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The Education of a Principal

Sir William Peterson – Principal of McGill

(1895 - 1919)¹

Abstract

Sir William Peterson served as Principal of McGill University from 1895 to 1919. His education in Scotland, Germany, and England took place between the years 1865 and 1882, a period when educational opportunities were increasing but more were demanded. An examination of this educational background, and of Peterson's activities, throws light upon the development and character of one who contributed greatly to establishing the reputation of McGill amongst North American universities.

Resumé

Sir William Peterson a été principal de l'Université McGill de 1895 à 1919. Il avait reçu sa formation en Écosse, en Allemagne et en Angleterre entre 1865 et 1882, soit à une époque où les possibilités en matière d'éducation se faisaient plus nombreuses, mais où beaucoup laissait encore à désirer. L'examen de la formation et des activités de Peterson permet de mieux comprendre l'évolution et la personnalité d'un homme qui a grandement contribué à asseoir la réputation de McGill parmi les universités nord-américaines.

When James McGill signed his will on March 6, 1811, he could not have foreseen the litigation which would ensue nor visualize what the college, which was to bear his name, would be like one hundred years hence. Its principal, like him of Scottish ancestry, would be William Peterson, but unlike him, the son of a merchant, a Presbyterian, and one who later

would be knighted for his services. That the college came into existence at all was due to the pertinacity of the chief administrator of the will, John Strachan; that a single building of the college was erected, before the deadline set in the will, was due to the Rev. John Bethune, a principal, declared by a prime minister of Britain, Mr. Gladstone, to be unfit to teach any subject at university level. The nineteenth century was only one year old when the government had responded to petitions for educational facilities by creating the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, to control all public education in Quebec. Its governors were Crown appointees, and by an amended Charter of 1852, these governors became also the governors of McGill College. In 1863, an act of the legislature of the United Canadas (XXVI Vic. Chap 6) saw the board of governors as a self-perpetuating body, and McGill a private university. A first charge given to the newly independent board of 1853 was to appoint a principal. Three principals, amongst all who have served in that office, between them served for eighty-five years. Two of them, Sir William Dawson (1855-1893) and Cyril James (1939-1962), have had extensive eulogies and biographies; the third, Sir William Peterson, has been less generously treated by those who have written about him. Two charges against him stand out – he was aloof in his personal dealings and he was an imperialist. As we approach the centenary of his arrival at McGill, it is more than appropriate that an attempt be made to assess the man as a product of his ancestry, his education, and his character, formed in the second half of the Victorian era, rather than as a non-Canadian when Canada was nation building, particularly in the years after Vimy Ridge, when talk of imperialism was both emotionally charged and politically divisive. Those who have written of him may have done so without regard to significant events in Scotland's history; without regard to social, cultural, and educational changes taking place in Scotland and England; and in ignorance of the growth of the notions of mission and service which Edinburgh and Oxford seemed to impose upon some of their graduates, whether these missions were at home, or abroad, in what was to become known as the Empire. Our first task, therefore, must be one of elaborating these points to determine the parameters within which William Peterson moved and had his being.

First and foremost among these factors was the ancient Franco-Scottish alliance against England, an alliance whose intellectual and attitudinal concomitants survived the Union of the English and Scottish Crowns (1603) and the later Union of Parliaments (1707) so that England remained the "auld enemy". Add to this, that the Reformation came differently to the two countries, so that while Scotland embraced the Presbyterianism brought from Geneva by John Knox, the Reformation in England became channeled politically into a maintained episcopacy, an official hostility to Calvinism in all its forms, and a general belief that monarchs were anointed of God. At the Union of 1707, in addition to gaining trading

access to England, to the extinction of its own debt, and without any liability for past English debts, Scotland retained control of its language, its laws, and its religion. As happened later, and elsewhere, the official religion, in Scotland, Presbyterianism as expressed in John Knox's *First Book of Discipline*, became the guardian of all things Scottish and a defense against the centralizing tendencies of governments in London. In education this was manifest in the democratic forms of schools and universities in Scotland, while in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries elitism continued. However, reforms were taking place in both countries, reforms which would affect the education and career of, among many others, William Peterson.

The Scene in 1856

William Peterson was born in Edinburgh on May 29, 1856, midway through that period, 1846-1866, which saw in Britain not only a great increase in population but also great prosperity as the negative effects of the Napoleonic Wars were replaced by the positive effects of the Industrial Revolution, a term coined by Arnold Toynbee (1832-1893). Some elements of reform had taken place between 1832 and the time of Peterson's birth, but many more were to follow. In 1856 the Crimean War was officially ended with the Treaty of Paris, and the seeds had been sown for the Indian Mutiny which followed in 1857, and the subsequent demise of the East India Company, followed by Crown control of India in 1876. More importantly, for Peterson, several events of great academic significance had occurred. For example, 1856 saw the publication of the twelfth volume of George Grote's *History of Ancient Greece*, an epic which he began in 1846, and the coincidental publication, in German, of Theodor Mommsen's three volumes of the *History of Rome*, both affecting the academic preparation of succeeding generations of Oxford students. Parliament was involved in university reform with the Acts of 1854, 1856, and 1858 dealing respectively with the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh, and one year prior to these it had passed the India Act which led to the appointment of civil service commissioners who set the first and, subsequent, open competitive examination for entry into the Indian Civil Service.

The examination itself was clearly modeled upon Oxford Greats, with an additional English paper which, incidentally, carried almost as many marks as the Latin and Greek papers combined. Open competition for the Home Civil Service only began in 1870. In North America, the United States and Canada were functioning well, as witness the act which created McGill as a private university, and moves were under way for a Kingdom of Canada.

In England the religious struggle for and against episcopacy continued, with the Established Church of England fighting to retain its privileges.

The Dissenters had gained some political rights with the 1828 repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the 1832 Reform Act. Until now the major dissenting groups had been the so-called Independents, synonymous with Congregationalists, plus the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and the Society of Friends. Then the Methodists, still Tory in outlook, broke with the Church of England and increased their own support. The Congregationalists shared with the Baptists more radical forms of dissent than the Presbyterians, while the Methodists, particularly in Wales and the north of England, were to take the lead in nonconformist politics. Sporadic attempts were made towards an Episcopal church in Scotland.

During the nineteenth century the population of Scotland doubled between 1801 and 1851, and doubled again by 1901, this despite the great numbers who emigrated in these years, numbers estimated by some counts to be twenty-five million emigrants from Britain. The earlier ones left for religious reasons, but in the latter half of the century they left for economic and, increasingly, professional and administrative reasons.² Our particular Peterson family was represented in both realms, fecundity and residence overseas.

The Peterson Family

The Petersons originally came from the Shetlands, a group of islands some two hundred miles northeast of Scotland, territory which was originally Norse but was transferred to Scotland as a wedding dowry. William Peterson's paternal grandfather, the Reverend Peter Peterson, was the Congregational minister at Walls, on the southwest of the main island. He and his wife, Barbara Mann, had ten children christened there between 1810 and 1836, though as two sons were christened John and two daughters christened Margaret it is presumed that some of the ten children died in infancy. There was a Congregational manse at Walls but the Reverend Peter is known to have preached in neighbouring parishes. He was the son of a John Peterson and Janet Twatt, and was twice married, the second time at age 71, Barbara Mann having died in 1847. However there is no record in Shetland of Peter's death. From Shetland we learn that,

The stronghold of the Petersons was in the Island of Vaila and in the district of Riskness, just across the water from there. A large number of Petersons congregated there during the first three censuses of 1841, 1851, and 1861. They moved or died out after then and there are no Petersons in Walls now.³

John, Magnus Mann, and William Peterson, the three surviving sons of Reverend Peter, left Shetland, the two former to Edinburgh, and the last, William, at a very young age for Melbourne, Australia, where he was to be

joined in partnership by a nephew, John, in the firm Peterson, Pole, and Company, merchants. Meanwhile, Sir William's father, John, was able to establish the firm of Peterson Brothers, merchants in Leith, later to be incorporated in Edinburgh.

