

Miscellanea Manitobiana

No. 6 From Perthshire to Quebec: The Story of Rev. James Robertson and his Family;

with notes on three famous descendants,
the writer Margaret M. Robertson,
the scholar William Robertson Smith,
and the novelist Charles Gordon ("Ralph Connor")

By Astrid Hess

This is the story of the family of a Scotsman, **James Robertson** (1776-1861), weaver and Congregational minister, whose course of life led him from the village of Baledgarno in the Carse of Gowrie,^[1] first to the North-East of Scotland and then via the United States to Sherbrooke in Canada. It is the story of a family which prospered in spite of all the hardships caused by poverty and limited possibilities. It is the tale of my great-great-great-great-grandfather and his descendants, in Scotland and abroad. Ancestral research did not particularly interest me until, some years after my mother's death, a large sheaf of family papers was passed on to me. It was only in 1999 that I began to peruse them carefully — and what I found was thrilling. Though most of the material related to my Scottish and German ancestry, it turned out that there was also a Canadian branch which was worthy of further research. So, instead of being only a task limited to organizing and archiving the documents, what had begun as a hobby became over the course of time nearly an obsession.

Little is said in the family papers about the great-grandfather of my own great-grandmother **Alice Thiele Smith**, though she wrote a great deal for her own children about her family and childhood in Scotland. Although here and there I found an odd reference to Canada — a hand-written memo, the attested copy of an official certificate or a reference in a pedigree — it seemed that the Scottish and New World branches of the family had quickly lost contact with one another. On the other hand these occasional references did indicate a persistent, if loose, connection. It was a stroke of luck, moreover, that the Robertson family had possessed a certain, almost genetic, compulsion to write and thus they left a mark on English literature which I could trace through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By good fortune therefore, I was able to find sufficient historical facts to enable me to write this story. Like Alice in Wonderland, I shall

begin at the beginning.



Fig. 1: The *Old Smiddy* in Errol, now a restaurant, and in front, the fount in Errol

James Robertson was not the first-known of my Robertson ancestors. His great-great-great-grandfather, **John Robertson**, had a son, **Andrew** (b. 8 May 1659), who married a **Catherine Allan** on 20 January 1689 at Fowlis Wester, west of Perth. This couple had a son named **John Robertson**, born at Errol on 25 January 1702. John married **Margaret Henderson** and they had a son named **Robert**, born at Errol on 12 October 1735, who married **Anne Langlands** (b. 7 February 1748), daughter of Thomas Langlands and his wife Elisabeth Scrymsour. In all, the Robertson couple had nine children, of whom their second child and first son is our James Robertson. He was born on 1 June, and baptized on 26 June 1776, [2] in the small hamlet of Baledgarno, which lies in the grounds of the Rossie Priory estate

of Lord Kinnaird, one mile north of Inchturre near Errol in Perthshire. [3] Between 1778 and 1780 the family must have moved to Errol on Tayside. There six more children were born. Besides James there were:

- i. **Elisabeth Robertson**, b. 3 April 1774 at Baledgarno
- iii. **Catherine Robertson**, b. 3 May 1778 at Baledgarno
- iv. **John Robertson**, b. 23 July 1780 at Errol
- v. **Euphania Robertson**, b. 14 July 1782 at Errol
- vi. **Janet Robertson**, b. 15 August 1784 at Errol
- vii. **Margaret Robertson**, b. 4 March 1787 at Errol
- viii. **Ann Robertson**, b. 11 July 1789 at Errol
- ix. **Isabel Robertson**, b. 21 October 1792 at Errol

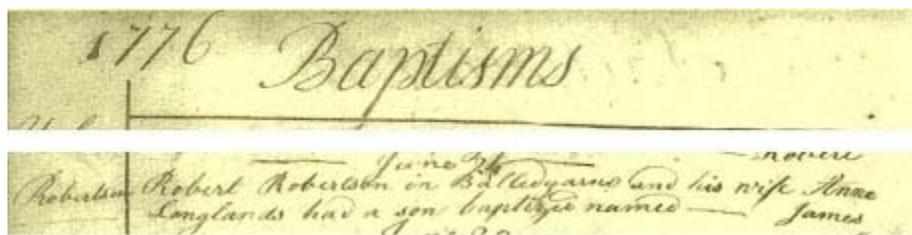


Fig. 2: birth-certificate of James Robertson

Today Errol remains a small village. The slightly winding High Street leads in the direction of the big North Church, erected in 1831. Not far away in a side street stands the square Free Church (now a workshop) erected in 1843, the year of the Disruption. A little further uphill, the old cemetery was the final resting-place of the villagers. There were other churches, of which scarcely any vestige now remains, yet church life must have been a very important and lively feature of Errol in days gone by. Behind the cemetery, almost hidden by modern buildings, stands another church, now part of a house. In the centre of the village and in front of the former smithy (now a restaurant) there is a small open space occupied by the village fountain — an important asset for all the inhabitants. It certainly would have provided a meeting-place for the women when fetching water, and doubtless was the site of most local gossip. Above the fountain is a column, bearing at the top a unicorn, the heraldic beast of Scotland, with the Scottish coat of arms engraved on a shield held between its front hooves.

The River Tay begins to widen here to become the impressive Firth of Tay, scene of a great disaster in 1879, when the iron railway bridge over the waterway, completed only seven months earlier, collapsed as a train was crossing. It was a frightful catastrophe with much loss of life. Theodor Fontane, the German novelist and journalist, based in London in the 1850s, wrote the exciting ballad "The Tay Bridge" — and what school pupil in Germany has not read it?^[4]

At the time when James (whose father was very probably a weaver) spent his early years there, the railway era had not yet been born. Folk travelled on horseback or by coach, if they could afford to. Otherwise one went on foot — by "Shanks's pony." On the horizon, however, there were already signs of great social change resulting from the Industrial Revolution, and this was to have a profound effect on the whole of the population, including the family of my great-great-great-grandfather. On the surface perhaps, life may have seemed tranquil and undisturbed, with the gentle hills above the banks of the Tay giving the impression of unchanging peacefulness; but it was to become increasingly difficult for people to adjust to the new patterns of everyday life.

The name Robertson is common in Perthshire, and there is another Robertson — a nephew of our James — the son of the latter's younger brother **John** and wife **Sarah Melville**. This was **Robert Robertson** (1832-1918), whose name still lingers in the memory of the local people. Starting out in life as a handloom-weaver like his father and uncle, he decided to become a physician. Already married, Robert began by studying from home in the evenings. Then he moved to Glasgow but, having completed his training, returned back to Errol where he spent fifty years caring for rich and poor alike. He was moreover interested in music, and for many years was both secretary and treasurer of the *Errol and Murie Curling Club*. He had had offers to

work at other places, one of the suggestions (to go to Juniper Green near Edinburgh) coming from our James Robertson's son-in-law, the Rev. **Daniel Gordon**, of whom and of whose son, **Charles William**, we shall have to tell more later.^[5]

Next to nothing is known about James' early days. No doubt he learned to read and write at the local school. Though not yet



Fig. 3: Tayside

compulsory, education was already widespread in Scotland at that time, although its quality varied. Most parishes had a schoolmaster sufficiently capable of identifying those pupils whose talents were worth fostering at university. When James was old enough, his father may have taught him the skill of weaving. Perthshire was famous at that time for its spinners, weavers, and dyers, and weaving was well-established as a cottage industry. The craftsmen trained their apprentices, marketed their products, and prospered modestly. At times a group of them might form a kind of cooperative in order to find a wider market for their goods.

With the advent of capitalism, however, well-to-do entrepreneurs — mostly from the cities — began to set up contracts with the weavers, while the development of steam-powered looms led to the establishment of factories in which the increasingly-vulnerable worker became virtually the slave of the mill owners. Mass production led to a fall in prices and a self-employed handloom weaver could not longer compete with the new technology. Many of the families were to suffer increasingly from malnutrition, illness, alcoholism, and severe impoverishment. Nevertheless we shall see that not all submitted tamely to these pressures.

On 30 January 1797, our James Robertson married a woman named **Agnes Crabb(b)** in the parish of Errol. We know little about her background other than that she was born on 7 October 1768, at Woodhead of Balinshoe (or Ballinshoe) within the parish of Kirriemuir, Angus, and was a daughter of **James Crabb** and his wife **Mary**, née **Farquhar**. Mary, her mother, had been baptized on 6 May 1743 at Kirriemuir, and was a daughter of **Thomas Farquhar**. James' father was **David Crabb**, born in 1693. James and Agnes Crabb (the spelling varies) had thirteen offspring:^[6]

- i. **Barbara Crabb**, b. 16 March 1761 at Kirriemuir
- ii. **Elizabeth Crabb**, b. 30 January 1763 at Kirriemuir

- iii. **James Crabb**, b. 30 December 1764 at Kirriemuir
- iv. **John Crabb**, b. 12 January 1867 at Kirriemuir
- v. **Agnes Crabb**, b. 7 October 1768 at Kirriemuir
- vi. **Charles Crabb**, b. 7 April 1770 at Kirriemuir
- vii. **Jean Crabb**, b. 29 November 1772 at Kirriemuir, d. 13 November 1858
- viii. **Alexander Crabb**, b. 11 February 1775 at Kirriemuir
- ix. **James Crabb**, b. 31 January 1777 at Kirriemuir
- x. **David Crabb**, b. 20 December 1778 at Kirriemuir, d. 17 July 1859
- xi. **Margaret Crabb**, b. 12 May 1881 at Kirriemuir
- xii. **Helen Crabb**, b. 11 May 1782 at Kirriemuir, d. 6 November 1860
- xiii. **Janet Crabb**, b. 30 March 1784 at Kirriemuir, d. 18 March 1857

The name Crab(b) is not particularly common in Scotland and seems to be found mainly along the north-east coastal region and its hinterland. Most of the Crab(b)s were domiciled in Angus and Kincardineshire. Agnes' birthplace, Woodhead of Balinshoe, is a tiny settlement south-east of Kirriemuir, the town made famous in the novels of Sir J. M. Barrie.

Agnes was nearly eight years older than her husband James^[7] and the marriage was perhaps more one of convenience than of love. The couple had five children, of whom their eldest son, **Peter**, born at Errol on 15 October 1797, will be of most interest to us. Of the others,

- ii. **Ann(e) Robertson**, born 6 August 1799 at Errol, seems to have died in infancy.
- iii. **James Robertson**, born 26 June 1801 became a businessman at Totteridge, London. A family named Smith, who will later figure largely in this story, were in the habit of staying with James when they visited London.
- iv. **Elizabeth Robertson**, born 4 June 1803, is said to have married a wealthy man in Liverpool. She visited the Smiths several times on her way north, as is noted in the family papers.
- v. **Robert Robertson**, born 3 February 1805, became a teacher at Aberdeen.

At this point, in order to understand fully the Robertson family's further progress, we have to make a brief excursion into Scottish church history. In religion as in politics, the Scottish people could be fiercely independent, and the prevailing system of patronage, which gave landowners and the nobility the right to install ministers of their own choice in each parish, had long been a matter for resentment and protest. Out of this persisting sense of grievance there began to emerge a variety of sectarian groups along with the foundation of new churches. Many were secessionists from the established church in Scotland, but from England came the Congregationalist movement: hardly a church in the original sense, but a loose alliance of believers across various parishes who wished to appoint their own ministers and to operate their own style of worship independently of ecclesiastical authorities.^[8]

The history of the Congregationalists (from the Latin *congregare*: to assemble,

unite, come together) was very eventful for a long time, their success often varying, but towards the end of the eighteenth century they gained a foothold in Scotland again and then were able for years to win over many communities to their cause. One can say that the Scottish cradle of this movement was Perthshire, in the region around Perth and Dundee. In 1798 the Congregational Church was formed in Perth.

The young James Robertson and his wife Agnes, both deeply religious, were followers of this new movement from its beginning. About 1800 the Independents, as they were often called,^[9] opened a college in Glasgow to train their ministers. The divinity course at first lasted for only one year, but was later extended to four years. James Robertson was one of the first of those students, receiving his instruction from the brothers Robert and James Haldane, who at that time were the most prominent leaders of the movement.^[10] By then, our James was already a father of a family, but whether the family accompanied him to Glasgow or not, we do not know. The Congregationalists always provided for the subsistence of their scholars — in return they had to preach during the vacations in far away parishes and were expected to recruit new converts. Certainly much of their success was due to the charismatic preachers whom the Haldanes found and nurtured.^[11]



Old View Of Congregational Church on West Street (Windhill Street) See large house on the right after single storey cottage, with Manse beyond.

