REVIEWS

William C. Gibson. WESBROOK AND HIS UNIVERSITY.
Vancouver: The Library, Univ. of British Columbia, 1973.
xii + 204 pp. $7.00.

In North America at least, the rise of science and the growth of universities seem to be indissolubly linked developments. In reviewing a biography of a university scientist, it would thus be almost impious to ask whether the marriage of organized science and organized learning-in-general has been a good thing. And yet, it is just this question which comes to mind in a reading of the life of F. F. Wesbrook, first President of the University of British Columbia. It is no doubt easier to ask the question at a time of levelling-off in student and faculty numbers, in capital expenditures and new research facilities. One may now write the history of academic science without any need to find in the sciences the embodied salvation of the university. To recall a hoary metaphor, the groves of academe show definite signs of physical maturity.

Wesbrook's biographer also has the advantage of writing at a time of significant change in the methods of the historical sub-disciplines concerned with science and education. In the last two decades, especially, historians everywhere have taken renewed interest in the broad social functions of education and science, in their politics, their economics and their government. Besides all these advantages, it happens that almost no work has been done on the history of the University of British Columbia. Gibson's life of Wesbrook may be considered an important event, then, in both the history of Canadian science and the history of Canadian education.

Wesbrook's life spanned decades of great intellectual excitement in Canada and abroad, beginning with his general and medical education at the University of Manitoba (B.A., 1887, M.A., M.D. 1890). His post-graduate work began at King's College School and Hospital, London, in May, 1891, continuing at Marburg, Germany (1892) and Cambridge, England (1893-1895), with only a four-month "break" as Professor of Pathology at the Manitoba Medical College. This latter institution was altogether *too* pioneering and too stifling for Wesbrook, who was relieved to return to Cambridge. His career in research, mainly in bacteriology, ended with his appointment as Professor of Bacteriology and Pathology at the thriving University of Minnesota and as Dean of Medicine (1906-1913) at the same institution. It was from the latter appointment that he was called in 1913, at the age of forty-four, to the presidency of the University of British Columbia. Five years later, he was dead, partly because of a recurrent infection (which could now be cured with a week or two of penicillin injections), and partly because of overwork. Fully three-quarters of Gibson's biography details Wesbrook's efforts to begin a university under war-time conditions, with less than a tenth of the funds originally promised, and in "temporary" quarters whose effect on the quality and content of instruction must have been depressing.

Throughout the complicated story of Wesbrook's dealings with the McBride and subsequent governments, Gibson keeps his facts straight and maintains a consistent pattern within chapters. Gibson gives us well-written narrative throughout the book, with perhaps the exception of one chapter (Ch. 4, "A Philosophy of Education"). His explanations of events are usually of the cause-effect variety. Each chapter is spiced with a few excerpts from Wesbrook's date-book. The result is a terse,

straightforward, chronologically ordered, readable account of events. But does this sort of account take the reader far enough?

No matter how clean and crisp his style, it is clear that Gibson, even before he began to write this work, wished to end it by marking out certain of Wesbrook's personality traits: his industrious work habits, his paternalistic concern for the health and welfare of students, and his talents for administration and teaching. Of course, in the case of a university president, one normally has not to look far for "evidence" of such characteristics. With his "evidence" in hand, and his conclusion in mind, Gibson needed to ask only a limited number of questions in the course of his research.

Suppose for a moment that Gibson had asked some stickier questions. It is true, for instance, that Wesbrook encouraged students to seek self-government in their own Society — but government over what affairs? Was this democracy in any important sense? It is true, too, that Wesbrook accomplished a great deal of administrative work single-handedly — but did he have some administrative goals in view? If so, was he very efficient in achieving them? One could argue, perhaps not convincingly, that Wesbrook's theory of university government (if he had one) implied that a great many decisions could be taken only with the authority of the President, and without the participation of anybody else. Other interpretations come readily to mind; none has been examined or disposed of in Gibson's book.