There, in Edinburgh, John Peterson married Grace Mountford Anderson on August 16, 1844, and they had fourteen children, of whom one unnamed male child died before he could be christened. Of these children, the fifth son, William Peterson, destined to become principal of McGill University in 1895, was born on May 29, 1856. Peter, the eldest son (1847-1899), went to India in 1872 to be the registrar and professor of Sanskrit at the University of Bombay; Magnus, the fourth (1854-1894), who had been an organist and choirmaster, died in New Zealand. A younger son, Franklin Sieveright (1861-1914), was, from 1900 onwards, the Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne, Australia. It is interesting to note that many of the children of the Petersons who had lived abroad, returned to study and work in Britain. The only son of William, the provision merchant of St. Kilda, Melbourne, became Sir Arthur Frederick Peterson, a British judge in chancery; Margaret, daughter of Peter of Bombay, an author, retired to Sussex; the son of Franklin, Franklin George Reginald Sieveright Peterson (1893-1933), became a leader writer on *The Times*. Of two grandsons of Peter, of Bombay, one, A.D.C. Peterson (1908-1968), was born in Sir William's house in Edinburgh and became professor of education at Oxford, and his younger brother (1910-1986) became Sir Arthur William Peterson, permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office. Of the two sons of Sir William, of McGill, the elder, Lt. Colonel William Gordon Peterson, D.S.O. (1886-1930), was, after distinguished service in the First World War, a lecturer in English at St. Andrews University, and the younger, Sir Maurice Drummond Peterson (1889-1952), was a career diplomat and British Ambassador in turn to Iraq, Spain, Turkey, and Russia. Only the eldest son of Peter, of Bombay, John Carlos Kennedy (1876-1955), though educated at Edinburgh and Oxford, returned to serve administratively in India before retiring to Wales. In total, this is a remarkable record, within one family, of public and professional service at home and abroad, with one generation serving abroad but with their descendants returning to the land of the parents' birth. Was it opportunity; a sense of duty, as part of the exodus of Scots, particularly Edinburgh graduates; of ideals derived from an Oxford education; of living in the shadow of Jowett, with his ideas of the civilizing mission of Oxford and especially of Balliol; or merely a pattern within one family? Are there clues to be found, in Sir William's case, in his early history and education?

The Peterson family, in Leith and Edinburgh, was apparently a tightly knit and happy one, as attested by a letter from a younger daughter, Margaret, who preferred the diminutive Germanic form of that name, Meta.

The prosperity of the father assured that his sons and daughters received a private education in preparatory schools to age nine or more, followed by attendance at one of Edinburgh's academies or high schools. Less fortunate children in Scotland would attend first a parochial school and later a "burgh" school, where they would undoubtedly be taught some Latin, for Presbyterian Scotland devoted much greater resources to education than did England, even though, for many years, the Scottish schoolmasters were poorly remunerated.

William Peterson and the Royal High School, Edinburgh

William entered the Royal High School of Edinburgh in September 1865 at age 9, at the same time as his brother, Magnus, who was two years older. They had been preceded at the school by two even older brothers, Peter (1857-1863) and John Anderson (1859-1862). A younger brother, Franklin Sieveright, would go to George Watson's Academy. The daughter, Meta, went to Miss Blyth's private school, and later Dundee University College, when William was the principal, and graduated in 1887. From school reports we glean that William

... was *Dux* in Herr Von Ravensburg's German class of 1870 and 1871. In 1869 he also received the Prize for Excellence in Mr. Carmichael's Greek class. Also in that year he received an Honourable Mention in the Rector's Report in Mr. Ross's English class. During his final year he won a bursary to attend the University, having been examined in Latin, Greek, Mathematics, French, German, and English, and was one of three high school boys who were accepted that year for university. As was customary Peterson was under the rector's tutelage during his sixth year. This is shown in the Library Register for 1870-1871.⁴

The Royal High School, dating back to 1503, received mention as *Scola Regia Edimburgensis* by James VI of Scotland, and its third site on Calton Hill (1825-1968) was so marked in the Edinburgh Directory of 1833, but the term only entered into general use from 1867 when a major re-organization of the school and its curriculum took place under its new rector, James Donaldson. The school retained its title after control passed from the Edinburgh Town Council to the newly established school board created by the Education Act of 1872, William's education being unaffected by this last change. It was said that, "Every High School boy, whatever else he may know or not know, knows two things – that Sir Walter Scott was a High School boy and that one of his predecessors shot a Baillie" (an event which occurred in 1595 when the sheriff tried to evict some High School boys from behind a barricade).⁵ The school had had many distinguished

alumni before Sir William Peterson, who does not merit a mention in any of the official histories of the school. Among these were Alexander Graham Bell (1857-1862), James Boswell (1755-1756), and A. C. Tait (1820-1824), a Presbyterian who became Thomas Arnold's successor as headmaster of Rugby and later the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁶ S. S. Laurie (1839-1844), who was the first professor of education to be appointed in any British university, was another alumnus. It was an adventure of yet another former pupil, James Hector, surveying in Alberta, that saddled that province with the famous Kicking Horse Pass. Of its many distinguished rectors, three are particularly remembered.⁷

Dr. Schmitz (1845-1865) had the privilege of being tutor to the future Edward VII whenever Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were in residence at Holyrood Palace. It was Schmitz who introduced for the school a code of discipline, of twenty-two clauses, and on the first day of each succeeding term for the next fifty years these were read out to the assembled school-boys. In its preamble the code said, "It is incumbent upon those entrusted with your education to see that you are trained to conduct yourselves in all the various relationships of life as Christians and as gentlemen".⁸ Peterson must have heard this admonition on some eighteen occasions, so if he had not acquired such modes of conduct before entering the Royal High School he would do so there. Schmitz started the publication of an annual rector's report; he also reduced the number of hours spent daily on Latin from five to four, made Greek an optional subject, ended Saturday morning school, and secured space in the grounds of Holyrood for school cricket. Schmitz's regime, under which three older Peterson boys had been educated, set the scene for further changes initiated by his successor, Donaldson. James Donaldson (1866-1882) had been the rector of Stirling High School before coming to Edinburgh as one of the four classics masters. Prior to his arrival such English as had been taught had been done so by the classics masters; Donaldson's first move was to appoint a master specifically for the teaching of English – a new departure for Scotland – and thus freed the classics masters for the sole job of teaching Latin and Greek. School games were instituted, though golf was played only from 1876 onwards, and Rugby football from 1868. Military drill and rifle shooting were introduced in 1865, the year in which Peterson became a pupil there. When Peterson attended (1865-1871), five school departments existed: classics, English, foreign languages (French and German), mathematics and arithmetic, and a miscellaneous department which included writing, drawing, fencing, physical science, and a civil service class. (Examinations for employment in the Home Civil Service were part of a closed competition; only after 1870 was competition open.) Each option followed by a student had to be approved by the rector, who, as was customary, taught Latin and Greek to the sixth year class, and hence, as we have seen, taught Peterson in his last year at school. In earlier days Donaldson had studied, in Berlin, the psychology of

education of Herbart and Beneke, and in 1874 his lectures on this topic were published as the *History of Education in Prussia and England*.

In 1881 he became professor of humanity at Aberdeen, and, from 1886-1891, the principal of the United Colleges of St. Salvator and St. Leonard, and, by seniority, in 1891 he became the principal of the re-organized University of St. Andrews. He was knighted in 1907. The paths of Peterson and Donaldson were to cross on several occasions between 1861 and 1895, at which time Peterson left Dundee to become the principal of McGill University. There is no record of any congratulatory note from Peterson to Donaldson on the latter's knighthood in 1907, and, of course, Donaldson died in 1915 before Peterson, in his turn, was knighted.

Edinburgh University

The town council of Edinburgh had not only controlled the Royal High School, it had been responsible also for the creation of the University of Edinburgh, Scotland's fourth university, obtaining a charter from James VI in 1582. (The other three had been papal foundations of the fifteenth century, St. Andrews [1411], Glasgow [1451], and Aberdeen [1494]). Initially the students were taught by regents, each regent being responsible for the same students throughout their stay, but later a professorial system, based upon the German model, was adopted with one professor for each subject. Scots students tended to be young and seldom stayed long enough to graduate. In the field of medicine, however, the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh offered superior facilities to those of the English universities. One Canadian prime minister completed his medical training there.⁹ Academic control at Edinburgh was always in dispute between the *Senatus Academicus* and the town council. A royal commission's report of 1831, which advocated executive commissioners, was rejected by the town council, and, more importantly, by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, though being accepted by the other three universities. It was not until 1858, following action at the two English universities, that a further royal commission (1858) led to the Universities of Scotland Act of that year. Executive powers were granted to the commissioners to effect the necessary changes "for the government and discipline of the Universities and Colleges of Scotland." It was under the terms of this act that William Peterson, and his brothers, were to receive their university education as day students at Edinburgh.