Fig. 4: Windhill Street, Stuartfield

On the completion of his studies, James accepted a call to minister at the small Aberdeenshire town of Stuartfield (then called Crichtie) in the parish of Old Deer, where a small Independent congregation had gathered about 1800. This group built its unpretentious chapel in 1801 and on 7 April 1802, James was ordained in the presence of his little flock and three other Independent ministers from the

county of Aberdeenshire.^[12] A manse was built directly beside the church; a small stone building facing the street and, although two-storied, of extremely limited size. There James and his family settled and he himself became a revered and popular minister of his rapidly-increasing flock. Indeed, even today his name is not forgotten.^[13] There is an anecdote, first published in an 1897 issue of the *Aberdeen Evening Express*, which is worth quoting here:

... Mr. Robertson was not only a famous preacher, but he acted as a sort of magistrate and law-keeper for the village. On one occasion a girl came running to the manse and said that her father and brother were fighting for the possession of an axe and that one of them would

be sure to be killed. Mr Robertson walked boldly into the house, and, snatching the hatchet out of their hands, quietly observed "I am going to take the loan of your axe for a while. You'll get it back after you are sober." He had a good smattering of the law, and administered advice and justice whenever his services were requisitioned....^[14]



Fig. 5: Stuartfield Manse



Fig. 6: Stuartfield Church

Stuartfield is pleasingly situated some way from the North Sea, at the foot of gently-sloping hill country, and about 15 kilometers from the picturesque coastal town of Peterhead with its red sandstone buildings, a port from which early whalers departed on long and dangerous journeys. The centre of Stuartfield is marked by a crossroad: one street leading from Old Deer to Auchnagatt, the other from Windhill to Millbreck. The village lacked any great attraction, yet seems to have been a pleasant place in the nineteenth century, the main occupations being weaving and farming. As in Errol, Stuartfield similarly has its central fountain. In James' time it had just been erected as a wooden construction. The manse is located in the street leading to the western hills, in the former West Street (now Windhill Street). There were five churches at that time in the small community, but it is said that all the ministers were on good terms with one another. They supplied pastoral care not only to the small village itself but also to the outlying farms and hamlets in the surrounding area. Until 1823, when the parish in Peterhead obtained its own Congregational minister, James also preached there at regular intervals.^[15]

It is remarkable that the Congregational ministers, and no doubt many of the others too, were not only chosen by their (male) membership, but were financially supported by their flock. In face of the poverty of the Scottish people, that was an impressive achievement and an illustration of their proverbial thrift. People worked hard to secure their daily bread, whether as small tenant farmers, weavers, domestic servants, or farm-hands. Their demands were modest: material wishes exceeding the bare necessities of life were generally beyond their conception. If they possessed a capable minister, however, all trials imposed by God might be endured more readily.

And so James worked on in the field of the Lord and, as we learn, possibly carried on a little home weaving also to eke out his stipend. That extra income would have been welcome in the growing household. Some animal husbandry and a small garden for fruits and vegetables would almost certainly have formed part of the minister's economy. As I have said, three further children were born to the couple. Agnes died soon after Robert's birth, probably in 1806 at the early age of 38. Maternal death following the birth of a child was all too common in those days — *the Lord giveth and He taketh away*. Medical aid for obstetric complications was rarely accessible then, and intervention, if available at all, was so roughly carried out that the danger to mother and child was increased rather than otherwise. Women knew only too well the risks of childbirth, yet faced these with staunch stoicism.

It was natural that James should look urgently for another wife: the children needed to be cared for and a minister without a spouse would unquestionably lack the full confidence of his congregation. There were always many important matters that women would discuss only with the minister's wife. And, in addition to her own housekeeping and maternal duties, she would have an important role to play in visiting the sick, as well as conducting children's Bible classes and assisting young girls to become firm and capable housewives.

James found his new partner in **Elizabeth Murray** (b. 16 December 1787, d. 1832). She was to prove herself well able to cope with her task, as the Robertson family enjoyed a high reputation throughout their subsequent years in Stuartfield. Elizabeth came from a very devout family, that of the sheep-breeder **Andrew Murray** and his wife **Isobel Milne** from Clatt.^[16] Two of her brothers, **John** and **Andrew**, became evangelists also, the latter going as a missionary to South Africa, while his own son, also named **Andrew**, was to become a well-known pioneer of the Religious Revival.^[17] John Murray had his first charge at Aberdeen in the Trinity Chapel of Ease, and later was to carry out (in 1820) the marriage ceremony of his sister's eldest stepson, **Peter** Robertson, a schoolteacher, and the latter's bride **Isabella Giles**. The couple were married from home, in the bride's parents' Aberdeen house, as was then customary. The witnesses were Robert, the bridegroom's youngest brother, and **James Giles**, the bride's brother, an up-and-coming artist of whom we shall have more to say later.

Elizabeth and James were married on 2 June 1807 at New Deer,^[18] and the family grew rapidly again, with at least ten more children being born.^[19] The first was **John** (b. 22 November 1809), named probably after Elizabeth's brother. This child is not heard of later, so presumably died young. In all, the children of whom we have records were:^[20]

- i. **John Robertson**, b. 22 November 1809 at Stuartfield
- ii. **Andrew Robertson**, b. 25 November 1814 at Stuartfield

- iii. **George Russel Robertson**, b. 24 August 1816 at Stuartfield
- iv. **Joseph Gibb Robertson**, b. 31 December 1817 at Stuartfield
- v. **Catherine R. Robertson**, b. 28 September 1819 at Stuartfield
- vi. **Isabella Robertson**, b. 28 March 1821 at Stuartfield
- vii. **Margaret Murray Robertson**, b. 22 August 1823 at Stuartfield
- viii. **William Wilcox Robertson**, b. 11 April 1825 at Stuartfield
- ix. **Mary Robertson**, b. 7 January 1827 at Stuartfield
- x. **Jane Robertson**, b. 14 January 1830 at Stuartfield

It must have been a home full of life and activity, albeit with a strict code of discipline. It was said that James Robertson was an unemotional, academically demanding parent.^[21] Everyday life in the manse followed a regular pattern, shaped by the time of day, the days of the week, the rhythm of the years and, of course, the reading of the Bible. The succession of new babies was not only a testimony to the Lord's will but a sure sign of His blessing upon the marriage. Although the children had to submit without question to parental as well as to divine commandments, they nevertheless enjoyed the advantage of a good upbringing and education; and whatever was needful beyond the elementary school syllabus was provided, as one might expect, by the parents. For reading material, the Bible took pride of place, with memory training being practised with the aid of the Shorter Catechism and the Psalms. If a son were sufficiently talented, he would compete, at the early age of 14 or 15, for a bursary at one or other of the two Aberdeen universities. That proved sufficient to ensure a very modest standard of living for those rural students, who could also bring a sack of oatmeal from home to sustain them through the winter and spring terms. Summers were spent at home, with the young lads helping in the fields.

We should not imagine that the daily life of these students was in any way romantic. The demands on them were great and their physical condition was often quite poor. If we visit King's College today, splendidly and picturesquely situated in Old Aberdeen, with its narrow, cobbled streets and small granite houses almost unchanged over two centuries, we can readily imagine the boys who walked there, pale and hollow-cheeked, each wrapped in his tattered scarlet gown — small protection from the cutting east wind. Bent over their books for half a year at a time, and subsisting largely on potatoes and porridge, those youngsters faced a severe challenge. It is all the more amazing how strong was the desire for academic education, and how great the drive to achieve well in the bursary competition. Many great Scotsmen followed that path, sons of small tenant farmers or children of the manse. Many of them succumbed to illness and did not survive into adulthood.^[22]

James's well-respected ministry at Stuartfield extended over three decades. But in the early 1830s the family had to stand a severe blow. Elizabeth died in her mid-forties, although the records unfortunately give us no clue as to the cause of death — whether a pregnancy, an acute illness, debility, overwork, or that

scourge of the time, tuberculosis, we shall never know. Such early maternal deaths were commonplace and accepted as the divine will. But the family would have been comforted by their conviction that Elizabeth was now resting in peace with her Lord. Had she not always been a deeply pious woman who knew that God would care for her children?

James had no other choice but to look for a new wife once more. He could hardly care for his large brood in addition to performing his ministerial duties. Family papers indicate that he remarried within the same year, and recent researches have just brought to light that his was not only a rumour, but a fact. The third wife's name was Jane Mason. Pity there are no other traces of her than the entry in the old family bible of her death at the age of 87 on 10 March 1881. This bible is still in the possession of Joseph Gibb's descendants, and a note on the front page tells us that James Robertson started to read from it at worship in November 1832. [23]

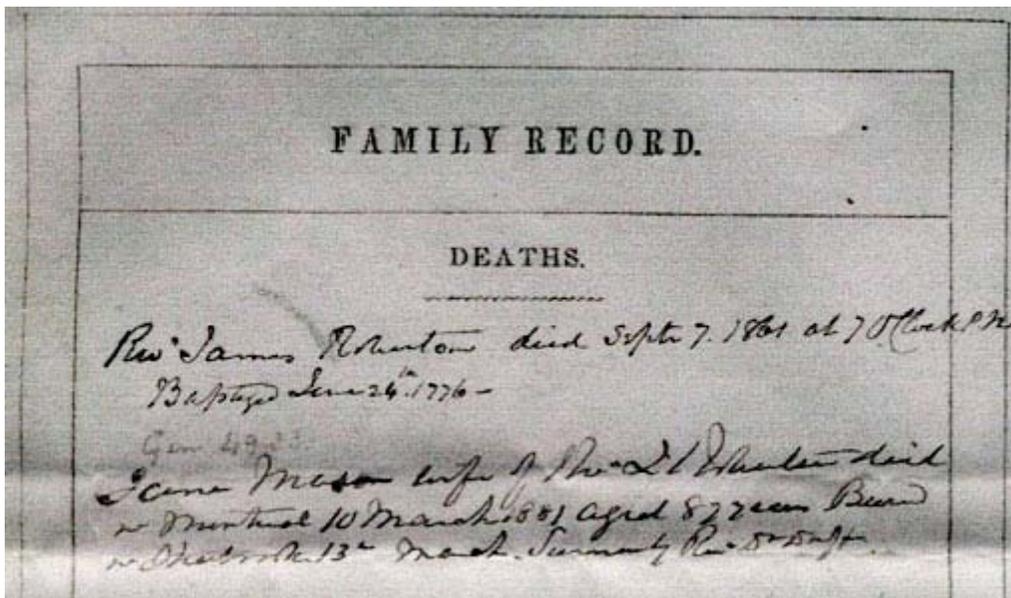


Fig. 7: James Robertson and his third wife recorded in family bible

In addition to these strokes of fate, it happened that the family was now in a fairly precarious financial situation. [24] How could such a large brood be adequately fed and clothed? The members of James's congregation were themselves suffering from an economic depression in the 1830s: the soil gave poor yields, and cattle-plague was already a scourge. Weaving was very time-consuming and by now brought little profit. The decision to emigrate was probably made without great heart-searching, given the family's plight. Was not America the land of boundless promise for those sufficiently brave and enterprising? New church communities were being formed there, and ministers were urgently needed for the various denominations.

The conclusion must have been quickly made, since it was in the year of Elizabeth's death (1832) that the family embarked at Greenock, the main

Scottish emigration port, and sailed to North America. In his pocket James carried a written attestation from the Aberdeen Congregationalists, dated 7 August 1832, certifying to his ordination at Stuartfield in 1802. On their disembarkation, the family travelled to Derby in the state of Vermont, and there James resumed his pastoral work for the next four years. Then he accepted a call from a Congregational church across the Canadian border, at Sherbrooke in the province of Quebec.^[25] At that time Sherbrooke was a small, newly-settled community with a predominantly Scottish population, one of the so-called *Eastern Townships* which had then just begun to develop.^[26] It lies not far from the U.S. border and is roughly equidistant from Montreal and Quebec. The surrounding area was populated largely by French immigrants. Being a Crown Colony, Canada welcomed enterprising emigrants from Britain, and for many of the poorest in Scotland emigration offered a realistic chance of obtaining farmland of their own — without being subject to demands of a local laird or landowner — as well as the prospect of a better life for future generations. Of course many of the newcomers failed and adventurers came also. Yet they almost all were needed.

The adult children from James' first marriage with Agnes Crab remained behind in Scotland. Peter Robertson had by this time become a teacher in Aberdeen, married long-since to Isabella Giles and already blessed with children of his own. We will get back to him in a later chapter.

The small Congregational parish in Stuartfield survived until 1900, when the church was closed because of declining membership. With typical Scottish pragmatism, a local shopkeeper converted it into a bakery. Later it completely burned down, and only an old photograph, a watercolour picture by Carlotta Burnett Stuart, and a sketch in a newspaper give some idea of how the street may once have looked with the old church and manse.^[27] The manse still stands and is a private residence. Externally it is unchanged, but internally it has been altered radically. Possibly there may have been a churchyard at one time, but there is no record of it. It presumably has been built over.^[28]

We shall now follow the Canadian Robertsons for a time on their journey through life. Apart from James Robertson, they are not direct ancestors of my great-grandmother, Alice Thiele Smith, but their story is of considerable interest in itself.

Growing and thriving in a foreign land

How much confidence and inner strength the family must have had to leave the old homeland and to re-establish themselves twice within so short a time! In relation to their modesty of demands, it was an exceptional effort, and each member of the Robertson family had to make its contribution. In addition to their natural talents, finally the difficult life in Scotland and the efforts to re-launch in

the new homeland, helped several of the children develop into remarkably capable, industrious and successful members of society. It is hard to understand how their father made it possible for those of his children who wished it, including the daughters, to attend college or university! Beneath the severe Calvinistic faith we can recognise a great deal of open-mindedness. However, does this point not mean also, if this striving for education and knowledge had to do with the fact, that it was a privilege to gain it? Teaching material was comparatively expensive and in short supply in those days. There was no electric light by which to read at night at one's discretion. Let us imagine such a flock of children crowded into a sparsely-heated room, poorly lit by a candle or paraffin lamp. Overstraining their eyes as they attached themselves to Greek or Roman texts or Sciences, and discussed them eagerly. Surely it was a rule that the domestic duties must come first before indulging oneself with the reading of books! The fact that the family included children of every age was surely helpful: the elder ones had to take on responsibilities from the beginning, and the juniors learned from their older siblings.