The chapter dealing with Wesbrook's "philosophy" of education does contend with a few somewhat trickier problems. According to Gibson, Wesbrook's notions of medical education laid more emphasis on the general structure of investigation into ordinary disease than on the memorization of a great many case-studies. As Wesbrook himself said,

> It is probable that the teaching of today is too diversified and that attempt is made to cover too much ground. At best, the student can only be taught certain general principles and how to observe. It is, therefore, best to illustrate the methods of observation by the thorough study of a few disease processes rather than to attempt to cover the whole field of medicine. (p. 32)

This inclination towards a methodical, general education was equally evident in Wesbrook's later planning of the offerings of the Faculty of Arts in the University of British Columbia. In this latter case, he built in certain "foundation" courses which, once taken, left the student free to complete his program in any way he thought reasonable.

The form of University government which Wesbrook thought appropriate would give the alumni a very large voice (as on the Cambridge model) while retaining most policy-making power in the hands of faculty. The government would require some representation. Indeed, most of the significant decisions to be made concerning the teaching and research activities of the University would be made by persons not directly involved in them. Why should this be? Perhaps Wesbrook explained it best himself in a 1907 speech:

> Each community does wisely if at the very outset it takes stock of its local assets, studies environmental and other conditions which affect operation, and takes immediate steps to utilize its local advantages to the utmost whilst exercising due care for future generations. It is strictly within the function of a university to aid in a practical way. (p. 39)

If any doubt remained in this reader's mind about Wesbrook's commitment to the material development of the State through the efforts of its universities, it was removed by another gem from the same speech:

> Had the state been developed to its proper point, Edison should have been working in a university and not for his own and other's personal gain; Luther Burbank would have been stimulating colleagues and students by his observations; . . . Marconi should have been developed in his practical applications as he had been in his theoretical knowledge by a university. (p. 39).

Obviously, Wesbrook had not been infected while in Germany by the spirit of disinterested learning, of *Lern-und Lehrfreiheit,* which the German universities hoped to embody. His university would provide facilities for thoroughly interested teaching and research. Another question: Did the commitment to provincial development explain why Wesbrook was so close a friend of H. R. MacMillan and Leon Ladner, both industrial barons of early British Columbia?

One wonders how different Wesbrook was from his counterparts at the Universities of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. One wonders, too, if his commitment to a provincially supported secular university meant that the benefits of institutions like St. Michael's College (now in the University of Toronto) and St. Thomas More College (University of Saskatchewan) could never be realized in British Columbia. Did he pay any attention to the model of the Scottish universities or to the experience of the Eastern Canadian universities?

At several points Gibson speaks of Wesbrook's inclination to "overdo" everything, whether it be study, teaching, administration or athletics. His energies were spoken of as "compelling," even during Wesbrook's lifetime. Gibson neglects to ask still another important question: why was Wesbrook a driven man? Was it religious conviction? Was it moral fervor? Or was Wesbrook so deeply a part of the international advance of science that his commitment to academic life and scientific work allowed him no rest? Unfortunately, there is no way to answer these questions on the basis of Gibson's biography. Since he has given so little indication of the extent and the nature of the evidence with which he dealt during his research, Gibson prevents his readers even from deciding whether there will *ever* be grounds for answering these questions.

Still, this beautifully printed and bound book may have done the very best service it could, for it has piqued the historical curiosity of one reader at least, and it has begun the job of giving a university an historical personality.

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Farnum Gray & George Mager. LIBERATING EDUCATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL LEARNING THROUGH IMPROVISATIONAL DRAMA. Berkeley: McCutchan, 1973. 202 pp. $8.95.

This book presents a convincing case for improvisational drama as a method of teaching. The authors employ improvisation for therapy; but this is *not* psychodrama.

The book's excellence lies in the honest and imaginative approach of its authors. The actual experience of the drama classes is vividly communicated, and any careful reader who has remained keenly aware of his students or used improvisational methods in the classroom, must gain insights from the facts presented.

Gray and Mager start by agreeing that the difficulty of education by direct experience is that you cannot measure it; then go on to do just that,

> *This intelligent and sensitive boy learned a great deal about people in the course, and outgrew his initial fear of movement to become one of the most abandoned dancers.* (p. 142)