The ease of admission to Scots universities, and the absence of qualifications for matriculation, together with the low age of entrance, meant that some students, rural students in particular, could arrive with only a rudimentary background in Latin and Greek. The professor was expected to make good such deficiencies, and additionally he felt required to devote

time to what was termed "examinations" – analogous to what American universities were later to dub "quiz sessions". A professor would set some six essay topics for the year.¹⁰

"Examinations" or "catechetical teaching" dealt with the essays and their evaluation, (though the professor may have responded also to questions on his daily lectures), and occupied two hours per week, additional to the five hours of his lectures. Only two of Edinburgh's professors were known to rely solely upon lectures, Stewart in moral philosophy and Lyon Playfair in chemistry. Another characteristic of Scottish university education at that time, and one remarked upon with derision by English academics, was the amount of time devoted to philosophy and the immaturity of the minds set to receive it. Scottish students had a double dose, being taught the same topics (theory of knowledge, perception, universals and causality), in the third year by the professor of logic and in the fourth year by the professor of moral philosophy. Metaphysical considerations seemed to enter also into the teaching of other subjects, and as a result of all this the Scots were regarded as sciolists or "smatterers". They, in turn had been brought up to regard philosophy and religion as more important than mathematics or classics.¹¹

By the time of the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1858, some much needed reform had been initiated at Oxford and Cambridge, notably in the admission of Dissenters and the reform of Statutes pertaining to Fellows and Tutors. These changes were to render the English universities more attractive to Scots students. Meanwhile the Executive Commissioners of the 1858 Act in Scotland were able to bring about all the changes implied or required by the Act, save for Mr. Gladstone's proposal for a federal university of Scotland, such as Wales secured in 1893. Control now passed from the senate to a newly created University Court consisting of a rector, principal and four assessors, (at Edinburgh two of these were nominated by the town council), and a general council, consisting of the chancellor, members of the court, professors, and alumni. The senate, meanwhile, retained power over the curriculum and instruction. The B. A. degree was abolished, and the ordinary M. A. (A. M. at some universities) was to be the first degree. This was to be granted after four years of successful study.¹² As a classics student, William was to benefit from the changes introduced.

Two problems for the commissioners are worthy of note: the condition of assistants and the inadequate provision of libraries. It had been the practice of professors to recruit a successful student of a previous year to assist in the provision of "rudimentary instruction" where that was necessary, paying him from his own remuneration, which came largely from student fees. The executive commissioners felt that a full-time professor deserved an income of £400 – £500 a year, inclusive of class fees, and that

assistants to a professor should be recognized by that title and remunerated directly from university funds. This would lead, eventually, to a salaried class of well qualified graduates embarking upon an academic career, as happened to William at a later date. It also became incumbent upon the government in London to provide the necessary financial help to university funds. The condition of the universities' libraries certainly called for help. The commission believed that Edinburgh had the best university library in Scotland but even so, with sometimes only one copy of the standard texts, it could do little to help the class of over two hundred students who attended particular classes, such as those in humanity or natural philosophy in 1876-1877. Thanks to the generosity of some of the professors, class libraries helped to relieve the problem but even so reliance upon lecture notes was still a fairly sure way to pass examinations.

Finally, the introduction of new subjects recommended by the commission meant the employment of new professors, and in one case a change of scope. Rhetoric, which at Edinburgh under Professor Aytoun had become the first British Chair of English Literature and enjoyed a high reputation, (one fully maintained by his successor, Professor Masson), now appeared as Rhetoric and English Literature. Seven new chairs were created, Sanskrit (1862), civil engineering (1868), political economy (1871), education (1876), fine arts (1882), and Celtic (1882), all of them from private endowments, the last one, Celtic, by Professor J. S. Blackie. Peter Peterson, who obtained an honours degree in 1867, must have been one of the early beneficiaries of the introduction of Sanskrit, the study of which he continued at Oxford, and later taught at Bombay. Edinburgh awarded him a doctorate in philology in 1883. (Comparative philology had from 1800 onwards been a part of the traditional Greek course at Edinburgh.)¹³

Peterson and the University of Edinburgh

When William entered with his bursary in 1871, at the age of 15, there were 1874 students registered of whom 729 were in arts; in the year of his graduation, in April 1875, these numbers had been increased to 2076 and 793, respectively. Rather more than 400 of these were Edinburgh residents, who would reside at home; non-Edinburgh residents would perforce live in lodgings. The arts graduation list for April 1875 showed that there were 53 ordinary and 15 honours M. A. degrees awarded, of which ten were first class honours, and William was one of the four awarded in classics. Graduation was still not the rule. One prize for graduates was the ability to be a member of the general council; a second prize would arise from 1868 onwards when graduates could vote in the election for a member of parliament to represent the universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews. (Glasgow and Aberdeen graduates would vote for a second member to represent the other Scottish universities.) Many years later William would

be invited to have his name submitted as the potential Liberal candidate for the combined universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews, but he declined the invitation.

Post-graduate study for outstanding individuals was difficult and financially expensive. There were prizes, certainly, but these were generally for small amounts, not sufficient to provide the means required. However, in the twenty years following the Act of 1858 sixteen scholarships were provided in the faculty of arts, including the Mackenzie Classical Scholarship (1862) valued at £120 per year for up to four years for excellence in classical literature and English literature, and the Greek Traveling Scholarship which gave residence at a German university for one year. From 1861 onwards there would be Ferguson Scholars, awards open to recent graduates of all four Scots universities, originally valued at £80 per year for two or three years. These were regarded as "the blue ribbon of academic merit for Scotland".¹⁴

William Peterson signed the matriculation register of the University of Edinburgh in September 1871, giving his age as 15, his number of years of high school education as six, and a home address in Edinburgh. From the first he began to collect prizes and mentions, starting with the winter session of 1871-72 in which, while failing to win a class medal for general excellence in humanity (Latin), he was placed a joint third in his class (of several hundred students).

In the summer session of 1872, in humanity, he was placed first in his division, and a joint second in Greek, and in the summer session of 1873 won prizes for Latin essay and honourable mention for his essays in Latin and English, with a certificate of merit in logic and metaphysics. In the winter session of 1873-74 he distinguished himself in Latin, winning the first prize for Latin prose composition and the class medal for general excellence, with a certificate of merit in rhetoric and English literature. In his fourth year we find him listed as a prizeman but not a medallist in the moral philosophy papers, gaining 503 marks out of a possible 575. (The highest mark awarded was 530). In the same session he won the gold medal for general excellence in Greek, and a gold letter for his Greek prose composition. William completed four years at Edinburgh with an honours M. A. in classics, the winner of a Mackenzie Scholarship worth £100 per year, and then was awarded the Greek Traveling Fellowship by Professor Blackie. With this he went to Gottingen to study philology under Professor Sauppe. At or about this time he applied to Corpus Christi College and was awarded a recently created "exhibition" valued at £80 per year with free rooms, but requiring him to furnish "battels".¹⁵ On April 28, 1876, he was officially admitted to Corpus Christi as a scholar and signed the university matriculation register the next day, April 29th. On October 3rd and 4th he

was in Glasgow to compete for the Ferguson Scholarship, before the beginning of Michaelmas term at Oxford later in October 1876. In the Ferguson competition he was one of three winners, all of them graduates of Edinburgh, Peterson in classics, R. B. Haldane (a future minister of war) in philosophy, and H. W. G. Mackenzie in mathematics. (Mackenzie distinguished himself as a mathematician, 5th Wrangler, and then as a physician).

All three of them had figured in the class prize lists of the university. It is interesting to note that Haldane had religious doubts whilst taking Latin under Sellar, particularly when studying Lucretius, and switched to philosophy. On the advice and with the help of Professor Blackie he went to Gottingen for four months to Professor Lotze (the successor of Herbart) until he had resolved his philosophical doubts. Whilst his parents had permitted this foreign visit in 1874 when he was still only seventeen, they refused him permission to go to Oxford some years later, fearing the anti-Calvinism which they still believed to exist there (as it may have done in certain colleges).

Oxford

As is well known, Oxford claimed to be one of the world's three founding universities, a collection of independent colleges, or "houses", at which, from the twelfth century onwards, groups of monks came for mutual instruction and further study, eight such houses being in existence before Scotland received its first at St. Andrews. By the time of the Union of the Crowns, Scotland had its four universities and Oxford some fifteen colleges, and Cambridge, a later foundation, had sixteen. The universities had been affected by the power struggles between kings and their parliaments, and the role of chancellor had been important.¹⁶ When the chancellor of the university was no longer resident, as happened after the Middle Ages, power passed to the vice-chancellor, and the office of chancellor became an elective one. It was the election in 1629 of William Laud, president of St. John's College, and a High Church man, as chancellor, a life-time appointment, which gave him the power to affect the statutes of the university. These gave power to the colleges and entrenched privileges and patronage, increasing the number of livings (parishes) in the direct gift of the colleges, as well as providing income for their support.¹⁷

The nineteenth century opened with reforms of the examination system. Prior to Laud, graduation depended upon attendance and ability to take part in disputations; under his statutes, some form of oral examination upon four texts, one of which was from Aristotle, was introduced. This deteriorated to the point where the examiners were friends of the student, and the whole process became farcical. Written examinations were started after 1801 with the introduction of the honour school of *Literae Humaniores*

(Latin, Greek, philosophy, mathematics, and divinity), in which students could either “take pass” or “challenge the honours”. From 1807 the final school was split into classics and mathematics, class lists were used, and separate examiners appointed for each school. By mid-century “Moderations” was introduced, taken in either classics or mathematics, and two new honour schools (natural science and modern history with cognate subjects) introduced. By the time of Peterson’s arrival, the first examination, *Responsions*, could be excused on the basis of an examination taken in school before matriculation. Moderations could be taken at either the pass or honours level, and “Greats” also taken at either the pass or honours level.¹⁸ It was possible to be examined in classics in one year, and in history or mathematics in another, a path followed by some distinguished individuals, especially those seeking a college fellowship. There had long been reports of professors who never lectured and fellows who never taught, with tutors taking Holy Orders and waiting for years for the college to find them a suitable vacant living (parish) from amongst those livings under its patronage, which would pay them more money than their tutorship. (Corpus Christi College, for example, had 22 parishes under its patronage, and maintained 17 fellows and three professor fellows, who actually might have taught.) Fellows were remunerated from the endowments of the college plus any dividend distributed by the bursar on the general profitability of its estates; tutors were remunerated from the proceeds of tuition fees paid by students. Teaching, when it was done, was entrusted to lecturers or tutors, but students desirous of making progress went for instruction to coaches in the town. As the century progressed there was, however, a gradual rise in the age at matriculation – Thomas Arnold matriculated at fourteen, many others at fifteen – so that by the 1870s most matriculants, and there were many more of them than in earlier years, had had their nineteenth birthday. There was a corresponding increase in the number of tutors – some 40% in fact, but, all in all, dissatisfaction with Oxford increased both inside and outside of the university.