James Robertson was to live in Sherbrooke for another twenty-five years and carried out his ministerial duties for nearly two more decades. The *Sherbrooke Daily Record* of 16 January 1926 states:

... He held services regularly in Sherbrooke and Lennoxville, and also conducted a bible class on Sunday evenings. The church commenced its first services in a schoolhouse on the site now occupied by the Quebec Central Railway offices. In 1838, the first church was built where St. Andrew's Church now stands. Five years before Mr. Robertson concluded his ministry, that is in 1855, the present building occupied by the congregation was erected. It is interesting to know that this is the oldest church building in use in the city....^[29]

He was popular and revered, being customarily known as *Father Robertson*.^[30] Nothing at all is recorded of his third wife or of how long she may have lived, since there is no mention whatsoever in his children's writings of such a woman. We know that James spent the last years of his life living with his son, Joseph Gibb Robertson. His daughter Margaret stayed there also, no doubt looking after the two single men.^[31] James died there at the age of 85 in the presence of his sons Andrew (d. 1880) and George Russel (d. 1871) on 7 September 1861, and was buried three days later at Sherbrooke.

It would go beyond the scope of this narrative were we to attempt to provide detailed biographies of all his descendant here, but the most important details nevertheless should be revealed.

There were four boys who had emigrated with their father: the sons Andrew, George, Joseph Gibb (d. 1899), and William Wilcox (also d. 1899), all of whom besides Joseph studied in Vermont and later became respected lawyers in

Montreal.^[32] The barrister Andrew was offered the post of a judge several times, but refused because of his poor eyesight.^[33] William Wilcox was apparently something of a political agitator also. Joseph Gibb, the third of the brothers, warrants a more extended reference. In *The Scot in British North America from 1880*, we find the following entry:

... The Hon. Joseph Gibb Robertson, who has been Provincial Treasurer under several Administrations, was born at Stuartfield, Aberdeenshire, on New Year's Day, 1820.^[34] His father was a Congregational minister for thirty years in that place, and for a quarter of a century at Sherbrooke, in Quebec. In 1832, the mother having died, father and son removed to Canada, where the latter received his educational training. In youth, Mr. Robertson was engaged in farming, but subsequently turned his attention to mercantile pursuits at Sherbrooke, and also, for a brief period, at Chicago, as agent for the home establishment. He retired from business some years since. He has always been an active and public spirited worker in the Eastern Townships, and has served for eighteen years as Mayor of the town. He had previously been Secretary-Treasurer of the county from 1847 to 1853. In other capacities, Mr. Robertson has been of essential utility, having presided over insurance, railway, and agricultural corporations. He was first elected to the Provincial Assembly from Sherbrooke at Confederation, and has ever since held his seat there, being usually elected by acclamation. In 1869 he entered Mr. Chauveau's Cabinet, and has also served in the Ouimet, De Boucherville, and Chapleau Administrations. On the last occasion, there was a contest; but Mr. Robertson triumphed by a majority of over six hundred and fifty. He is chiefly known in connection with the finances of the Province, which he has successfully administered for some years. A journalist has remarked: "It is no easy matter to compass the Treasurer on a matter of business; he is a shrewd, cool-headed Scotchman, who will not be readily led into a trap, as many a man who has had his eye upon the 'soft thing' supposed to be at the disposition of Ministers of the Crown, and has attempted to trade upon conjectural weakness, will readily and painfully recollect." Mr. Robertson is a Conservative, respected by all parties for his sterling integrity and business talents. It may be added, that he adheres to the Church his father served so long, and is a staunch advocate of the temperance cause...^[35]

And this may be supplemented by a short note from *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*:

... Mr. Robertson was a delegate to England on public business in 1874. Since he entered public life he has represented Sherbrooke, and is a Liberal-Conservative.^[36]

In 1870, already an old and seemingly confirmed bachelor, he married the daughter of his business partner, **Mary Jane Woodward** (b. 1842, d. 1927),

with whom he had four sons and two daughters.^[37]

There is an family anecdote explaining why he married so late in life:

... when he was a young man someone asked him when would he think about getting married. Joseph pointed to the infant daughter of his business partner and said that he'd have to wait till she grew up so he could marry her. He did.^[38]

He made an official journey to England in order to negotiate on behalf of Quebec Province for a loan of over four million dollars. His sister **Margaret** accompanied him on the voyage and so renewed acquaintance with her old homeland at the age of 41.^[39] After 1887 we unfortunately lose track of Joseph^[40] and the other brothers. Although apparently all were very capable persons of their day, their achievements seem to be largely unrecorded. However, we do know that Andrew, who seems to have remained unmarried, declined the offer of a post in the judiciary but became governor of McGill College in Montreal,^[41] while George married a woman named Harriet Smith and seems to have been a teacher at Stanstead Seminary. And finally, William founded the law firm of Robertson, Fleet, & Falconer.

As we have already indicated, James also provided his daughters with a good education by the standards of the day. That was remarkable at a time when one needed all hands to do the daily work. And for girls it was usually most worth striving for a marriage, which would provide for them materially for their whole lives. Of the five daughters born to James and Elizabeth, only four are mentioned later. Two of them became exceptional women: Margaret Murray, and her younger sister Mary — born or baptized 7 January 1827 as a "Christmas box" for her father — who "loved his daughter dearly."^[42] Margaret had been nine when the family emigrated, and despite her youth must have already seen and experienced a great deal. When the family settled at Sherbrooke, she was thirteen years old, an age at which a girl then could take on many domestic responsibilities. Though the family records fail to mention the eldest sister Catherine, research confirms that she became the wife of the Rev. David Gibb, son of the Rev. Joseph Gibb, after whom their brother Joseph Gibb Robertson had been named.^[43] Joseph Gibb had emigrated from Scotland three years earlier than the Robertson family, having been the Congregational minister at Banff from 1809 to 1829. He and James seem to have been on very friendly terms with one another.^[44]

Another daughter, Isabella, married a Mr. Fleet, and their son, Charles Fleet, became a member of the Montreal Bar.^[45] Almost all the Robertson children appear to have been educated at home up to college-entrance standards. The young Mary went to South Hadley in 1846 and attended the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary there (today Mount Holyoke Ladies' College), where she made an immediate impression both by her intellectual ability, especially in

Mathematics, and by the calm self-confidence which she displayed. She did the entrance tests in grand style, came first in her school year, and graduated in 1847 at the age of twenty, a year earlier than usual.^[46] Mount Holyoke was the most respected ladies' seminary in the U.S.A. at that time. Margaret attended the same college, although without graduating and only for one session, from 1847 to 1848, one of her classmates being the American poet, Emily Dickinson. Possibly domestic duties kept her at home. Her youngest sister Jane, who died in 1850, was ill and needed nursing care. The Principal of the seminary was the highly-respected Mary Lyons, a well-known and remarkable personality. Being of the view that young ladies should not simply be trained to be good housewives and mothers, she insisted that her students be educated in the classics, natural sciences and philosophy, while also being trained in physical exercise and sport, for she recognised the importance of those activities for women. She must have stimulated many a latent talent in her pupils, and may well have played a part in promoting Margaret's desire to write.^[47]

Mary Lyons' ideals did not go unchallenged. Conservative groups maintained that a woman's place should be by her husband's side and that those of the female sex who sought to follow a profession were to be viewed with mistrust: "Why spoil a good mother to make an ordinary grammarian?"^[48] Mary and Margaret Robertson both became teachers at Sherbrooke Ladies' Academy, and Mary eventually became headmistress there. On Mary Lyons' death in 1849, our Mary Robertson was offered that prestigious post — but declined to accept it.^[49] Other matters were more pressing: the young, newly-minted minister Donald (or Daniel) Gordon (1822-1911) met and wooed her passionately. The son of an impoverished Scottish family from the Blair Atholl region, Donald had studied divinity in Aberdeen at the time of the 1843 Disruption and immediately pledged his loyalty to the newly-formed Free Church of Scotland, giving up the promise of a scholarship and completing his studies under the auspices of the new church. Donald was a Calvinist of the old school, interpreting his faith rigidly and displaying a decided tendency towards gloom and pessimism. Perhaps because of those features, the Free Church decided to send him to Canada as a missionary to a remote, newly-colonized area of Canada.^[50] Mary, a pretty girl with expressive brown eyes, was uncertain whether to join him in that venture but gave way to her father's urging. Old James judged a woman to be more useful in God's service in the role of a minister's partner than as the headmistress of a college.^[51] A decisive event occurred in 1850 when the youngest sister of the family, Jennie (Jane), died of tuberculosis at the age of 20 years. That disease had raged world-wide during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with devastating effects. Only after the Second World War, when nutrition, hygiene and effective medicinal treatment became available, was the spread of tuberculosis stemmed and finally eradicated. Jennie's death must have been a most poignant experience for her sisters. Mary often mentions her, and Margaret

was later to memorialise her in many novels.

Life in the new Homeland



Fig. 8: Mary Robertson and Donald Gordon

While Margaret, a committed but not wholly enthusiastic schoolmistress, continued teaching in Sherbrooke, Mary married her Donald in 1851 in her father's house. For almost forty years she was to prove a loyal, faithful and self-sacrificing wife. Her husband's first parish was Lingwick, not far from the village of Sherbrooke. There they spent the first four years of their marriage, and according to her husband's report, these must have been happy years, their eldest son, **James Robertson Gordon**, being born then. In 1855 Donald was sent to Glengarry, then known as the "Indian Land," a large tract of territory divided into four parishes. The population was mainly of Scottish descent and the language Gaelic. This was to prove a hard task for both the missionary and his wife. A church, a manse and a school: all had to be built. The women

of the community, with Mary at their head, worked together industriously, until finally the new church was built and consecrated. Many of the women understood English only with great difficulty, and so Mary herself had to learn their Gaelic tongue — with the help of a Gaelic bible! That opened her sisters' hearts. And of course she also gave Bible Class lessons to the children and advised the women on the more delicate problems associated with the female sex. Her warm-heartedness and her natural talents were to prove invaluable.^[52] The son, Charles Gordon, was later to describe in his memoirs, *Postscript to Adventure*, how hard her life had been and how she had been "a real man ... riding the pony, a child in front of her on the saddle, another on the way." Her children loved her dearly and she was to be long remembered in those communities where she had laboured.^[53] The Gordons spent eighteen years in that bleak region and contributed much to its gradual development into a more prosperous community. Eight more children were born to them there, of whom two sons died young. The others all grew up to quite capable people.

The church situation in Canada was to follow a course similar to that in Scotland,

a disruption occurring in 1844, with the subsequent creation of a Free Church. Donald was in any case too much a typical Free Church minister to be able to feel comfortable with what was, for him, too “moderate” a Presbyterian church, whose relatively liberal views did not accord with his own darkly-Calvinist attitude. And he probably found many like minds amongst the Highland emigrants from those remote parts of Scotland where the Free Church had prospered. After much wrangling between the supporters of the old and the new denominations in Glengarry, a Free Church congregation finally came into being, but was denied access to the existing church building. Another church therefore had to be erected and finally, in 1864, the Gordon Free Church was inaugurated and consecrated.^[54] It is amazing how enthusiastically the colonists gave of their time and labour — in addition to their daily work — in order to make adequate provision for their spiritual salvation.

