the imposing of man's design on nature. He could exercise his imagination in creating waving wheat fields

⁴⁷ Currier, Biography, p. 18.

out of the prairie; see beauty in the production of a fine cheese; and hear music in the sound of a reaper. One expects he could see a grace in the settlers' homesteads with their gardens and air of prosperous solidity.

His consuming passions were agriculture and rural education. Enough has been stated of his efforts in the field of agriculture, a fact widely recognized. What was recognized equally widely during his lifetime, but which is not quite so at present, is his contribution to Canadian education. This neglect is obvious in texts on Canadian Education.

In his lengthy volume, The Development of Education in Canada, Charles E. Phillips presents a table depicting the changes which took place in the elementary school curriculum, from 1825 to 1950. For the period 1900 to 1925, three new subjects are included, nature study, manual training and household science.⁴⁸ All these subjects were given impetus by the Macdonald Movement, yet Phillips says nothing about Robertson, and refers only in passing, to Sir William and his financial contribution to school consolidation.⁴⁹

Surprisingly enough, Phillips omits reference to the Royal Commission on Technical Education, an important landmark in the history of Canadian education.

⁴⁸ Charles E. Phillips, The Development of Education in Canada, (Toronto: Gage 1957), p. 433.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 271.

F. Henry Johnson, in A Brief History of Canadian Education, devotes a section of his book to the broadening curriculum introduced into the public schools at the turn of the century, and to manual training in particular. Dr. Johnson describes the partnership of Macdonald and Robertson and their involvement in the Manual Training scheme and in Domestic Science instruction as championed by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless. Due recognition is given by the author of the importance of the Royal Commission on Technical Education.

From its recommendations two important Federal measures followed. The first was the Agricultural Instruction Act of 1913, which allotted \$10,000,000 of Federal Funds to be spent in encouraging agricultural education in the provinces as they might see fit. The second act delayed by World War I, was the Technical Education Act of 1919, authorizing an equal sum to be spent in ten years to enable provinces to initiate or expand their efforts in technical education.⁵⁰

A recent book has rather more to say. In Canadian Education: A History, Robert M. Stamp states:

Although provincial authorities gave tentative verbal support to manual training, their actual response during the 1890's was very cautious. Without money and without teachers, the department hesitated to commit themselves to such a costly and controversial departure in education. It was the generosity of Sir William Macdonald that made both money and teachers available James Robertson . . . persuaded Macdonald of the value of practical work in the elementary school, and saw that the Fund's monies were wisely spent.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Johnson, Brief History, Chap. 9.

⁵¹ Robert M. Stamp, "Education and the Economic and Social Milieu: The English-Canadian Scene from the 1870's to 1914," in Canadian Education: A History, ed. by J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, Louis-Philippe Audet Prentice, (Scarborough, Prentice-Hall), pp. 298-299.

Writing on the rural school Stamp considers that, "One of the main concerns of Canadian education at the beginning of the twentieth century was the so-called rural school problem," brought about by a declining rural population, unsatisfactory attendance, a curriculum unsuited to rural needs and taught by poorly-qualified teachers who could not adjust to those needs. "Perhaps the best organized and best financed approach to problems of rural education . . . came from the Macdonald Education Movement"52

Of the campaign for Technical Education Stamp asserts:

Educators and industrialists were delighted when Ottawa appointed a Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education in 1910, with James Robertson . . . as chairman. The Commission's Report included a comprehensive survey of technical education abroad, a condemnation of the lack of such opportunities at home and a recommendation that the federal government give massive assistance to the Provinces to help expand technical education. The report was greeted with delight by management, labour, and educators in English-speaking Canada53

In 1958, Dr. J. F. K. English stated, "Probably the most significant development in Canadian education during the past twenty years has been the establishment of larger local units of school administration."54 Consolidation on a large scale was an area in which the Macdonald Movement quantitatively

52 Ibid., p. 297.

53 Ibid., p. 297.

54 J. F. K. English, "The Reorganized System of Local School Administration in British Columbia," Education, 11 (Toronto: W. J. Gage, 1956-58), p. 41.

but only temporarily failed. There were a number of reasons for this, among them being the reluctance of the local taxpayer to provide for the extra costs of student transportation by an increase in the mill rate, and partly from the inability of the rural population to acknowledge education, per se, as of benefit generally. Consolidation, as envisaged and promoted by Macdonald and Robertson, was inhibited in part by the poor condition generally of rural Canadian roads, a fact of life which tended to preclude the transportation of pupils over a distance.

(That rural school consolidation did not entirely cease can be ascertained from an article in the Farmer's Advocate of 13 July 1916, which maintained that, "Manitoba was the only province where a study of consolidation could be made since it was the most advanced numerically.")⁵⁵

With the improvement in attitude toward education, (albeit precarious), and with the development of motor transportation and better roads, the principle of centralization has since been accepted by the Canadian public.