External events after the end of the Napoleonic Wars began to impinge on Oxford, foremost among these being several acts of parliament, and also the creation of several new universities. While some previously imposed disabilities were removed, internal criticism persisted and laid the groundwork for a royal commission under the Bishop of Norwich. The terms of the report were to become the basis of the Oxford University Act of 1854.¹⁹ Changes followed in Oxford life. Previously there had been a class of poor students termed *servitors*, who performed several menial functions, during and after meals in Hall, in return for an education for which they were otherwise too poor to pay; there had been three classes of undergraduates, each with a different gown to mark his status as nobleman, gentleman-commoner, or commoner. From 1854 all undergraduates were commoners, though at matriculation distinctions were preserved for the

description of the parent. Subsequently, in 1871, the Cleveland Commission made a thorough examination of the finances and endowments of the colleges and of the university, preparatory to moving some college funds to the general support of the university. By now it was accepted that celibacy of all fellows could no longer be enforced, and a new executive commission was appointed in 1877, the year when William was to sit Moderations. Unlike its predecessor, its seven members with three co-opted members from each college in turn, would draw up and enforce a completely new set of statutes. More professors were appointed and more money was provided for scholarships and exhibitions. (This change may have assisted William in becoming an Exhibitioner at Corpus.)

Other changes were introduced which would improve both the colleges and the university. Some of the changes affected the tutorial system, reduced the number of prize fellows and had more college fellows, who now became teachers, but the clerical influence remained with the college chaplains, who were no longer celibate. Each college had its own restrictions on how many of the fellows and tutors could marry. But it left unresolved the balance between research, scholarship, and collegial (teaching) duties, though permitting the existing tutors association an increased voice in college and university affairs. But these later changes would affect William very little, though they would restrict his opportunity to obtain a fellowship, had that been his intention. To mitigate the supposedly high cost of living in college, new statutes approved by the Hebdomadal Council in 1868 permitted students, who might otherwise find university costs excessive, to live in lodgings, and created further a group of students unattached to any college, and this in turn required the university to provide tuition by a new generation of tutors. These students were to be incorporated later into a society, the St. Catherine's Society, which eventually gained college status.²⁰

In the years from 1856 to 1876 there had been a great increase in the annual number of matriculants, rising to over 700 in 1876, with a similar rise in the number of tutors, though private coaches existed and continued to flourish. By the time of William's arrival the average teacher/student ratio was 1/17. How did this affect the kind of supervision and instruction an undergraduate could expect to receive? Much would depend upon the particular college, its size, its endowments, and its tutors and lecturers. Prior to 1852 Corpus admitted only scholars, all destined for honours degrees; from some 17 fellows it was reduced to ten, but as a result an additional forty-four commoners were matriculated. In earlier years the award of a scholarship in a larger college almost always guaranteed a later fellowship; in others, a waiting period was spent as a tutor (or later as a lecturer) before becoming a fellow. Thus tutors were often quite young men, recently graduated. After 1855 this preferment was no longer automatic. The endowed (or prize) fellows did not necessarily have to fulfill residence re-

quirements but did have to remain celibate and often had to take holy orders, but in return had a guaranteed and substantial income for life. Again, in the 1870s at Corpus, there were three university professors granted fellowships, three or four teaching fellows (i.e., acting as tutors), two honorary fellows, of whom Ruskin was one, and four lecturers, plus two designated tutors and two designated chaplains. In a college as small as Corpus, with about seventy-five undergraduates, that should have meant that no tutor would have to cover the whole of the examination requirements, but in a larger college, with the same number of tutors, he might be responsible for the whole syllabus. Some students remembered their tutors with affection, others with contempt.²¹

During Peterson's time, attempts were made by tutors in one college to foster cooperation with tutors in other colleges so that some specialization could take place, and undergraduates could attend lectures and tutor-based sessions in colleges other than their own. Because of the autonomy of the colleges such arrangements were informal; it was impossible to establish a publicly available timetable, though a movement initiated by the history tutor at Corpus, Robert Laing, did lead to specialization with the cooperation of others in the faculty of history. The drawback was that from a catechetical and directed session which might be followed with only members of the same college, the absence of student response to that technique in a mixed group led to a more professorial type of lecture. Another development noted at the same time was the use of the "private hour" when the tutor or professor would see a single undergraduate, or, at the most, two or three, for an hour. Of course, private coaching continued to be available. Tutorials were always held in the morning, public lectures by the university professors were in the early afternoon. To encourage the right student attitude to tutorials the college and university boathouses only opened after midday. Serious students were expected to read in the evenings after dinner in the Hall.

Peterson at Gottingen and Oxford

Of Peterson's studies in Gottingen, we can infer only from our knowledge of Sauppe (1809-1893). Sauppe had distinguished himself as the joint author of *Oratores Attica* (a work of over 1000 pages), for an edition of Demosthenes' speeches, and for work on Plato's *Protagoras*. (*Satura Philologica*, essays honouring his 70th birthday, were published in 1879.) But it was in Gottingen that Peterson met, and established a firm friendship with A. A. Macdonnell. Arthur Macdonnell, born in India, the son of an Indian army colonel, was sent to Europe for his education. When he met Peterson he was in his second year at the University of Gottingen, having previously spent four years in the Gymnasium at Dresden. Peterson persuaded him to come to Oxford and to apply for admission to Corpus. He did. He lived on

the floor above Peterson at Corpus, and later contributed his recollections of Peterson to the Corpus journal, *The Pelican Record*. From having been the first to be designated as a Chinese scholar at Oxford, and later the Taylorian Lecturer in German, he obtained a Ph.D. from Leipzig in Sanskrit and became professor of Sanskrit at Oxford. Eventually he became a professorial fellow at both Corpus and Balliol and the keeper of the Indian Institute.

Once Peterson had matriculated, and with his scholarship of £80, income from the Ferguson and Mackenzie Awards and free rooms in college, he would be financially secure. A near contemporary of his, Sir Charles Oman (New College 1880-1884), by not dining in Hall and eating sparsely, managed to live on an £80 scholarship and a £50 award. As to age, Peterson's would be similar to other matriculants. There were three examinations on the way to a degree. William was excused the first of these, *Responsions*, by virtue of his Edinburgh experience. Following the 1854 reforms, what had previously been a single final examination was now divided into two parts, language and grammar, tested by Moderations, and history and philosophy by *Literae Humaniores* or Greats. William as a Corpus scholar would be required to take the honours examination in both Moderations and Finals. Though after reforms were instituted by an 1877 royal commission, the examination in Classical Moderations could only be taken at the end of Hilary term and Finals at the end of Trinity term. William elected to take both at the end of Michaelmas term, the former in 1877 and the latter in 1879. In the official list for Moderations,

In *Literis Graecis et Latinis* William Peterson was one of sixteen candidates placed in Class 1. Peter, the eldest Peterson brother, had obtained a Second Class in Moderations in Trinity Term 1871 and their Australian cousin, Arthur, would obtain a First Class in 1880. The first portion of the Moderations examination was the Greek text of the Four Gospels, followed by a translation of Latin and Greek unprepared passages, an examination on Latin composition and five set Latin and Greek authors as prescribed by the Board of Studies. The emphasis was upon grammar, contents, style and literary history of the selected texts.²²

“The examination was held in the upper rooms of the old Ashmolean Museum. There was no heating except by a small fireplace at one of its ends. In 1879,” (when Peterson would be writing his final examination), continues Oman, “it was a bitter December week and we were permitted, or rather advised, to bring horse rugs and warm gloves.”²³ It was some years later, in 1883, before the New Examination Schools were opened with rooms which were warmed, ventilated, and lighted. Preparation for Modera-

tions would vary with the college and the individual. One near contemporary of Peterson wrote: "In Moderations the examination has to do not merely with work like that done in school, but largely with work which has actually been done in school. When a man who has been well trained in the classics at school comes to Oxford, he has little more to do than to go over again the authors whom he has read."²⁴ As Peterson in 1877 would be well grounded in the classics and philology and Quintillian, Moderations should have provided no challenge. The class awarded would also depend upon the attitude of the student. Oman decided that a second would be good enough. Macdonnell, Peterson's friend at Corpus, who was doing many other things, also obtained a second class.