In 1872 Donald moved to Zorra,^[55] a small congregation near Harrington, about 100 miles west of Toronto, where he worked as a minister until his retirement. Although he and his wife only reluctantly left Glengarry, the change was not unfavourable for the family since the elder children, who had outgrown primary-school classes, were now nearer to college education. A further nineteen years together were left to the couple. All their children were successful: the eldest, James Robertson, became an attorney; **John Stewart** became a chemist and journalist; and **Daniel Gilbert** a doctor. As the only son following in the footsteps of his father, Charles William Gordon became a minister and his story will follow later. The daughter, **Helen**, graduated in 1888, married and died early in 1895, leaving a little girl. Of the others, **Andrew R.** Gordon became Professor and **Henry F.** Gordon a chemist.^[56]

Once the children no longer required their mother’s care, Mary gave up her teaching activities in the parish and devoted her time completely to work for women. She was called by the Presbytery to be president of the newly-founded *Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society*, a task in which she became relentlessly engaged. That meant much travelling on behalf of the Mission and countless lectures across a country in which many of the new inhabitants had little regard for their own spiritual welfare and abandoned themselves to lives of profligacy. Sadly we possess no record made by Mary herself.^[57]

In April 1890, Mary went to Hamilton, Ontario, to report there on the plans for the forthcoming year. Weak from an attack of flu, she was determined to deliver her lecture. She suffered a relapse, however, and hastened to one of her sons in Toronto, where the illness forced her into sickbed. Her husband and the other children were called immediately but the end came quickly. Mary bore her suffering with humble submission to God’s will and in her last hour, asking to be lifted up, addressed everyone individually and quoted to each a suitable passage from the Bible. Her final words were, “Everything for Christ!” Then Donald held

her hand until she died in peace. Her epitaph comes from the Book of Revelation, 14, 12-14: [\[58\]](#)

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

She had led a fulfilled life, in harmony with herself and her faith. Her husband had certainly not been a straightforward or easy companion for her. In his eyes the role of wife was rigorously defined, and obedience towards God's laws an unquestioned duty. It is perhaps hard today to appreciate how strong this faith was: not only acting as a comfort to Mary, offering a means of coping with the hardships of her earthly life, but also operating as a spur for her tireless work to the glory of God. Guilford, in her *Biographical Sketch* of Mary R. Gordon, includes some lines from a letter written to her by Donald Gordon in which he gives sincere and moving expression to his sense of personal loss. [\[59\]](#) And Mary's son, Charles William, wrote of her in his memoirs with deep warmth and affection, while referring comparatively briefly to his father, though by no means without due respect. [\[60\]](#)

Donald Gordon survived his wife for many more years. We hear about him once more, when he officiated at the marriage ceremony of his son Charles, torturing the young couple by delivering a tedious and much-too-lengthy sermon. [\[61\]](#) There still exists a long letter by him to his son Andrew, written in 1898 from Bridge of Allan during a visit to Scotland, in which he records his impressions of life in the Scottish homeland, mentions relatives, and enquires after Andrew's family. He speaks of his own health problems — his asthma for instance — and his need for a walking-stick. Apparently, however, he was able to talk, to eat, to drink, and could still enjoy walking through the beautiful forests, with the restorative aid of a little *Aqua Vita* afterwards. After several pages of sermonising, Donald finally reached the nub: his purse was almost always empty and the coins seemed to disappear with enormous rapidity. He asks that Andrew talk about this to Donald's son, Gilbert, who would surely have some funds on hand! To facilitate the transfer he adds a postal address in Edinburgh to which Gilbert was to send the "necessary" without any delay. [\[62\]](#) After this we rather lose track of Donald, who died in 1911, surviving his wife by more than 20 years. [\[63\]](#)

"Observe, Think, Reason" [\[64\]](#)



Fig. 9: Margaret M. Robertson,
1862

“Observe, think, reason”: these rules form the quintessence of Margaret M. Robertson’s educational philosophy. Margaret was nine years old when the family emigrated from Scotland, and an interesting and extraordinarily varied life was to lie ahead of her. As mentioned already, she attended the Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, entering a year later than her sister Mary and leaving in 1848 without completing the final examinations, to return home to Sherbrooke. She remained unmarried either by choice or from lack of a suitable husband, living with her father and Joseph at Sherbrooke — no doubt her presence being very convenient for the two men. After her father’s death, she lived with Joseph until his marriage in 1870, after which she stayed in Montreal, where Andrew, George and William were already respected lawyers.^[65] There she was living together with a widow Sara Robertson, as the

1871 Montreal census states. The entry says that Sara was seventy-six years of age, Presbyterian Congregationalist, and also born in Scotland; and she has been called “more than likely a relative.”^[66]

Margaret surely was an ideal representative of Mary Lyons’ philosophy: always conscientious, always busy. Idleness was regarded as sinful. Margaret had a weak physical constitution. And she was near-sighted and wore glasses — as her photograph illustrates. Afraid to be idle for a moment, she knitted obsessively and was never to be seen without her needles moving restlessly in her hands.^[67] She was an excellent teacher but kept her distance from the children.

Around 1864 Margaret began to write her first stories, although the first work that we know of is an essay concerning education — “An Essay on Common School Education — Wisdom is the Principal Thing” — for which she won a prize.^[68] Then she began to write a variety of moralising novels for Sunday school children.^[69] The Religious Tract Society was enthusiastic! Although her pieces were highly edifying, Margaret dealt openly with the problems of daily life: poverty, lack of faith, doubt in God’s justice, emigration, homesickness, illness, alcoholism, and child abuse. Her characters overcome their trials through reflection, industry, and prayer — and ultimately by accepting that their individual destinies were the will of God. Her writings are nevertheless a mirror of the conditions of life in which she lived, when it was comforting to see God’s hand at work in everything. Yet she rarely refers to political matters or to the

major events and controversies of the day — slavery, the American Civil War, the “Fenian Raid” (a revolt of Irish immigrants to America) or the difficult economic situation in Canada around that time.^[70]

Margaret’s first full-length book, *Christie Redfern’s Trouble*, was published in 1866. Its heroine, Christie, might well have been the young author herself: thin, inconspicuous, and near-sighted. According to her obituary, the novel is autobiographical, although it is not known whether Margaret ever served as a nurse in any other family than her own.^[71] *Christie* was such a success that Margaret could end her teaching work immediately and devote herself completely to writing. Over a span of more than twenty years she published fifteen novels, most of which were highly successful throughout the English-speaking world.^[72] For children, there was little reading material available apart from the Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Most novels were considered too worldly — inappropriate nourishment for impressionable young people. Even reading the works of Scott or Burns on the Sabbath was regarded as frivolous or even sinful.

Within her novels, Margaret made use of people, events and places known to her. She had her own experience of life and was aware of the relatively rich lives enjoyed by her sister Mary and her brothers in Glengarry.^[73] The pain and hardship of emigration is a topic she describes repeatedly. Many of her novels deal with events which she herself had known: a mother may have died in the far-away homeland or a sister may die of tuberculosis. She describes the deathbed scenes with tear-jerking poignancy and they seem always be a replay as it were of the death of Jenny, her beloved young sister. It is striking also how often a lame child has a role to play in her work — perhaps an indication of some hereditary illness?^[74] Some of these “poor crippled children” die in submission to God’s will; others recover at least partially. Several stories are set in both Scotland and Canada, while four concern Scotland alone. To highlight social differences, but to show natural cordiality and an attachment to her homeland too, Margaret uses differences in her dialogue, the poorer folk talking in Scottish dialect, while the upper classes use the cultivated English tongue.^[75]

Two books are of particular interest, since they give a fairly accurate account of the Robertson family’s life in Scotland and of their emigration. One is *Allison Bain* — *by a Way she knew not*, a novel located in Stuartfield. Though the name of places and people are changed, whoever has visited that village will immediately recognise in “Nethermuir” the topography of Stuartfield and its surroundings, while the minister’s family, named “Hume,” is readily identified with the Robertsons. The father is a Dissenter, which means a Congregationalist like James Robertson, and the church is erected by the newly-established congregation. Even the street name “Windhill,” where the manse stood, corresponds to Stuartfield. It is also one of the few novels in which Margaret shows a (very restrained) sense of humour. *Allison Bain*, however, inevitably

gains her rightful husband and her inner peace only through almost masochistic self-sacrifice and selfless devotion to God's will.

The second book, which reveals more information about the Robertson family, is *The Bairns; or, Janet's Love and Service*. It describes the emigration of a large ministerial family, the Elliots, after the mother's untimely death. Margaret recapitulates their journey first to the United States and then on to Canada. We can see how the children grew up, with one sister again dying, and how they married and established their personal lives. In the first section of the novel it is Janet, the good spirit of the household, who sets the moral tone, although she herself suffers from homesickness and pines for her son left behind in Scotland. But Janet finds belated fulfilment in marrying a widower.^[76] A variety of characters are on display: some of the children grow up to be successful from the beginning; others follow a more circuitous path before achieving their goals. There is a love affair, but as this concerns an elder brother and his beautiful but rather childish wife, his sisters have to endure it silently. The eldest sister, Graeme, is another tirelessly good spirit in the family, who at the very end finds her reward in a husband worthy of her.

The figure of an older aunt or of a female domestic servant appears frequently, often acting as the pivotal character who determines the family's welfare. Self-sacrifice in the face of interpersonal tensions is always an underlying theme in the novels, probably reflecting unresolved ambivalence within the real Robertson family. We still do not know whether Margaret's father actually married for a third time, as is implied in the family papers, or whether some female relative accompanied James to America. Certainly no mention is ever made of a stepmother, and so we are left in doubt.

Two more novels deal with Scotland. One of them, *The Twa Miss Dawsons*, is only of interest insofar as it is set in a coastal Aberdeenshire village. The central figures are an orphaned aunt and her similarly orphaned niece who both had, or rather have, a love affair with a whaling man. The aunt's brother would consent to her engagement subject only to setting her lover a final perilous trip, from which he did not return. The sister submitted to her fate, remained single, and (as supposed) loyal to her brother. The younger of the Miss Dawsons also believes her fiancé to have been lost at sea, steadfastly resisting offers of marriage from others before Providence finally unites the two lovers. Faithfulness rewards the price! The book is exceptional in that it does not deal, as do all the others, with the fortunes of ministers and emigrant families, but displays the Dawsons as a quite well-to-do family. The other Scottish novel, *The Orphans of Glen Elder*, is again a very moral tale. Again there figures a lame child, Archie, who is expected at first to die and then is healed — yet another *poor cripple!*

It may be noteworthy that with the exception of *The Bairns*, Margaret had written all her Scotland-based novels after she had accompanied her brother in 1874 on

his trip as a delegate of the Canadian government. We can infer that visiting her native village reinforced her recollections.

The heroines of Margaret's novels are mostly young girls or women always shouldering great responsibilities: some have to care for their siblings and do the housekeeping; others even run a farm. There is seldom a figure in whom they can confide or from whom they can seek useful advice. Fathers are either dead or else are weak men, largely indifferent to the heroine's problems yet expecting absolute obedience to their personal whims. The girls have to make endless sacrifices and rarely experience any appreciation. The greater their personal sacrifice, however, the deeper grows their personal faith; and by the end of the story they have become suitably humble, fully devoted to God, and in some instances about to become the wife of a suitably-earnest young man. It is disconcerting to find that Margaret displays not the slightest urge to promote the emancipation of women, despite being herself an independent female who hardly fit the common stereotypes of her time. How far her father or brothers approved of her writing was never recorded.

In Margaret's novels, mothers do not correspond to the traditional pattern. If the children are not already orphans, the mother is often sickly or even crushed by grief, as illustrated in *Shenac's Work at Home*, the story of a Scottish family which emigrates to Canada and undergoes a long sequence of ordeals. After the father's death and the burning of their farmhouse, all the burdens fall on the shoulders of young Shenac (the Gaelic form of Janet), who has no more than moral support from her twin brother, Hamish, who is yet another physically-disabled son and who dies at the end of the story. Shenac's younger siblings, the "little ones," never lack anything, while the brothers are generally less than helpful to Shenac. Some go abroad, either to study or to embark on the search for fame and fortune. They are never the backbone of the family; and only when their sister has finally overcome all her adversities do the sons return home, expecting to assume their dominant role as masters of the home and to find themselves suitable wives. And while Shenac herself is now free to marry, she sets herself the curious condition that she must first go to school in order to become a wife worthy of her future minister-husband!^[77]

Assessing her work, we have of course to recognise that Margaret wrote within the cultural context of her age, that her books were aimed at children at Sunday School or Bible Class, so that her protagonists are themselves children or adolescents. They encounter no real physical or moral dangers; the problems they meet are genuine enough, but centre upon the struggle to face the pressures of ill health, poverty, and exhaustion through overwork. As an author, Margaret drew upon her own experiences as a teacher and as a daughter of the manse. She herself had lacked the luxury of a playful childhood, so that the simple pleasures of growing up are lacking. A nostalgic longing for Scotland is a

frequent element in her stories: her characters have to leave their homeland, school and friends; in short, everything. That loss has to be endured at all times with stolid resignation.

Margaret often addresses her readers in a rather maternal, "Now, my dear children" fashion. If a topic threatens to become too delicate or technical, she simply remarks: "We need not go into all the details now as that would take us too far from our theme" — and so she succeeds, more or less elegantly, in avoiding issues that might take her away from familiar territory.

Her books nevertheless became a great success in both the U.S.A. and Canada, as well as in Great Britain. Many went through several editions, and there would have been few Sunday Schools in which they were not presented as prizes. Margaret wrote not to become rich or famous, but purely from the pleasure she derived from writing. And perhaps in order to compensate for that, she felt bound to adopt an edifying style, thus meeting precisely the prevailing tastes of that mid-Victorian era.^[78] In some ways it is tragic that she did not become widely known as a writer in literary circles, and as long as she still lived in Joseph's house was recorded anonymously in *Lovell's Directory of Addresses* for Montreal among "others of the household."^[79] In the Montreal census of 1871, moreover, Margaret was listed as having "no occupation!"^[80]

Her final book appears to have been *Eunice, a Story of Domestic Life*, published in 1887, and once more the novel contains intense autobiographical reminiscences. One sister, Fidelia, gives up her college education in New England to nurse a younger sister, Eunice, who suffers very obviously from consumption and dies a heartbreaking death. There is mention of a "great headmistress," who can readily be identified with Mary Lyons. Typically, the serious-minded young heroine suffers numerous trials and tribulations, even though all around there is a crowd of young people quite innocently enjoying life. Fidelia (her name is significant) naturally receives her reward in due course — a white knight in the shape of a serious young man who henceforth will accompany her through life and guide her always in the paths of rectitude!

Margaret spent her last years among a large circle of relatives at Montreal, in an old-fashioned homestead set within park-like surroundings.^[81] She wrote no more, perhaps because her creative vein was finally exhausted. She had never been very strong and no doubt suffered from ill-health as old age advanced. She died on St. Valentine's Day, 14 February 1897. For a long time she was almost completely forgotten, but fortunately such early women writers are being studied again in Canada.^[82] *Shenac's Work at Home* was reprinted in 1993 with a detailed preface by Gwendolyn Guth.