Nature study and the school garden flourished for some time, but eventually the former was absorbed by the elementary

⁵⁵ For a comparison between the number of consolidated districts in Ontario and Manitoba which presents the latter province in a most favourable light, see McCutcheon, Public Education in Ontario, pp. 111-113. This disparity between the two provinces may reflect the progressive attitude of the prairie province in regard to its educational system and the more conservative attitude of Eastern Canada.

school general science programme, while the latter faded away by the late 1930's. Phillips's table of elementary school subjects for the period 1925-1950 shows manual training transformed into industrial arts, and household science into home economics.⁵⁶

Robertson's educational philosophy owes much to the earlier educational reformers, although he does not appear to have acknowledged this in any of his speeches or pamphlets. Alert man that he was, he could not have avoided being influenced by his educational contacts during his visiting professorship in the 1880's, and by his attendance at educational meetings of various kinds. Furthermore, he was an avid reader, particularly on rural and agricultural education as his collection of articles, a number by Liberty Hyde Bailey and other progressive American writers, shows. Above all, the turn of the century saw the development of the progressive movement, that response of concerned people to urbanization with all its social ramifications. Robertson, occupying as he did, a strategic position in Government and as director of the Macdonald Movement, was not unaffected by the turmoil.

It is clear that Robertson's sympathies, shared by Sir William, lay in the direction of a practical education around which a general education should revolve.

⁵⁶ Phillips, Development, p. 433.

He believed that agriculture could be made more profitable by the teaching of scientific methods, ascribing to it a scientific interest which would elevate farmers to the level of the professions. Thus would farming be made attractive to young men and women. Robertson was a reformer whose mission, encouraged and supported by Sir William, was to spread the gospel of the value of practical and constructive work in the education of Canadian children. Both men realized that the impact of the object lesson would have a greater effect upon the farmer and his family than the written word. It must be remembered that both he and Macdonald were practical men even if idealists. Both had been denied higher education, the one becoming a cheese maker, the other a merchant and manufacturer. Perhaps Robertson, despite his honorary doctorates, regretted his lack of education and sought to compensate by advocating the kind of "non bookish" programme that he did.

However, they were in good company. Contemporary progressive educators leaned towards the Pestalozzian, Froebellian, Spencerian, type of sensual, self-exploratory, scientific and practical learning. Thus together, the two men boldly acted to pave the way and in doing so, set an example for others to follow.

Robertson was a romanticist. He spoke of "Old Mother Nature," and felt that the country man was somehow morally superior to the town dweller.⁵⁷ This again was an expression

⁵⁷ J. W. Robertson, Conservation of Life in Rural Districts (New York: Association Press, 1911).

of his period, and one can trace certain Rousseauian overtones in this attitude. He tried, as did Bailey, Knapp and other American educators, to stem the migration from the country to the town, a development which was already in full flood by 1900 in the United States, and which was beginning in Canada by the first decade of the twentieth century.

Accompanying his attitude on rural education for boys, were his ideas on the rural education of women. One can estimate from his pronouncements, that Robertson was not in sympathy with an education which fitted women for anything other than traditional occupations, for a woman's place, above all, was in the home, feeding her family according to scientific methods while inculcating at the same time a good moral tone.

The growth of industry during the latter part of the 19th century, brought with it a demand for a highly skilled labour force. The country that could organize the kind of education that could produce this force in what was then becoming a very nationalistic period, was sure of economic growth and economic superiority. Canada as a young nation, still agricultural, but by 1910, fast becoming industrialized, had need of the kind of training which was well-established in the very powerful United States to the South.

Thus, with the example of Europe, and of the United States always before her, Canada followed suite, the Technical Training Act of 1919, being an expression of recognition that if Canada was to thrive or hold her own in company with the giants, then

there must be a reorganization of the curriculum in Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools and post-Secondary institutions. This reorganization has come about.

It may be said that Robertson grew up with Canada. He arrived in the country only eight years after Confederation, and lived under no fewer than eleven Prime Ministers, from Sir John A. Macdonald to W. L. MacKenzie King. He appears to have expressed no particular political sentiments, but served loyally Liberal and Conservative Governments alike, as Commissioner for Agriculture and Dairying. Robertson was a member of the establishment of his time. He believed in the ethic of hard work and in the dignity of labour. As a civil servant he preferred order to chaos. As an educational administrator he held the optimistic view that Canadian national progress depended on a scientific education. As a public figure he was a living example of what is now called "participatory democracy." He was intensely patriotic towards Canada and Great Britain. For Canada he wanted stable agriculture counterbalanced by a developing industrialisation. With Britain and the United States he wanted strong ties.

James Wilson Robertson is deserving of a far wider recognition than he has received. It has been the purpose of this paper to try to rectify this.

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