After that, two further years of preparation would be required for the honours school, in William's case that of Greats or *Literae Humaniores*, or, as the official results would state, *In Literis Humanioribus*. This would entail roughly one year of philosophy and one year of ancient history. However, every candidate for a degree, whether pass or honours, would be required to pass the examination in the rudiments of faith and religion. In Peterson's time it was an integral part of Moderations, but at a later date this part was written separately, at any time between Moderations and Finals and became known as "Divvers". It is presumed that William, as a Presbyterian, would offer the alternative of one or more books of the Old or New Testament in Greek.²⁵ The examination for Greats would commence on November 18th and would be partly in writing and partly by *viva voce*, with never more than ten candidates being examined orally in one day. (A topical cartoon of the scene is reproduced in Balsdon's text.) It was always understood that the *viva* could never lower the class awarded to the written portion but might raise it. Formerly the examinations were mainly held in the rooms under the Bodleian Library with no light and no fire. Afternoon papers were sometimes completed in semi-darkness. The stated subjects of the examination were three fold:

- (1) The Greek and Latin languages, (2) the histories of ancient Greece and Rome to be studied in the original authors, and (3) Logic and the Outlines of Moral and Political Philosophy, at least two treatises thereon by ancient authors to be offered. The writings of modern philosophers are admitted but not required.

Candidates were also required to offer one or more special subjects drawn from the three divisions above. So much for the official requirements. One stinging comment upon this format reads as follows:

This limitation of studies is produced and perpetuated by the hard and fast examination system which binds us hand and

foot . . . Oxford has decided that in the study of the Humanities one course is better than all others and that every student shall be driven through this particular gate. The Final Schools are one fluke of the anchor which prevents Oxford from moving with the stream, and the other fluke is the Civil Service Examination which resembles the Final Schools almost as closely as one side of an anchor resembles the other. . . . By philosophy is meant Plato and Aristotle in the first place, and in the second place logic and moral philosophy, political science and the works of ancient and modern philosophers. . . . Historically the great importance assigned to Aristotle at Oxford is a remnant of the vast dominion which he exercised in the Middle Ages.²⁶

In practice, the separation into two distinct parts, philosophy and history, affected both the preparation for the examination and the relations between the examiners appointed. Since each examiner would be a specialist, the philosopher would have to rely upon the historian for a relevant judgment on his section of the examination, and *vice versa*. This gives point to the alleged remark of an Oxford tutor to his pupil, "Do you really want to learn any philosophy, or do you want simply to know enough of it not to spoil your Class in history?"

When Peterson was examined at Michaelmas 1879, the five examiners were: T. Fowler (Lincoln), professor of logic and later president of Corpus; R. L. Nettleship (Balliol); W. W. Capes, reader in ancient history; F. T. Richards (Trinity); and R. W. Macan (Christ Church), later master of University College. The examination syllabus was virtually all embracing – "*de omni scibili*" – the papers were extensive, the number of questions to be answered was limited. How did students prepare for their final examination? For the pass student, some four and one-half hours per day was recommended; for the honours man it was presumed that six to eight hours would suffice, with extra work during the examination term. This was supposed to entail three hours before lunch, some work between 4:30 and 6:00 p. m. when dinner was taken in Hall, and then again from 8:00 p. m. to 11:00 p. m.²⁷ Much serious reading was expected to take place in the one long vacation available. In Peterson's case we have evidence that after Hall he spent one hour at the Union and could be relied upon to return to his rooms at 8:00 p. m., and he was known to visit Macdonnell in his room around midnight – where the latter had been secretly working away at his Chinese. On the other hand, we have the record of Oman, who relates that he never spent time in athletics or looking at people playing cricket or football, although he used to run along the towpath when his college was involved in the Torpids, in March, or Eights, during May.

. . . but as to the rest of my intellectual training for "Greats" I must say that, with one notable exception, the classical tutors who had to deal with me at New College were of no assistance whatever. My generation educated itself, or perhaps I ought to say we educated each other in constant discussion of all things human and divine. . . . As to the history side of *Literae Humaniores*, the half of it in which I was really interested, I read all my texts and many books of comment. Mommsen I swallowed whole . . . I never wrote weekly essays for any of my New College tutors: they discovered from the first that I could be left to myself, and I utilized the time thus gained in running through nearly the whole of Plutarch, and other historical authors who were not prescribed for the Schools.²⁸

And the results? We have already seen how the final result was dependent upon not only the student's efforts, and the effectiveness of his tutors, but upon the vagaries of philosophical thought of the various examiners. Rolleston, the professor of anatomy and physiology, compared the examination to a great gambling casino. He wrote down the names of men whose later careers had conspicuously reversed the verdict of the examiners, including a little list (a copy of which he would offer) "of First Class men whom the world has not thought much of afterwards. . . . the more I think of it, the surer I am that, with our system of gambling and cramming for classes, we shall never succeed in making the pursuit of knowledge a real end in the University." He favoured an alphabetical list of those who were worthy of honours and a separate alphabetical list of pass men.²⁹ Oman's comments take the matter one stage further: "Who remembers Oxford's 'firsts' or 'seconds' when a few years have gone by?" When he considered the majority of his fellow students in the first class he remembered "only two achieved any distinctions, one as a colonial bishop and the other as a vice-chancellor of a northern university. On the other hand, George Curzon of Balliol, the most brilliant man of his year, and subsequently the most distinguished, who had too many irons in the fire, achieved only a second class."³⁰ William Peterson, too, obtained a second class, and he also was destined for great things later. Macdonnell in 1880 received a third class, but was immediately appointed to the Taylorian lectureship in German and, some time later, as lecturer in Sanskrit also.

Chapel, Collections, and Student Life

There were two other practices of the various colleges which greatly affected the life of their students, Chapel and Collections. Attendance at chapel, which had been compulsory during the heyday of Anglican control,

was retained as a means of regulatory control of students' presence in college when terms were being kept. Even after the Oxford University Act of 1854 admitted Dissenters to the degree of B. A. (but not M. A.), colleges could still discriminate in favour of the admission of Anglicans by requiring a baptismal certificate signed by an Anglican minister.³¹ Some colleges continued to demand daily attendance at chapel, but at Corpus compulsory attendance was abolished on November 24, 1868, as was compulsory roll call "except that every scholar and exhibitioner had to read the lessons on two days in rotation in each term." Thus, Peterson on arrival at Corpus in April 1876 would be subject only to the latter restriction. It was the advent of a Wykenhamist, Mr. Gordon, who was unwittingly the immediate cause for a reform of these procedures. This resulted, "in the summer of 1876, of the reinstatement of compulsory chapel or, alternatively, roll call for the whole College." Gordon was not regular in attendance at lectures before 11:00 a. m. and when confronted on the issue gave the excuse that he had not had time to finish breakfast; nor did it appear had many others, who also stayed in bed until lunch time.³² "Minutes of a College meeting for March 1878 recorded that a Committee had been set up to consider the hours of attendance of college servants on Sundays, and formulate some plan for ensuring the earlier rising of the undergraduates."³³ This was to be achieved by causing each undergraduate who did not attend chapel as required to have to report to the Dean between 9:00 and 9:15 a. m. on Sundays, and a roll call was instituted on weekdays. Peterson as a Presbyterian would be excused chapel but must answer roll call. In addition he would be free to hear the exposition of the articles of the Presbyterian faith extolled from the steps of the Martyr's Memorial each day by Mr. Bazley, a devout Christian and Presbyterian who, *inter alia*, had chosen to preach there as his form of Christian witness.