The Glengarry Man

Other descendants of James Robertson

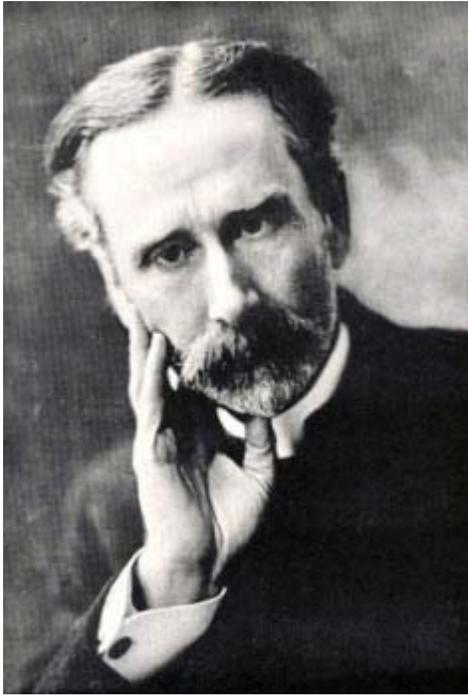


Fig. 10: Charles Gordon, 1910

distinguished themselves in public life, amongst them his grandson, Charles William Gordon, the fourth son of Donald's and Mary's surviving children and the only one who followed in the footsteps of his father to become a minister.^[83] Charles was born on 13 September 1860 in Glengarry, and he seems to have had a promising youth, being very closely attached to his mother, as the many tributes to her in his novels testify. When Charles was just four years old his father, a staunch Free Church minister from the early days of the Disruption, was deprived of his church building in Glengarry. Perhaps the gloominess, which Charles describes as part of his father's temperament, was in some degree caused by that humiliating event.

Charles attended school in Glengarry and later in Zorra, before proceeding to study at Toronto University from 1880. Along with his brother, Gilbert, he went to Edinburgh to pursue theological studies, and his diary records his meeting there with numerous theologians and professors, together with a good account of Edinburgh's social life at that time. Along with three friends, Charles and Gilbert set off upon a bicycle tour of Europe, the adventures of the "Quintet" (as they styled themselves) being amusingly recounted in Charles' diary.

Though Charles visited numerous relatives in Scotland, they seem all to have been on his father's side, no mention being made of the cousins descended from his uncle, Peter Robertson, among whom was that remarkable pioneer of Biblical Criticism, **William Robertson Smith**. But Charles was certainly aware of the relationship, since he refers to it in his autobiography, *Postscript to Adventure*. Moreover, there exists in the William Robertson Smith Collection of the University Library at King's College, Aberdeen, a copy of a church leaflet written by Charles Gordon.

Charles' first call to the ministry was to Banff, Alberta, in 1890, a short time after his mother's death. Banff was a town largely populated at the time by lumberjacks and miners — men living and working far away from their families. Charles found ample scope for mission work within a decidedly tough and uncultured social environment, and many of his experiences were later to be incorporated within his novels.

Charles Gordon's career as a writer began with short stories written for the *Westminster Magazine* under the pseudonym **Ralph Cannor**, the surname being

an abbreviation of the phrase "Canada North." In consequence of a badly-transcribed telegram, however, the name Ralph Connor became — and thereafter remained — Ralph Connor. His first novel, the famous *Black Rock*, heralded a flood of further fictional work, and Charles' literary success soon became prodigious. Two of his novels, *Black Rock* and *The Sky Pilot*, were even translated into German, while in 1921 there appeared a silent film based on *The Sky Pilot*, although the film's director took considerable liberties, introducing a love story with a conventional happy ending, and replacing the novel's sombre conclusion with the sky pilot's death and his girlfriend's paralysis in a riding-accident. In the book, Connor's own "happy ending" was the transformation of a wild, barely-civilized community into a lively and earnest church congregation.

In 1884 Charles became minister of St. Stephen's Broadway Church at Winnipeg, remaining there until his retirement in 1924. It was there also, towards the end of the nineteenth century, that he met his future wife, **Helen King**, daughter of John M. King, Principal of Manitoba College, after whose death in 1899^[84] the couple married at Toronto, the ceremony being conducted by old Donald Gordon, whose interminable sermons must, as always, have proved painful for bride and groom alike. Charles' and Helen's first child, **John King Gordon**, was born in 1900, to be followed by six daughters. According to the account in *Postscript to Adventure*, the marriage was a happy one, both husband and wife being deeply in love with one another.

Charles Gordon became a friend of Lord and Lady Aberdeen during their residence in Canada, when Lord Aberdeen was Governor-General. They often visited him in Banff, Alberta, and afterwards they all met several times in Scotland. In 1913 Charles was commissioned by the General Assembly to take part in the Pan-Presbyterian Council at Aberdeen. His wife Helen accompanied him. After the meeting had ended the couple holidayed with the Aberdeens at the House of Cromar, and the two families maintained contact by letter for many years thereafter.^[85]

During the first World War, Charles Gordon acted for some time as an army chaplain in England and France, but returned to Canada to give lectures on his war experiences and to meet with figures such as President Woodrow Wilson of the U.S.A., whom he urged to abandon neutrality and join the Allied cause. Charles' experiences on the battlefield were to make him a dedicated supporter of the League of Nations after the war, and he was outspoken in expressing his belief that the churches ought to play a greater role in regard to issues of war and peace.

From 1922 onwards, Charles directed his time and effort in promoting union among the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist churches. As a successful writer, he was by now a wealthy man, but subsequently lost most of his capital through the stock-market collapse of 1927. Almost all that remained to him was

the little island of Birken Craig in the Lake of the Woods, Northwest Ontario. Yet he seems not to have suffered greatly from his financial loss. As public interest in his books abated, he turned his interest increasingly to matters relating to church union and social welfare. He died on 31 October 1937, at the age of 77, having just completed his *Postscript to Adventure*, which he had intended to be less an autobiography than an account of "incidents and personalities."^[86]

On a rather curious concluding note, it is worth mentioning that the Charles Gordon Collection in the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections contains a letter which he wrote in 1936 in reply to a request from my great-grandmother, Alice Thiele, for information about the Robertson family which could clearly establish the Aryan purity of her forebears — a vital requirement for survival in Germany during the Third Reich. Charles wrote, briefly but politely, that he knew no more about his ancestry than she did. But there followed two remarks: first, that he regarded the Versailles Treaty as a tragedy; and, second, that he hoped she would "not be forced to suffer any unhappy results from this absurd attempt of your government."^[87] And he adds, as a postscript, that he is sorry to learn she did not like *The Major*, a novel published in 1918, and written while his impressions of the Germans and the battlefields were still fresh in his mind.

Writing remained in the family's blood and both children of Charles Gordon's son, John King, later became well-known writers.

Aberdeen Men: Peter Robertson and James Giles

Now the scene must shift back to Scotland. As has been noted, the adult children of Agnes Crab and James Robertson remained there when their father emigrated to the New World. What little is known of the elder siblings I have mentioned briefly before, with the exception of the eldest, my great-great-great-grandfather Peter Robertson. And even in his case we have no knowledge of his early years, education, or early manhood. He first appears on his marriage to Isabella Giles, sister of the well-known painter James Giles. Possibly he went from school to university and obtained a degree.^[88] In due course he became a teacher, and married Isabella Giles on 30 March 1820. The Old Parish Record states the following:

By the Rev. Mr. John Murray [Elizabeth Murray's brother] Minister of the Trinity Chapel of Ease were Lawfully married in the brids [bride's] Mothers house after due Proclamation of Banns Mr. Peter Robertson Teacher in Aberdeen and Miss Isabella Giles there Daughter of Mr. Peter Giles, Teacher in Glasgow. Witnesses: Mr. Js. Giles Teacher [the bride's brother], Mr. Robert Robertson [Peter's youngest natural brother] Teacher, both in Aberdeen.

Here we have to digress briefly from the Robertsons to deal with the Giles family. The kin of Isabella Giles' mother **Jean**, a woman, it is said, of great ability and

force of character,^[89] came from Rumfud, a bygone farm or small hamlet near the Braes of Scurdague, some thirty miles from Aberdeen. Rumfud belonged to the parish of Rhynie and Essie (where Jean was baptized), bordering the parish of Kennethmont and close to the village of Clatt, from whence the Murrays hailed. Her maiden name was **Hector**, and she was descended from the **Bruces** of Kennethmont, physically noted for their “dark eyebrows contrasting with auburn hair.”^[90] So we may reasonably assume that these families all knew one another well. Yet by the early nineteenth century the Hector family were living in Printfield — part of Woodside, then a village of its own and today a district of Aberdeen. It is not known from whence the Giles family came, the Scottish form of the name usually being Gillies. **Peter Giles** (1765-1841) was married to Jean Hector on 24 May 1800 and we know of two children: Peter’s Robertson’s wife, Isabella (b. about 1800, d. 14 August 1833) and James (b. 4 January 1801, d. 6 October 1870).

There was a flourishing cotton industry in Printfield, and Peter Giles became a designer of patterns for the craftsmen who then cut the wooden printing-blocks. He was a capable artist and also taught drawing and painting privately in his John Street studio. There was a market moreover for his flower-paintings — small but beautifully-executed pictures, some of which still exist. It is clear that James inherited his father’s artistic talent, and we know that in his youth he made decorative snuff boxes which he was able to sell.

Yet the marriage of Peter and Jean Giles appears not to have been a happy one. The father abandoned his family about 1812, and he and his wife were legally separated before 1817.^[91] From 1815 on, the son James supported his mother by giving drawing classes himself.^[92] There is no record of the father re-appearing in Aberdeen. According to his daughter’s marriage certificate, Peter Giles was then living at Glasgow. Recent research shows that Peter Giles moved from Aberdeen to Glasgow around 1812. After spending 15 years in Belfast from 1821 to 1836, he returned to Glasgow, where he died in 1840 at the age of 76. He was buried in the Glasgow Necropolis on 15 June of that year, his name being given in the record as Peter Gilles, artist.^[93]

James Giles, however, continued to develop his skills as a painter. Although mainly self-taught, we know that he studied art and attended anatomy classes at Marischal College. He toured Scotland painting landscapes and later (after an early marriage at the age of 21 to a widow, Clementina Farquharson) set off on the customary Grand Tour of Europe, leaving his wife at Dover before visiting France and Italy. There he met fellow artists and consorted with men of the world, besides executing some extraordinarily fine watercolours in the Mediterranean light.^[94] On his return to Aberdeen around 1826, Giles bought a house at no. 64 Bon Accord Street, where a plaque still commemorates him. He then became a member of the newly-founded Royal

Scottish Academy, and later was elected to the Council of the Spalding Club. Success in his profession soon gained him both prestige and modest wealth. His sister Jane and her husband lived in an adjacent house, of which James was doubtless the owner also, and he became godfather to **Jane Robertson**, eldest daughter of the young couple.

Giles was both versatile and shrewd: he excelled not only as a landscape-artist and portrait-painter but also as a town-planner and landscape-designer, designing such notable Aberdeen features as the Demeter Sculpture above the Simpson House and the obelisk, now in the Duthie Park, which formerly stood in the quadrangle of Marischal College. But above all James Giles was a landscape painter.^[95] His close friendship with

George, 4th Earl of Aberdeen (and British Prime Minister in the mid-1850s) was of major importance. Not only did he design the gardens and parkland of the Earl's estate at Haddo House in Aberdeenshire, but after Queen Victoria had viewed a painting by Giles of the old Balmoral Castle, the lease of which had been held by the Earl's younger brother Robert until his death, she decided to lease it without having actually seen what would become her Scottish residence from 1848 on, and in 1852 she purchased Balmoral with its lands. The old castle was completely rebuilt, and it is surprising how closely the new Balmoral resembles Giles' painting of its predecessor. In later years Giles was to carry out several commissions for the royal family and these remain in the possession of H.M. the present queen.

In my own view, his finest work is represented by his posthumously-published *Drawings of Aberdeenshire Castles*, commissioned by Lord Aberdeen. This comprises a series of some ninety watercolour sketches, completed between 1838 and 1855. They are brilliantly-executed, and offer a fine impression of these old Scottish buildings. Most of the original pictures are preserved in the James Giles Room at Haddo House, and copies of the entire set were published in 1936 by the Third Spalding Club. Giles was given a similar commission by the Duke of Sutherland in 1839 to sketch the castles of Sutherland, although these were never published as another artist had issued a sketchbook of that region shortly before Giles completed his work. It should not be forgotten that James also made steel engravings based on paintings by David Octavius Hill (artist and pioneer in photography), some of which are published in a book entitled *In the Land of Burns*.^[96] And, although he never visited America, one of Giles' engravings, "Fairmount Gardens, with the Schuylkill Bridge, Philadelphia," after a

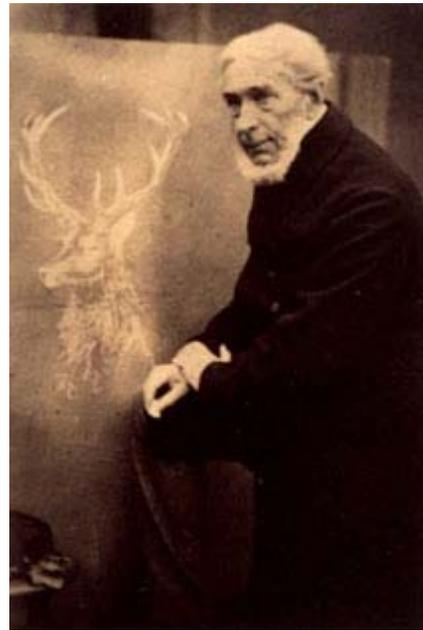


Fig. 11: James Giles

painting by W.H. Bartlett, is also reproduced in a work entitled *American Scenery*.^[97]

By his first wife, Giles had six children: a daughter, **Emily**, and five sons. All the sons predeceased him, which may account for a certain melancholy displayed by Giles in later life. His wife, Clementina, died in 1866, and Giles subsequently married **Margaret Walker**, by whom he had a son and a daughter. So the Giles line did not die out. Giles himself died in 1870 and is buried at Aberdeen in the graveyard of St. Machar Cathedral,



Fig. 12: Giles Tombstone

where a granite tombstone of his own design stands prominently among the others. Next to him lies his brother-in-law, Peter Robertson.