At the conclusion of each term the ceremony of Collections took place.³⁴ At Corpus, each undergraduate filed past the college president, Dr. Wilson, who shook hands with each in turn and gave a short report to each of his progress, or otherwise, the information having been compiled by the tutors. This in some way was a foil to the examination system, for it provided an alternate source of information about each undergraduate, information which would be of value in the overall evaluation provided by the college, in, for example, the application for fellowships or suitable future employment and promotion. In Peterson's final year one such occasion provided the president of Corpus with the opportunity for a severe reprimand to one of Peterson's juniors, Graham Wallas, who later distinguished himself as the first professor of political science at the London School of Economics. When asked what reading he had done during the long vacation, Wallas replied that he had not done much reading but had done some thinking. From the remarks of the president to him, Wallas might well have inferred that thinking was a subversive activity and that only

reading (and the acquisition of knowledge) was the preferred activity. Reports on Peterson to President Wilson would most probably have come from Henry Nettleship (Corpus Professor of Latin) and A. M. Little on Moderations and a recently appointed A. E. Haigh or the Rev. F. A. Clarke on Greats.³⁵

There was a formalism to college life and behaviour, in the daily ritual, somewhat relaxed in extramural activities. On Sundays, for example, a black coat and tall hat would be featured. "Fancy waistcoats and brilliant neckties were worn", and whiskers were cultivated.³⁶ Extramurally archery was still practiced, tennis was gaining in popularity, golf was for the future, and rowing was still a major activity, even in the days before the advent of sliding seats. At Dundee, Peterson encouraged the playing of tennis and, in golf, he became a member of the Royal and Ancient, a membership he retained whilst at McGill, though there is no evidence that he played either tennis or golf. Peterson rowed, apparently not for Corpus, though his friend Macdonnell did, and the aforementioned Henry Nettleship had earlier distinguished himself on the river. Peterson's rowing activities persisted. He may have been one of a group with Viriamu Jones and E. B. Poulton who rowed to Reading, but there is more definite evidence of vacation-rowing on the rivers of northern Germany. Here, Peterson's knowledge and fluency in German and German invective proved most effective on two major occasions. On the first, entering an inn with others in flannels and carrying their oars, the landlord was reluctant to admit them until "Peterson suddenly came out with a string of words, all used in a wrong sense, but expressive of strong indignation. The strength of his language proved that we were gentlemen for we were immediately received with open arms." The second occasion was even more impressive, when customs officials, having delayed the stowing of their boat and so caused Peterson to miss the ocean steamer from Bremen, were so moved by his harangue that they delayed the steamer for several hours at sea so that "a most important person" (Peterson) might be taken out by tender and eventually rejoin his companions already aboard.³⁷

Peterson's College Activities

Examination results were not the only *desideratum* of college life – there was the daily living and the contact with others. This contact may have existed before college days, may have occurred within one's own college, at the Union, at lectures attended in other colleges, in sporting activities, or arisen from chance encounters. Peterson, as we have seen, knew Macdonnell in Germany, and had other friends in Corpus. He may well have courted acquaintanceship with other Scots students, but is often remembered for being one of "a circle of singularly able undergraduates" centred upon John Viriamu Jones of Balliol.

Apart from rowing, and the Union, to both of which Peterson devoted time, though no published account exists of his participation in the debates, there were other activities in college. Entertaining in one's rooms was "confined to a glass of sherry or claret and a slice or two of cake."³⁸ Afternoon teas were a later departure. Saturday evenings saw intra-college debates and some literary activities, informal sing-songs, and "wines". Old Wykenhamists held regular singing evenings, and Corpus at one time boasted the Corpus Christi Minstrels (one banjo and some vocalists). Peterson's contributions were a baritone solo, based upon the Burns ballad, "Oh, Willie brewed a peck of maut" and joining in rousing choruses of "Was macht der Herr Papa?" and "Pherson swore a feud". (Later, at staff-student evenings in Dundee, Peterson gave other baritone renderings of such favourites as "The Two Grenadiers", "Doughty Deeds My Lady Please", and "Sigh No More Ladies".) "Wines" were held on several occasions, the one after Moderations being somewhat riotous, though not as Bacchanalian as the freshman's "wine" in Hilary term.³⁹ Other "wines" supposedly were less so. Being called before a college don to testify about one such "wine", Peterson described it as not especially rowdy. "What is your standard of a 'wine'?" asked the presiding don. "My experience", was Peterson's instantaneous reply. One other activity at Corpus, which was often accompanied by much noise, was the attempted capture of the top floor by an attacking force from the lower rooms of the staircase, one of which was occupied by Peterson. The advantage, of course, lay with the occupants of the top floor, armed as they were with water jugs and doormats.⁴⁰

At Corpus, Peterson was best remembered for three events. In a paper set for Honours Moderations men there occurred several sentences to be put in logical form. One of them was, "You cannot have your cake and eat it." Peterson immediately turned it into "Possession is incompatible with consumption." [Later] not a single man was found capable of putting down any other equivalent.

The second event saw Peterson as the instigator of opposition to a college tradition whereby the eight men of the college boat were provided with a special dinner at 2:00 p. m. which was paid for by a levy on all the other undergraduates of fourpence per day. Peterson persuaded twenty others to join him in insisting that the dinner be supplied to them also. His protest was extended to the practice of levying fines for absence from the evening meal. Eventually the fourpence charge was abolished and the scale of fines for absence reduced. Perhaps, most importantly, Peterson was remembered for his refusal to pay a trademan's bill which he thought excessive. He allowed himself to be charged in the vice-chancellor's court where, though he lost the case through the incompetence of his counsel, he was supported at the trial by the appearance of every Corpus undergraduate.⁴¹

Friends and Choice of Career

As we have seen, Peterson was admitted a scholar at Corpus when he matriculated on April 28, 1876, and though his scholarship would extend for five years until 1881, he had completed his twelve terms of residence⁴² before that. He moved into lodgings, most probably to Beaumont Cottage, Beaumont Buildings, St. John Street, where he was one of a "small colony" who settled there. Among that small colony was John Viriamu Jones, and a frequent visitor there was P. A. Barnett (Trinity) whose opinion Peterson sought when, at McGill, he was making the appointment of the first Macdonald Professor of Education, J. A. Dale (Merton). It is to Barnett that we owe the information that, after meetings in one or the other of the students' rooms in Beaumont Cottage, they all, on the pavement outside, engaged in the game of "Hoppy".⁴³ It was from this non-collegiate residence that Peterson prepared for his examination for Greats at Michaelmas 1879. Others of Jones' friends from Balliol and elsewhere were E. B. Poulton (Jesus); Harry Reichel (Balliol, and later a principal of Bangor University College and a vice-chancellor of the University of Wales); W. P. Ker (Balliol, later a fellow of All Souls and professor of poetry at Oxford); A. H. Bullen (Worcester, an expert and publisher of Shakespeare and Marlowe, and who only read English literature for Greats); and the Australian, E. H. Irving, who returned to Australia to edit newspapers there. Amongst the activities of this group was attendance at the lectures of John Ruskin, then Honorary Fellow of Corpus. Jones was to write in April 1877, "Have I told you that Ruskin is lecturing here three times a week? He reads most beautifully, his voice is wonderfully musical, full of tenderness, capable at times of the minor cadence of the Welsh – or something like it."⁴⁴ Ruskin's ideas on education found an echo in the later work of Jones, first as Principal of Firth College (later to become the University of Sheffield), and then as Principal of the University College of South Wales, and, finally, as the first Vice-Chancellor of the federal University of Wales. When Ruskin visited the museum he had established in Sheffield, Jones met him there, one breakfast with him being recorded on July 20, 1882. Peterson, as a resident of Corpus, might have had more opportunity to meet Ruskin as he "used to stalk majestically through the Quad on his way to lecture at the Taylor (Museum)", or at breakfasts which Ruskin from time to time gave to Corpus undergraduates, and others who had worked upon the famous Hinksey Road project. (E. B. Poulton and Arnold Toynbee were two such labourers.) Peterson's Corpus friend, A. A. Macdonnell, whose "mother in her girlhood had known him (Ruskin) at Perth, and was an intimate friend of Miss Gray, whom Ruskin married, and who afterwards became Lady Millais," was another likely avenue for personal acquaintance with Ruskin.⁴⁵ Some aspects of Peterson's attitudes to education as an end in itself, to its wider provision, the education of women, the university extension movement, and the place of music and health and physical education - were

reminiscent of Ruskin's ideas on the subject. They could also have been merely characteristics of the liberalism which Peterson professed, or they could have been acquired, not directly, but in discussion with Jones and his circle of friends. In 1882 Peterson did go to Sheffield to visit Barnett and Jones, but there is no indication that he also met Ruskin there.

On completion of Greats, in Michaelmas 1879, Peterson was faced with making a choice of career, if he had not already done so. Election to a fellowship was no longer the certainty it had been prior to the reforms of 1854. Law was still attractive to some, especially those who had offered jurisprudence in finals, and many fellows of All Souls combined their fellowship with a thriving law practice or parliamentary duties. The open competitions for the Home and Indian Civil Service attracted others; Charles Oman, for example, sat the Civil Service Examination within days of completing Greats in case his application for a fellowship was unsuccessful. Newer career openings were becoming available in colonial appointments especially in Africa and Australia. Some educational appointments were available in the inspectorate and in the staffing of the many newly established public schools, and the newer university colleges whose growth had been "established by municipal pride and industrial munificence."⁴⁶ It was as principal of one of these that J. V. Jones was appointed, and there secured the appointment of his Oxford friend Barnett as professor of modern history and literature. Later, on taking over at Cardiff, he appointed three of his Balliol friends, W. P. Ker, C. E. Vaughan, and R. H. Pinkerton, to professorships there, and was to support Peterson in his application for the position of principal at Dundee University College in 1882. Another Balliol friend, Harry Reichel, as we have seen, then a fellow of All Souls, was to become the first principal of the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1884.

Peterson and W. P. Ker, who, after receiving a first in Classical Moderations took a second in Greats in 1878, were both at the Inner Temple after graduation, where Peterson was registered as a student in 1879. Possibly they were only meeting the legal requirement to dine there once a month. In 1878 Ker was appointed as assistant to W. Y. Sellar, professor of humanity at Edinburgh but in November 1879 he was elected to a fellowship at All Souls, a fellowship which he retained until his death in 1923. Ker was replaced at Edinburgh by Peterson who, according to a *Times* obituary, had been teaching at Harrow.⁴⁷ Peterson remained at Edinburgh for two and a half years until he was appointed as Principal and professor of classics and ancient history at the newly created University College of Dundee on August 21, 1882. Ker meanwhile moved on, first to Cardiff and then to hold the Chair of English Language and Literature at London, where he also taught Icelandic, founded a department of Scandinavian Studies, and held the Chair in that subject. He remained the longest serving fellow of All

Souls, where he spent each available week end throughout the rest of his life. He was elected to the Chair of Poetry at Oxford in 1920. All in all, that group of undergraduates who congregated frequently around Beaumont Cottage made distinguished contributions to academic life in Britain, Europe, Australia, and Canada.

Peterson Becomes Principal of Dundee University College

And what of Peterson? Probably the best evaluation of his own personal, intellectual, and academic status at the end of his Oxford days, and after his two and a half years as assistant at Edinburgh, is that provided by information arising from his application for the principalship of Dundee in 1882. For that appointment, which attracted forty-three applications, the college council appointed a five-member selection committee, which was assisted by four eminent assessors – Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol; James Stuart, of Cambridge, the founder of the University Extension Movement and the first awardee of a Ferguson Scholarship; Henry Roscoe, professor of chemistry at Manchester; and Edmund Robertson (later Baron Lochee of Gowrie), a practicing barrister, member of parliament for Dundee, and Fellow of Corpus. Four candidates were invited for interview, and thirty-nine were rejected. Among those rejected were (Sir) Nathan Boddington, later to become the first vice-chancellor of Leeds University; John Marshall, professor of classics at Leeds; E. G. Hardy, later principal of Jesus College, Oxford; J. H. Muirhead, an eminent philosopher at Birmingham; and A. E. Sonnenschein, co-founder of the Classical Association and a Plautine scholar.⁴⁸ (Professor Sonnenschein was most helpful to McGill's first Macdonald Professor of Education, J. A. Dale, when Dale was studying at Birmingham.)

Robertson, after discussions with the president of Corpus, came up with the names of three Oxford men, Boddington (Wadham), Merry (Lincoln), and Peterson, of whom Peterson was the youngest. Robertson seemed to prefer Merry (a Scot) and Peterson over Boddington, though Fowler, president of Corpus since 1880, preferred Peterson over the other two.⁴⁹ Jowett, for his part, named Boddington (University College) and Peterson.⁵⁰

Donaldson, Peterson's former rector, then at Aberdeen contented himself with saying that Peterson was very young.⁵¹ James Stuart introduced his own candidate into the selection process and secured an interview for his nominee, G. G. Butler (Trinity College, Cambridge). It is not known whom Roscoe favoured, but E. G. Steggall (Trinity College, Cambridge), then Fielden Lecturer in mathematics at Manchester, was also interviewed. He later accepted appointment to Dundee as professor of mathematics and remained there for the next fifty-one years, during many of which he seemed to have waged a vendetta against Peterson. The fourth interviewee

was Cyril Ransome (Merton) who had taken a first in mathematics at Moderations in 1871, changed to history and obtained a first in modern history finals in 1874, but whose son, Arthur Ransome, is now better known than was his father.

Peterson had letters sent on his behalf by Fowler, president of Corpus, and Henry Nettleship, Corpus Professor of Latin; Professor J. V. Jones, principal of Firth College (Sheffield); and by the following professors at Edinburgh: Blackie (Greek), Calderwood (moral philosophy), Sellar (humanity), Fraser (logic), and Masson (rhetoric and English literature), and some unsolicited testimonials were also received on his behalf. Unfortunately, the only information still available from these letters is that due to the *Dundee Advertiser* of August 22, 1882, who printed those of Sellar and Masson. After describing him (Peterson) as a thorough and accomplished classical scholar, Professor Sellar adds:

Although there can be no more certain test of the scholarship of a young man than the result of the honours and other competitive examinations at our Universities, Mr. Peterson has recently given proof of maturer attainments than are usually exhibited by young scholars, by his translation of Cicero's speech in defence of Cluentius, a work which bears the mark of exact and refined scholarship, and shows at the same time a mastery of forcible and idiomatic English. In my frequent discussions with him of questions of scholarship, arising in the course of our work, I have found that I could place full reliance on his knowledge and judgment. If a Classical scholar is to be selected for the office of Principal, I do not think the electors could easily find a better man than Mr. Peterson. He has been also a most successful teacher, thoroughly interested in his work, and conscientious in attention to its minutest requirement. He has, I believe, obtained a great hold over the students, and not only taught them admirably, but stimulated them to work independently. As regards the part of his duties which comes most under my personal observation, that namely of examining and correcting written papers and exercises, I can say that I have never been associated with anyone who did the work better. As scholar, teacher, and examiner, he is, I believe, perfectly competent to fill any educational post in Scotland.

Professor Masson (in his testimonial) states that all he has heard of Mr. Peterson confirms his confidence in his administrative powers as well as in his general scholarship. He adds:

When Mr. Peterson was the successful candidate, about seven years ago, for the Mackenzie Classical Scholarship in the University of Edinburgh, in which scholarship in English literature is conjoined with Latin and Greek, I had the opportunity as examiner in the English department of marking the extent of his knowledge and the fine quality of his culture in this department also. During the last winter session Mr. Peterson had the conduct of the Latin class, and also (for a while) of the Greek class, in the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women; and I have heard but one opinion of his efficiency and acceptability in the duties of those classes. It ought to be added that Mr. Peterson's personal manners and address are remarkably excellent, and such as can hardly fail to command the respect of any, whether colleagues or pupils, with whom he may be associated academically.⁵²

Peterson's appointment as principal of the new Dundee University College, a college unable to grant its own degrees but forced to rely upon the examining function of London University to validate its teaching, at a salary of £500 plus one-third of all students' fees, to a minimum annual salary of £750 for the first five years, may be said to mark the end of academic achievement, though not of intellectual development nor of educational knowledge.

Aloofness and Imperialism?

Some forty years after Peterson's appointment at Dundee, the obituary notices which followed his death in London on January 4, 1921, following a stroke in Montreal on January 12, 1919, mentioned many of the attributes described above. However, a new word, imperialism, appeared, first in the obituary of *The Times* of January 6, 1921, then in the memorial address at a McGill University service held in the church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, Montreal, and next in an obituary notice which appeared in *The Pelican Record* of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The charge of imperialism took a more important position in an article in "McGill: The Story of a University", published in 1960. This, along with the charge of aloofness in personal dealings during his time at McGill remain, for many, a too, too summary dismissal of Sir William and his many contributions to the establishment of McGill as one of North America's ranking universities.

There is nothing in his educational history, so far revealed, nor in his years spent at Dundee, that could substantiate the charge of aloofness. As for the imperialism charged to him, by the end of his formal education the

topic had scarcely arisen; only in retrospect have historians dubbed the years 1875-1914 as "The Years of Empire." At this stage, therefore, we must conclude that, whatever the influence of his education, the study of Greek and Roman methods of governance, any possible subscription to Jowett's notion of Oxford's civilizing influence, it would have been premature to consider him an imperialist at that time. But in his lifetime opinions changed, ideologies emerged, and in the crucible of the First World War political categories hardened, and post-war thinking condemned much that had gone before, including notions of Empire. The role and character of Sir William Peterson as an Imperialist demands further elucidation.