Fig. 13: Peter Robertson

Here we finally turn back to Peter Robertson and his family. We know that they settled at no. 66 Bon Accord Street, which runs off Union Street, close to the location of the West End Academy, of which Peter became headmaster in 1840. He and his wife Isabella had four children, the eldest daughter being Jane Robertson (22 January 1821 — 24 February 1890). We know that James Giles witnessed her baptism. **Jessie** was born on 28 July 1822, followed by two more daughters, **Clementina** (b. 21 May 1824) and **Mary Anne** (b. 30 June 1827), who is never heard of later, and so probably died young.^[98]

Peter first taught at the Lancastrian School in Blackfriars Street, lying beside Schoolhill, where he later became headmaster. We find some quite enlightening and amusing notes about the way he taught and maintained the pupils' discipline in the reminiscences of

William Lindsay:^[99]

... My next move was an important one for me. There were half-timers in those days. I was engaged as message boy in the autumn of 1830 to a shoemaker. My wages was first 1 shilling a week with shoes free, and I was to be allowed three hours' absence each day for school. The

Lancastrian school in Blackfriars Street (Aberdeen) was chosen for me. The headmaster there was Mr. Peter Robertson,^[100] who afterwards became the chief of the West End Academy. The late gifted Professor Robertson Smith was grandson of this famous teacher.

At this school I had two experiences which, even if I had tried, it would not have been easy for me to forget. The plan of our school lessons was this:— The school consisted of nine different classes. The first class learned the alphabet by tracing the letters on sand by the pupil's finger. This had the double advantage of imparting a knowledge of the ordinary Roman letters and the letters used in ordinary writing as well.

When the work of the school was in full operation, the classes were broken up into groups; the monitor, who was the pupil-teacher of that period, stood in the centre of each section with a pointer in his hand, to which he drew the attention of his pupils to the lesson of the day. It might be on the blackboard, written with chalk, or on a large board on which a printed sheet was displayed. While this was going on either Mr. Robertson or the monitor made a tour of inspection from class to class. The first of the two experiences referred to, happened one day when two boys on my right were quarrelling and as was not infrequently the case on such occasions, they did a little swearing just as Mr. Robertson reached the spot where they were wrangling. He, in a passion, raised an ebony ruler that was in his hand, but instead of it striking either of the boys whose conduct provoked him, it struck me, and left a mark on my head that is visible to this day.

The second experience to which I allude, occurred when an unfortunate woman named Humphrey was sentenced to death for poisoning her husband. Mr. Robertson deemed it to be his duty to warn the scholars not to go to the execution. The death sentence being then carried out in Castle Street publicly. In doing this, he made a statement of the facts of the crime and of the law's method of punishing it, of such a realistic character, that it filled at the time my young mind with unspeakable loathing, disgust, and sadness. I have ever since insisted that no tales of horror should be either read or spoken before children, being convinced that that can never be done with impunity.

It is only fair that I should acknowledge here some benefits that I derived from this school and from Mr. Robertson's personal instructions. He had a high ideal of grammar as a branch of education. In order that he might be able to find out the boys that showed most aptitude for learning grammar, he instructed the monitors to write the name of each boy who, in their opinion, possessed that special gift, and send it to him. I was lucky enough to be put before him in that way. The junior grammar class met in the mornings. It was, I think, an abridgement of "Lennie's Grammar" that was used. The plan of instruction after repeating the part of the grammar that had to be

committed to memory, and going through the examination that took place on it, every pupil was required to produce an original essay, which consisted of one page of ordinary notepaper. These essays were read seriatim; when that was finished Mr. Robertson invited the whole class to point out defects that they had in either of the papers read. He was pleased to think that I was, for this purpose, tolerably useful. I succeeded generally in pointing out errors in composition, and as a proof that he thought my work in this department serviceable, he appointed me junior monitor of this class during a whole winter session. I have always been deeply grateful for the opportunity thus afforded me of becoming acquainted with the preliminary stages of this useful branch of knowledge.

Peter is listed in the Aberdeen Directory prior to 1840 as a teacher at Dr. Bell's School in Frederick Street (which is the same school as the Lancastrian). In the course of time he became headmaster of the West End Academy, a school set up by a group of residents in Aberdeen's West End who wanted a good education for their sons. The school was reputed at that time to be the best private school in the city.^[101] Of the couple's family life we unfortunately know nothing. There are, however, photographs in the family's possession of two oil paintings by James Giles. One half-length portrait shows Peter, a good-looking man in his prime. He has side-whiskers and a slightly receding hairline, and wears a high collar, waistcoat and jacket. The other painting shows Isabella, of obviously brunette appearance, with a bonnet appropriate to a woman of her time. Her dress is high-necked, but decorated with a fine lace collar. Dark eyes look somewhat indifferently out of a prettily-rounded face. Isabella died on 14 August 1833, at the age of only 33 years. We may reasonably assume that she died either of consumption or in childbed. She left three young daughters and, as one might expect, her widower married again.



Fig. 14: Isabella (Giles) Robertson

There are few documents relating to this second marriage, but from now on we are able to rely on contemporary witnesses. The following comes from Jane, the eldest daughter, as told late in life to her daughter Alice:

I was just twelve years old when Mother died. Though accustomed to do my share in helping Mother keep house and in caring for my sisters, it was hard for me to bear all the additional work that fell on my shoulders. Father was away teaching all day long and there was

only our maid for help. We all missed Mother very much. So at first it was a relief for me when Father remarried. Our stepmother was **Mary Roy**, who was about thirty years old at the time. I could now get on with my schoolwork, which I enjoyed greatly. As I liked to learn and did so easily, Father was always very appreciative and said jokingly that some day I would be his helpmate in the West End Academy. This was about the time that girls were beginning to attend school, though in very limited numbers. It turned out, however, that our stepmother was not prepared to be a real mother to us; she expected us to act as maids to her so that she could lead the life of a lady of leisure, not realising that the three of us girls still needed motherly care.

One day Father introduced a young teacher to us, whom he already had known as a boy and his former pupil. This was William Pirie Smith, a young man of great enthusiasm and diligence as a teacher. Father enjoyed his company and so William spent many nights with him, eagerly discussing educational and theological questions. He always had a kind word to say to us children and we welcomed his visits to the house. Once I was mature enough I became a teacher also, since Father thought me sufficiently competent, and taught classes of young girls in writing, arithmetic, catechism and needlework.

Another three siblings were born: first **Helen Philippa** in 1837, then little **James** at the end of 1839 (who only lived for 15 months, much to the grief of Father and Stepmother). It was especially hard for Father, as James was his first son. But he was very happy when another son was given to them and **John** arrived on April 12, 1841. At that time Father's health began to deteriorate. He often had to stay at home or even was confined to bed, as after a series of acute colds and attacks of flu he did not recover properly. By the autumn of 1842, he had started to spit blood — and we all knew what that meant: it was the feared consumption that took away people regardless of age, class or wealth. The doctor was helpless and Stepmother was in despair when finally no more could be done. Father died willingly after such severe suffering and was buried in St Machar graveyard, to be reunited with his beloved little son James. I still treasure the obituary, which was published in the first days of January 1843: ^[102]

It was our painful duty last week, to record the death of Mr P. Robertson, Head teacher of the West End Academy — an event which cannot but be regarded as a serious loss to the community at large. Mr Robertson was a man of high talents and well-cultivated mind; but, at the same time, of a spirit so humble, that, to hear himself praised was painful to him. Everyone knew his worth, except himself. Brought under serious impressions in early life, through the instrumentality of a revered parent, he devoted himself uniformly to the advancement of Christ's cause in the world. While, with an assiduity that could not have been surpassed, and with a skill that is seldom equalled, he discharged his arduous duties as an instructor of the young, he never forgot that, as a Christian, his principal aim should be to communicate that knowledge which is life eternal. He was peculiarly at home when engaged in explaining and illustrating the Word of God. And no one,

either minister of the Gospel or private Christian could have heard him exercise his scholars in the Scriptures, without learning much which he did not know, or which had not struck him before. Mr Robertson's talents as a teacher were very remarkable. By his own perfect knowledge of what he taught, combined with great firmness of character, he commanded the respect of his pupils; while, at the same time, by his gentleness and kindness, he secured their affections. His worth as a Christian and a man, and his singular qualifications as a teacher, pointed him out to several gentlemen in the West End of the town as one to they would wish to confide the education of their children; and, accordingly, with a view to the securing of his invaluable services, the West End Academy, now a flourishing establishment, was instituted. A mysterious Providence has removed him from this promising and useful field of labour. Mr Robertson taught in Aberdeen for about twenty-six years, always with the encouragement to which superior worth and talents were entitled; and it has been stated, by those who have full access to know the fact, that more than six thousand young persons have had the benefit of his instructions during that period. The result of his unwearied labours will never be lost, though he himself has passed away. He had the consolations of that Gospel which he adorned by his life, and the truths of which it was the joy of his heart to inculcate, to support him under his protracted illness; and to him may be implied the beautiful words of the Scripture, "the righteous hath hope in his death." He had just attained his forty-fifth year when he died. "Haud diu sed multum vixit." [103]

Now life became even harder for us all. Father had no savings left, yet five children had to be fed. So Stepmother, who was very skilled in needlework, opened a sewing and millinery shop. Unhesitatingly she expected us girls to undertake most of the work and we had to do a great deal of laborious sewing before our most basic needs were met. None of us was physically strong and yet we were often driven to the point of exhaustion. I had to join my sisters as soon as I came home from teaching. We would sit for hours doing nothing but decorating dresses, hats and bonnets. There was no escape, except through marriage — which did not always lead to happiness. Clementina married a teacher, Charles Allan, in May 1847. After some years, she and her family emigrated to Australia, but Clemmie had already been seriously ill when they left and, as only a few letters survive, we must assume she soon died.

Jessie married a teacher, **John Reid**, in December, 1846, and the couple emigrated to Canada. Jessie was the one who missed our dead mother most, and as a keepsake, she took our granduncle's oil painting of his sister. Jessie had a very difficult life to face in Canada — times were hard and her husband eventually abandoned her and their five children, **Jane [Jeannie], Jessie, John, Andrew, and Annie**. Frail as my sister was, she managed to bring up her children very well. I later sent her the painting of our father also, as we both wanted our parents to be united. Much later, after William, your father, had retired from the ministry, she visited me in Aberdeen along with her daughter Annie, who was married to a wealthy Canadian, **Alex Maclaren**. This meeting was a great pleasure for us both. My

niece, Jane, married a Canadian, **Robert Stuart**, in Montreal.”

William Pirie Smith

I had been the first of the family to marry, and it was William Pirie Smith, who had been Father’s deputy from 1841 and ultimately his successor as headmaster, who asked me to become his wife. There was nothing I would have liked more. I knew him well, and had found him an earnest yet kindly man who had always shown respect and friendship to us all. We were married on July 16, 1844, one year after the Disruption of the Free Church from the established Church of Scotland. Those ministers who had left the established church opposed all forms of patronage and demanded the right of the church members in each parish (male heads of households at any rate) to elect ministers of their own choice. This event had greatly stirred passions in the whole population — and both Willie and I were at one in aligning ourselves with the movement.



Fig. 15: Mary and Martha Smith

Willie came from a poor but god-fearing family, and was brought up under sometimes very straitened circumstances. His father was **Gilbert Smith** (b. 20 October 1782) who had married **Mary Michie** (b. 17 September 1782, d. 30 September 1866) on 13 August 1808. Gilbert’s own parents had been **Gilbert Smith**, a labourer, and his spouse **Mary Well**, living together in Aberdeen’s Hardgate. My father-in-law, Gilbert junior had been a rope maker who, when his business failed, decided to go to America on his own. He subsequently wrote asking his wife to follow him, but she chose to remain in Scotland, where she brought up her three children, William Pirie (b. 14 April 1811, d.

24 February 1890), **Martha** (1809-1896), the eldest, called Matt or Mattie, and **George** (b. 1815), who was drowned as a small boy in the harbour at Aberdeen, an experience Willie never was able to forget, and which led him later to feel great anxiety over the welfare of our children. He always wanted to know exactly where they were and became agitated whenever they arrived home late. Willie attended the Lancastrian school as one of my father’s pupils for some time until he was old enough to enter an apprenticeship with a wood-turner. But he loved to study, mathematics especially, and after teaching himself Latin was able to win a small bursary which enabled him (in addition to giving private tuition) to progress to King’s College and attain his M.A. degree. He was his mother’s pride and joy for she spoke of having dreamt during her pregnancy of bearing a male child who would become a minister. That seemed a curious thing to me, because

she was otherwise a sober woman, while my husband always detested superstition. After Willie had graduated, his first post was as schoolmaster in a small Kincardineshire village, Kincardine O'Neil, before returning to teach at the West End Academy, where he met my father once again, as we know.