FOOTNOTES

1. This paper is a shortened version of the first section of a monograph (in progress) entitled *The Life and Times of Sir William Peterson 1856 -1919*.
2. G. K. Clark
3. Letter: Shetland archivist.
4. Letter: Royal High School archivist.
5. Ross
6. At Balliol he had been the tutor of Matthew Arnold; at Rugby he had taught William Arnold, the fourth and favourite son of Thomas Arnold. In 1854 he had written to the governors of McGill recommending William Arnold for the position of principal of McGill. William, however, preferred service in India. It was Tait, as one of seven commissioners, who prepared the Report on Oxford University which led to the Oxford University Act of 1854. He was instrumental in securing the admission of non-resident students, which took place in 1868.
7. The first, James Pillans, an alumnus who was rector from 1810 to 1830 and subsequently professor of humanity (Latin) at Edinburgh for the next forty years was, after 1852, given the task by the governors of McGill of finding a principal for the newly independent university. (His eventual nomination was rejected, on the grounds that the nominee was a cleric and not a lay person.) The other two rectors were intimately connected with the education and future of several members of the Peterson family, including William. They were Dr. Leonard Schmitz (1845-1865) and James, later Sir James, Donaldson (1866-1882).
8. Ross, p. 139.
9. Sir Charles Tupper, Prime Minister 1896.
10. There was a single winter session which stretched from early September to late April as opposed to the three or four terms of the English university calendar. Later, a summer term became available, of which William was able to take advantage.
11. Latin, Greek, and mathematics were each studied for two years, and the three medieval philosophies of metaphysics, moral and natural philosophy, and natural history each for one year.
12. An honours M. A. could be obtained, without necessarily further study, by passing examinations in one of four specializations, classics, mathematics, philosophy, or science. As each subject was successfully completed it was aggregated towards the M. A. – in other words a tightly controlled series of credits was employed, as opposed to the single final examination at Cambridge

or Moderations and Finals at Oxford. Though the major changes were in the arts faculty, other changes were also made. In law the LL.D. remained an honorary degree and a new LL.B. was instituted. In medicine the degree of M.D. became a second degree with the original degree split between medicine and surgery resulting in the M.B. and Ch.B. Theology was henceforth to have four professors, divinity, biblical criticism, ecclesiastic history, and Hebrew. The D.D. was retained both as an honorary and an earned degree, though, later, a first degree of B.D. was available to arts graduates who had pursued study under each of the four theology professors.

13. Sir William Jones (1746-1794) is credited with the beginnings of philology with his work documenting a common ancestry for Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. Philology was introduced into the study of Greek in the Edinburgh curriculum in 1800.
14. The Ferguson bequest, based upon the estate of John Ferguson (1787-1856) which was worth over half a million pounds, was for the support of religion and educational endeavours in the six western counties of Scotland. The residue of a smaller bequest, amounting to £50,000, was set aside for providing substantial exhibitions or scholarships, each of which could support a student fully, were to reward scholarship, and were to be competed for annually by recent graduates (M. A.) of any of the four Scottish universities. Two awards were to be given each year, one for classics and mathematics, the other for classics and mental science, (which included metaphysics, logic, and ethics), the award being made to the person with the highest total marks. By 1873 the number of scholarships was increased to three, one each for classics, mathematics, and philosophy, but the value reduced to £80 per year. From that time onwards the award could be held alongside any other award. An examination was held on the first Thursday and Friday of October in the Glasgow offices of the bequest. The syllabus was quite demanding; in Latin some knowledge of Plautus, Horace, Lucretius, Cicero, Tacitus, and Pliny was required; in Greek it was Homer, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle's Rhetoric, together with some knowledge of Latin and Greek etymology. There would be prose compositions in both languages and questions on Greek and Roman history and literature.
15. Originally, the cost of food supplied from the kitchens or buttery. At a later date it included the rent of furniture, the purchase of cleaning materials, fines for late or non-attendance at meals in Hall, and "gate money" levied when one's guests stayed after the gates were closed.
16. Edward III (1327-1377) forbade any one to receive a message from the Pope without his permission; John Wycliff, Master of Balliol, and the scourge of the clergy, became the focus of a parliamentary demand for the removal of Edward's clerical advisers. Henry V, to control these clerics and scholars, in 1420 ordered that "all scholars of the university dwell in a hall or college of the university." Only the king's chancellor could give permission to a townsman to lodge a student. Elizabeth I, in 1571, incorporated the university with a chancellor, the masters and the scholars forming a corporation. In return, the members would accept subscription to the Act of Supremacy and to the Thirty Nine Articles. She further ruled that every schoolmaster should be "found meet as well for his learning and dexterity in teaching . . . and also for the right understanding of God's true religion". The monkish restriction of celibacy continued. Elizabeth's successor, James VI of Scotland (James I of England),

conferred further status upon the two universities by granting to the resident Masters of Arts at each university the power to elect two members of parliament. At a later date, William Gladstone, who became prime minister, was one of Oxford's two members of parliament, and worked for its reform.

17. The Statutes of 1636 established the Hebdomadal Board of twenty-two members, the heads of the houses, two proctors nominated by the colleges in turn, and a vice-chancellor who was always the head of a house. A very visible sign of the Laudian Statutes was that students wore gowns distinctive of status, e.g., commoner, gentleman-commoner, nobleman, B.A., M.A.; gowns were required to be worn on certain occasions such as at matriculation, during examinations, in the Bodleian, and, of course, outside of college. The Statutes remained in force for over two centuries before reforms were introduced, many of them against the wishes of the colleges.
18. Stedman.
19. The drafting of the bill was left to W. E. Gladstone, the member of parliament for Oxford, and he created an executive commission given powers to negotiate new statutes with each college separately. The colleges were thus able to preserve a great many of their original privileges and Oxford remained a collegiate university. University and college revenues were more equitably used to provide more professorships and fewer fellowships, and colleges were freed from restrictions which had bound their admissions to particular families or locations (e.g., Queen's College existed virtually for entrants from Cumberland and Westmoreland, Jesus College for those from Wales. It was left to Gladstone, as prime minister, in 1871, to pass the University Test Act which allowed Dissenters and Catholics access to all degrees save divinity. That was not changed until 1920.)
20. It is interesting to note that McGill's second Macdonald Professor of Education, Sir Fred Clark, had been an unattached student at Oxford. Cecil Rhodes, an Oxford contemporary of Peterson, though on the books of Oriel, never lived in college.
21. William Ker was pleased to acknowledge his debt to his tutors, F. de Paravicini and T. H. Greem at Balliol; C.W. Oman had a poor opinion of his (unnamed) tutors at New College.
22. This part of the examination was followed by papers on Greek prose, Latin verse, Greek verse, comparative philology, the history of Greek drama or, as an alternative, *Quintillian's Tenth Book* (on which William was, or became, an expert), and the elements of deductive logic.
23. Oman.
24. Gardner.
25. "Divvers" was the slang version of Divinity Moderations. When it was taken as a post-moderations examination, but before "Greats". Aldous Huxley failed "Divvers" at his first attempt, and a famous Welsh actor-playwright failed it twice and was fined by his college, Christ Church, for doing so. He finally passed by taking the option of examination on the Greek text of St. John.
26. Gardner.
27. Stedman.
28. Oman.
29. Rolleston.
30. Oman.
31. C. P. Scott, world famous editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and Liberal M.P., was originally denied admission by two Oxford colleges, because, as a Unitar-

ian, he would have no baptismal certificate. He was eventually admitted at Corpus. (From January 1851 all births had to be publicly recorded.)

32. *Pelican Record*.
33. Letter: Corpus Christi Archivist.
34. Fees were originally collected at the end of each term. Oral examinations on the books read were instituted by Christ Church, and adopted by Balliol in 1798, when they became largely written examinations. This preceded the adoption of written examinations for Moderations and Finals in 1801. This change, along with the institution of Open Scholarships, contributed greatly to the pre-eminence of Balliol in the nineteenth century. In some colleges it was "Handshaking" and a report on a student's progress made personally by the head of the college. With larger student numbers this became a meeting with the Dean, and became much more of a formality than a strict accounting.
35. Letter: Corpus Christi Archivist.
36. Oman.
37. *Pelican Record*.
38. Oman.
39. *Pelican Record*.
40. *Pelican Record*.
41. *Pelican Record*.
42. "There are four Terms for academical exercises in each year but for many Professors' Lectures and some other purposes Easter and Trinity Terms together count as only one." (Oxford University Calendar. 1881). The Terms were Michaelmas, Hilary (or Lent), Easter, and Trinity.
43. Letter: Barnett to Peterson
44. Jones.
45. *Pelican Record*.
46. Armytage.
47. The *Times* obituary notice.
48. Southgate.
49. Letter: Robertson to Thornton.
50. Letter: Jowett to Lord Dalhousie.
51. Letter: Dundee University Archivist.
52. Southgate.

ORIGINAL SOURCE MATERIAL

The major sources of information for this paper were: (1) Printed sources – calendars of the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford for the appropriate years; selected issues of *The Pelican Record* – the journal of Corpus Christi College, Oxford; official histories of the Royal High School of Edinburgh; and official histories of the University of Edinburgh; (2) Archival material supplied by Corpus Christi College; Royal High School of Edinburgh; Edinburgh University; Dundee University; Public Library, Dundee; Shetland Archives; St. Andrews University; McGill University; and Melbourne University; and (3) Genealogical material supplied by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Montreal; the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and *Who Was Who*.

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