Fig. 16: William Pirie Smith and his wife Jane Robertson

For the first years of our marriage, we lived with Willie's sister Martha and his mother, first at no. 29 Dee Street and then at no. 121 Crown Street. For me, this arrangement was deeply disagreeable as I had hoped to run my own household and escape from being treated like a child, but Willie felt so responsible for both those women that he could not bring himself to leave them alone. For me, however, it meant that my mother-in-law saw me simply as another dependent member of the family. She was a woman of the old school. I was proud of my curls, but was bidden not to show them in company as that was inappropriate for a married woman. So I wore a bonnet, but always let some curls peep out, which I am sure was noticed, but not openly criticised. In 1845 our dear little Mary Jane was born. And it was she who finally forced me to hide my curls — as she would playfully but mercilessly tug

them.

In the same year, Willie entered the Free Church as a minister. The number of ministers available was too few to meet the needs of all the parishes, and schoolmasters were sought out as suitable candidates for that great task. I myself was enthusiastic! The idea offered me not only the chance of leading a Christian life free from the taint of Moderatism but also the prospect of us both being independent of others. Though Willie naturally asked his mother to come with us, she refused point-blank — as we had expected. But, as a good son, he handed over all his savings to her, which then meant still greater thrift for me. Later, when his mother died, those savings were the only means his sister had of maintaining herself in Aberdeen, something for which I was deeply grateful!

Willie was ordained on November 5, 1845, and we finally moved, early in 1846, to the scattered village of Keig, where a Free Church parish, including the hamlet of Tough, was to be established. At first there was literally nothing. We lived in a

room rented to us by a kind couple and later in a small house, New Farm, before the manse could be built. At first, Willie had to endure much hostility from Lord Forbes, the local landowner, who initially refused, as frequently happened, to grant a piece of land to the congregation for the erection of a church and manse. Lord Forbes eventually gave way and money was soon collected, mostly from friends in Aberdeen, with the result that within a year both the church and adjacent manse were completed. Our eldest son, William Robertson, was born in New Farm and it was a great joy that with only a short delay he became the first child to be baptized in the new church — during the inaugural service of dedication.”



Fig. 17: Church and Manse at Keig

The Smith Family Offspring

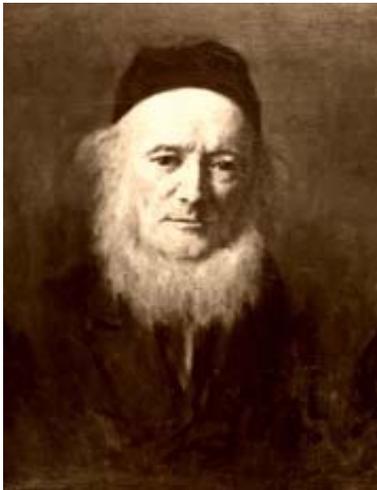


Fig. 18: William Pirie Smith



Fig. 19: Jane (Robertson) Smith

Now it is time — after this insight into Scottish school and family life during the early nineteenth century — to give a short account of the Smith family. The father, William Pirie Smith (hereafter WPS), remained at Keig until his retirement from the ministry in 1881. The early years had been a struggle and his wife Jane often found it hard to make ends meet; but, thanks to her tireless diligence and inventive genius, she proved fully-capable of bringing up her large family

successfully. The couple had eleven children:

- i. **Mary Jane Smith**, b. 11 July 1845 at Aberdeen; d. 15 May 1864 at Keig
- ii. **William Robertson Smith**, b. 8 November 1846 at Keig; d. 31 March 1894 at Cambridge
- iii. **George Michie Smith**, b. 23 February 1848 at Keig; d. there 27 April 1866
- iv. **Isabella (Bella) Giles Smith**, b. 5 October 1849 at Keig; d. 16 November 1938 at Aberdeen
- v. **Ellen (Nellie) Deans Allan Smith**, b. 26 April 1851 at Keig; d. 17 February 1917 at Peterculter/Aberdeen
- vi. **Eliza Steward Smith**, b. 9 November 1852 at Keig; d. there 5 October 1857
- vii. **Charles (Charlie) Michie Smith**, b. 13 July 1854 at Keig; d. 27 September 1922 at Kodaikanal, India
- viii. **A son**, b. 4 March 1857 at Keig; d. there the same day
- ix. **Alice Thiele Smith**, b. 27 April 1858 at Keig; d. 25 June 1943 at Braunschweig, Germany
- x. **Lucy Smith**, b. 22 September 1859 at Keig; d. 7 March 1922 at Kodaikanal, India
- xi. **Herbert (Bertie) Smith**, b. 8 February 1862 at Keig; d. 17 December 1887 at Aberdeen



Fig. 20: The four Smith siblings leaving for Aberdeen, 1861

WPS supplemented his small stipend by taking boarding-pupils at the manse — generally boys who needed coaching to a university-level standard. Many of them in later years wrote in vivid and positive terms of their educational experiences there and of the atmosphere and spirit in the Smith family home. Of course there were also Sunday School and Bible Class lessons, duly attended by all, and the background activities of life in a country parish. All the family children were educated at home, the first lessons being provided by their mother Jane in the nursery. When the children were sufficiently advanced, the boys joined the father's lesson in the manse study and, as time went on, some of the girls were similarly privileged. The emphasis was on providing a thorough traditional education within a Christian environment, although WPS encouraged his pupils to learn something of science

and natural history as well. Learning by rote was standard and included memorisation of all the Psalms, one after the other, from Sunday to Sunday.

WPS was fortunate in having two highly-talented eldest sons in William and George. Both were put forward for the Bursary Competition at Aberdeen in 1861, gaining top places, and they entered university at the ages of 13 and 15 respectively, accompanied to the town by their two oldest sisters, Mary Jane and Bella, who were to attend school there and keep house. Bella only stayed for two winters. The university session then lasted only from November to Easter; in spring and summer the rural students were needed at home to help with farm-work. The Smith boys and their sisters were all subject to poor health and suffered repeatedly from tuberculosis. Mary Jane, a very gifted girl, who had even published little poems in *Chambers's Journal*, was the first to succumb, dying after having nursed her brother George. A year later, in 1866, George died shortly after passing his final exams with the highest distinction and being offered a place at Cambridge to study Mathematics. His brother WRS had to postpone further study for a year to recuperate from serious illness at the time of his own final exams. Others in the Smith family had died prematurely — Eliza and a new-born baby boy — and we may only imagine that their mother, Jane, coped with those tribulations through the support of her deep Christian faith.

William Robertson Smith

Following completion of his elementary schooling, William Robertson Smith (hereafter WRS) went to New College, Edinburgh, to complete his studies for the Free Church ministry, becoming assistant to Professor P.G. Tait of the University's Department of Natural Philosophy, in addition to his other commitments. His work for Tait further involved teaching physics to "Ladies' Classes" which were then beginning for the first time under the auspices of the more liberally-minded academic staff there, though the women were not permitted to graduate until 1896. William's report on the women's performance is remarkably open, objective, and honest: [104]

The ladies' papers last winter were obviously done with great care. Almost all the papers showed signs of great attention, though in a good many cases attention of rather mechanical kind, quite intelligible notes having often been carefully got up and accurately written out.

The reason of this, however, seemed to be not so much confusion of thought as hesitation on the part of the writers to assume that what appeared nonsense to them was absolute nonsense. For what was understood was in general clearly grasped, and expressed with a neatness and directness not very common in University papers. Except where quite thrown out by the novelty of the ideas involved, the average student seemed to have her powers of expression and thought better in hand than a University man of the same standing; and mainly to this I would ascribe the fact that the average marks gained were decidedly higher than those gained on similar papers at the University.

There were one or two very good students at the top of the class who were in every respect equal to the best University men; but below these there was rather a rapid descent to painstaking mediocrity.

It is of course fair to remember that, to most of the class, not only physical facts, but all physical and mathematical ideas were perfectly new. Even a sound knowledge of arithmetic in its theory was very far from well diffused.

In matters which did not involve accurate mathematical ideas, the performance was decidedly superior, and there was never reason to complain or want of diligent effort to assimilate ideas that were felt to be new and difficult."

In Edinburgh WRS met John F. McLennan,^[105] who first called his attention to early religion and totemism. During his student years WRS had made several trips abroad, especially to Germany where he encountered the latest ideas on Biblical criticism, and to Egypt where he studied Arabic. These journeys brought him into contact with numerous students and professors who later became lifelong friends. At the age of 24 he was elected to the chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature in the Free Church College, Aberdeen.

Life there proceeded comfortably for WRS until the publication in December 1875 of certain articles on Biblical subjects which he had been invited to write for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His long article "Bible" in particular provoked an indignant outcry from the more conservative of the Free Church leaders and led in course of time to accusations of heresy. The subsequent investigations were to lead to a formal "libel" for heresy, resulting in a series of trials, lasting for five years and culminating in dismissal from his professorial post at the Aberdeen College.

Some idea of the opposition's views may be gauged from the remarks made by one of WRS's fiercest enemies, the Rev. Dr. James Begg, one of the leaders of the notorious so-called Highland Horde, who wrote the following:

[The fall of the Tay Bridge] ... was a punishment of the Deity upon either the passengers in the train for Sabbath breaking or on other people for their sins of omission or commission.... The North British Railway Company ... if they desire their bridge, when re-erected, to be left alone, must stop Sunday trains, and stop Professor Robertson Smith."^[106]

By 1881, WRS was employed as co-editor of (and regular contributor to) the *Britannica* under Thomas Spencer Baynes.^[107] After Baynes' death in 1887, WRS became editor-in-chief. He had now spent extensive time in Germany (taking with him in 1876 his sisters Alice and Lucy to complete their education, as he had taken Nellie to Göttingen some years before) and also in the Middle East, where he had continued his study of Arabic and

related languages and increasingly turned his attention towards the history of religion, particular Semitic religions, in the study of which he was a pioneer. In 1883 he moved to Cambridge, first as Lord Almoner's Reader in Arabic, becoming a fellow of Christ's College in 1884. After some years as Cambridge University Librarian, he was appointed to the Thomas Adams chair of Arabic in 1889. He had earlier met with James G. Frazer, the famous ethnologist, whom WRS encouraged in his work. In 1888 his work on the ninth edition of the *EB* (ever after known as the "scholarly edition") was completed and in 1889 appeared his most eminent work, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, based on his series of Burnett Lectures given at Aberdeen. ^[108]



Fig. 21: William Robertson Smith at Cambridge, by G. Reid

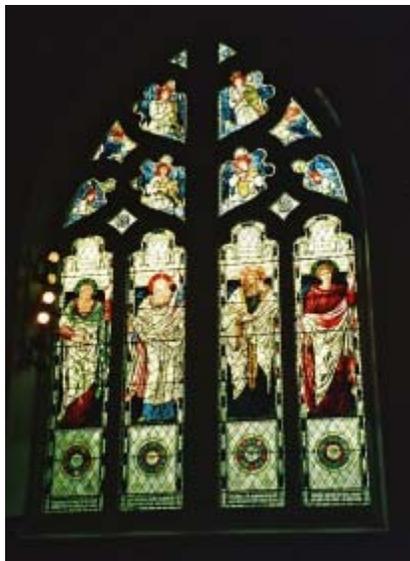


Fig. 22: William Robertson Smith window in King's College Chapel, Aberdeen

WRS enjoyed his work to the full, but the diversity of his duties seriously over-burdened his health. His constitution, never strong, began to give way in 1890, leading to a protracted illness which culminated in his death on 31 March 1894 at the age of 47 years from spinal tuberculosis, through which he had continued to teach from his bedside until the very last weeks of his life.

A commemorative set of four stained-glass windows was unveiled in September 1897 at King's College, Aberdeen. They represent the Hebrew prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and the accompanying inscription reads:

In piam gratamque memoriam Guli. Robertson Smith, LL.D. Aberd., Litt.D. Dublin, S.T.D.

Argentorat, Prof. Cantabr. Ingenii dotibus, animi candore, doctrina opibus preclari hujus Univ. Alum., consecrarunt amicimirantes maerentes. Natus A.D. MDCCCXLVI, obiit A.D. MDCCCXCIV.

And in translation:

In pious and grateful remembrance of William Robertson Smith, Doctor of Laws of Aberdeen, Doctor of Letters of Dublin, Doctor of Theology of Strasburg, Professor at Cambridge, illustrious for his mental endowments, candour of mind, and wealth of learning, an alumnus of this university, these windows have been consecrated by

his mourning but admiring friends. Born A.D. 1846, deceased A.D. 1894. [109]

At the parish church of Keig (then the United Free Church) a brass memorial tablet was unveiled around 1900 by George Adam Smith, WRS's successor in the Hebrew chair in Aberdeen. [110]

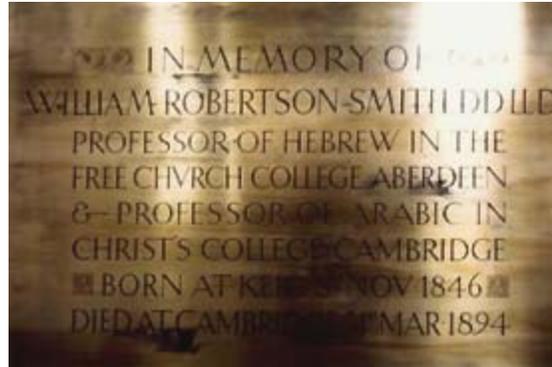


Fig. 23: William Robertson Smith memorial tablet in Parish Church, Keig

And what became of the younger children?

Turning back to Keig in Aberdeenshire, we find that the Smith family prospered despite all their hardships. Though the other siblings had not the same intellectual brilliance of mind which their father had found in the eldest children, the others went on their different ways and a brief review is warranted here.

Bella, after returning from Aberdeen, refused to proceed any further in her education. Instead she became her mother's dedicated helper in all aspects of housekeeping and cooking, guarding jealously against any challenge to that role. But she was to prove of real help to her parents, especially when Jane was occupied with nursing first her youngest son, Bertie, and later her husband. And it was Bella who finally devoted her life to caring for her mother. By that time, the family were living in Aberdeen at no. 61 Fountainhall Road, a house which WRS had bought for his parents and his unmarried sisters in 1889. Bella remained unmarried, becoming something of an old maid and dying somewhat neglected, since she refused to accept help, in that same house.

Nellie (Ellen) was a capable girl, gifted with a sound mixture of intellectual, social, and practical skills. While WRS was studying at Edinburgh, she stayed with him, attending school there and receiving lessons in French, Drawing, and Music. In 1869 WRS took her to Germany, where she remained for about a year. She had an unfortunate love affair with a young German student to whom she became engaged, but the relationship ended. On her return to Scotland she did a variety of educational work, teaching her younger siblings and in 1874 translating a theological work, Gustav Oehler's *Theology of the Old Testament*, from German to English. [111] This suggests she must have had an excellent knowledge of Latin, Greek and



Fig. 24: The Smith Family at Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen, in 1889

Hebrew, as well as of the Bible. She was, of course, a daughter of the Manse, accustomed from earliest childhood to listen to the most lively discussions on biblical and theological matters.

In 1876 she married a Free Church minister, **James Hamilton Allan** (b. 1846, d. 11 March 1899). Allan had been WPS's assistant for a time,

and had his first charge at Glenbuchat, not far from Keig. That early ministry must not have been a success, since he moved after four years to Sellafirth on Yell, one of the Shetland Islands. There Hamilton ministered with only limited success until his death from an hepatic abscess. It was his wife Nellie who rose to the challenge in 1881, when the great Gloup disaster occurred. The Shetland fishing fleet (consisting mostly of small "sixareens") was caught in a terrible storm about forty sea miles offshore. Ten boats were lost and fifty-eight fishermen drowned, leaving thirty-four widows and eighty-five fatherless children. There was not a single house or family that remained unaffected. It was Nellie and not her husband who gave comfort and practical support to the bereaved, and in later years she was greatly revered by the people of Sellafirth. Hamilton seems to have been of a depressive temperament, and (as people still say today) to have been unduly susceptible to the female sex. There had even been a rumour concerning Hamilton and a local illegitimate child. He would often stay in his bed, and it was Nellie who then had to climb the pulpit steps and conduct the entire service. After her husband's death she stayed on in Sellafirth, moving to a house of her own which they had bought previously. She continued in her pastoral care, teaching the local children and holding Bible Classes. Eventually her siblings persuaded Nellie to return to Aberdeen, and she left Yell reluctantly in 1909, buying a house at Peterculter, near Aberdeen, and becoming once more an invaluable aid to the local minister. In 1917 she caught flu from which she did not recover, and died on 17 February of that year.

Charles (always known to us as Charlie) was the most practical of the children and had a special interest in both woodwork and astronomy. His father, as Charlie's teacher, would despair at the boy's lack of interest in the classics. Yet Charles

duly went to university and took his M.A. at Aberdeen before going to Edinburgh where he graduated in 1876 with a B.Sc. in Engineering. From there he briefly worked on board a cable-laying ship in the Caribbean before going to Madras as Professor of Mathematics at the Christian College there. Being highly interested in Astronomy, he joined Norman Pogson, director of the observatory in Madras, and became Pogson's successor in 1891. In 1899 the new observatory on the Palani Hills in Kodaikanal was completed under Charles's guidance. He had been fascinated by the great eruption on Krakatoa in 1883 and wrote (among many others) a paper entitled "The Green Sun" on his observations at the time of that event.^[112] A secondary interest was photography, which was very appropriate to his professional work, and many of his astronomical photographs are extant. In addition he contributed some articles to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. As acknowledgement for his work in India he was created a Companion of the Indian Empire (CIE) in 1910.

Charlie retired in 1911, by which time his youngest sister, Lucy, had joined him in India. He never married, but seems to have had a pleasant and comfortable life there, and eventually found that he could no longer tolerate the Scottish climate. After a final visit in Europe in 1919, both Lucy and her brother decided to remain in India. Charlie, however, fell prey to progressive dementia and died on 27 September 1922. Lucy, worn out by the demands of nursing her brother, had died some six months earlier.

The next in age after Charles was Alice. In the thirteen months before her birth the Smith parents had lost two children, the death of four-year-old Lizzie being a particular blow to the mother. The little child had suffered from hydrocephalus, but Jane even accused the doctor of failing to treat her daughter properly. According to her death certificate, however, the child died of tubercular meningitis. Alice, on the other hand, was a normal girl who grew up liking books and learning of all kinds, whether indoors or outdoors. Rambling with her siblings, especially with her older brother Willie whenever he was at home, was her greatest joy. She became an avid butterfly-collector. In 1869 she was allowed to go with Nellie and WRS to Edinburgh for the winter term. She enjoyed attending a private school at Edinburgh but had to return to Keig when her brother became Professor at Aberdeen. In 1876 she and her sister Lucy both accompanied WRS to Germany, together with his friend, the painter George Reid.^[113] Of this journey the two friends made a kind of diary, illustrated by Reid, and later privately printed.^[114] It was George Reid, moreover, who in 1877 completed the triple portrait of WPS which, along with that of Jane Smith by Archibald Reid, is preserved in Aberdeen Art Gallery.

In Germany, Alice and Lucy were to have lessons in French, Drawing, and Music. Following a short, unpleasant stay with a minister's widow, the sisters moved to live with another German family,

who took great care of them and treated them as members of the family. It was here that Alice met **Hans Thiele** (b. 20 October 1855, d. 4 April 1939), stepson of their host's daughter. Alice was allowed to stay in Germany until she was engaged in September 1877, but her parents then insisted she return home. A lengthy engagement followed. It had been expected that Alice would, in the course of time, become a governess; and for a short spell she filled that role with the White family.^[115] But her health failed and she gave up that post, returning to Keig.



Fig. 25: Hans and Alice (Smith) Thiele, about 1883

Hans came twice to Scotland for a visit, and on 10 January 1883 the two were finally married in her father's flat at no. 2 Skene Place, where the family lived after his retirement from 1881 to 1889. Of course Alice then went to Germany, returning to Scotland only for holiday visits. Her husband was somewhat unsuccessful in the running of businesses, and so they often moved, with WRS's financial help being required from time to time. Hans finally secured work as an auditor and from then on the family prospered moderately.

The couple had five children: three sons, **William** (a quartermaster), **Alfred** (missionary of a German Free Church) and **Kurt** (a white-collar worker, and a high-ranking Nazi official in the Third Reich), and two daughters, **Jeannie** and **Lucy**. Both girls became teachers, and remained single, in contrast to their brothers, who all married and had ample offspring. Alice revisited Scotland frequently, but the two World Wars put an end to that. The last visit to her old homeland was in 1925, to meet up with her only surviving sister, Bella. She must often have been homesick during her first years in Germany, though it is clear that she grew to enjoy life there. After the death of her husband, it was her daughter Lucy who cared for Alice until her death on 25 June 1943. One feels thankful that Alice was unable at the end to realise how Germany was rushing towards an abyss.

Thanks to her we have so much information about the Scottish, and to a smaller degree of the Canadian, branches of the family. She spent her last decade mostly in noting down her childhood reminiscences, and as much as she was able to remember of the history of her family as well.^[116]

Lucy, the youngest daughter of the Smith family, was a cheerful and exuberant girl, called by the others (as Alice tells us) "the laughing ha-ha-bird,"^[117] or



Fig. 26: Lucy and her warden's room

"Wiry" because she had such a delicate frame. She loved all kinds of animals, especially birds and poultry, calling them all by name and chatting eagerly with them. Though intellectually able, she was not keen at first on learning; that changed only in her teenage years. She never went to school outside the home, but did spend a year in Germany with her sister Alice. One event which affected her deeply

was Nellie's marriage. Only later did she reveal that Hamilton had proposed to her first, shortly before they had left for Frankfurt. During a spell back in Keig, Lucy began to apply herself much more enthusiastically to studying with her father, and later she became a governess, being engaged to accompany the McLennans to Algeria and to take responsibility for the care and education of their child, Ella. McLennan was now seriously ill, and it turned out that the tuberculosis from which he suffered was too advanced to permit such a long journey; and so the family remained for the winter of 1880 to 1881 at San Reno.

They all returned to Kent in the spring of 1881, and Ella's father died a short time afterwards. Lucy stayed with the widow and her daughter, eventually as a friend, until Mrs. McLennan's death in 1896. Lucy then went to London, where she became a nurse at St. Thomas Hospital, steadily gaining promotion until she became second matron. She enjoyed the work but in October 1910 became so ill that the worst was feared for her. Recovery was slow, even after her return to Aberdeen, and she finally quit her post in December of that year. On Charlie's next visit to Scotland he asked her to come with him to India as his housekeeper, and Lucy agreed. She and Charlie both made over their share of the house in Fountainhall Road to Bella so that their sister might remain there in comfort.

Lucy must have enjoyed life in India greatly. In 1914 she accompanied her brother to an astronomers' meeting in Australia. They tried to resettle in Scotland in 1919 but (as noted previously) Charlie could no longer endure the European climate, and so they left Scotland for the last time. Following a stroke Charlie became progressively impaired both physically and mentally, and Lucy cared for him until her own death from exhaustion on 7 March 1922. A fine tombstone was erected for them at Kodaikanal, but I do not know if it still exists.

Herbert ("Bertie") was the youngest of the family.

Of his childhood we know only that he was by far the least able and could never come up to his father's expectations. WPS would fly into a furious rage, being unable to understand his son's failure to learn. Bertie was not destined to become

a scientist or theologian. He was frequently unwell, suffered from headaches, and was unable to enter university. Instead he worked as a bank clerk, and for a few years it seemed that all was well. But at the age of twenty-three he was diagnosed with spinal tuberculosis. The illness was protracted and he suffered greatly, tolerating care only from his own mother until his death on 17 December 1887.

By that time WPS had already had suffered a stroke, was confined to a wheelchair, and needed constant care. Jane and Bella were burdened almost beyond their united strength. Their father died one year after they had moved to their new house, on 24 February 1890. A short time later, Jane took her sister-in-law, Martha, into her home. Frail and old by that time, Martha was incapable of living independently. After Martha's death in 1896 Jane lived four more years, then died of heart failure.



Fig. 27: Herbert Smith

Of all the Smith children, only Ellen and Alice had married, and Alice alone had children. It is a fitting point to close this story, at the waning of the Victorian Age and the twilight of the nineteenth century.

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude is due to several institutions and individuals. Amongst the latter in particular are Dr. Gordon K. Booth for his profound encouragement, help and advice with the text, and the editor John B. Dobson for giving me much additional information, and patiently editing and re-editing the content and preparing the manuscript for the web. Much is owed to Cecilia Penny, who allowed me to make use of information and pictures published in her book *Stuartfield our Place*. I am indebted to University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, in Winnipeg, who kindly gave permission to make use of documents held in the Charles William Gordon (Ralph Connor) Papers. And also to the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal, for giving permission to publish a photograph of Margaret M. Robertson.

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NOTES

1. The *Carse of Gowrie* is a section of low-lying, fertile land that stretches along the north of the Firth of Tay between Perth and Dundee.
2. Apart from this instance, one can generally not be sure whether the given date refers to the birth or the christening. Probably it more often marks the date of baptism. Only after 1854, when statutory records in Scotland were introduced, are the dates of birth completely reliable.
3. See L. Melville, *The Fair Land of Gowrie*, pp. 84-87.
4. "Die Brücke am Tay," 1879.
5. L. Melville, *Errol, Its Legends, Lands and People*, pp. 99-100.
6. Data from <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>.
7. The notes of my grandfather William Robertson Thiele tell us that she was about 10 years older, an indication that this is the right Agnes despite the slight discrepancy in their reported ages.
8. Otto Dibelius, "Das kirchliche Leben Schottlands," in *Kirchenkunde des evangelischen Auslandes*, vol. 5, part 2, pp. 8ff., 180.
9. Glasites, Tabernaclers, Dissenters, Revivalists, Missioners, amongst others.
10. "Stuartfield and its Churches," *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 October 1897. Both Haldane brothers later became Baptists.
11. Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism*, pp. 77ff.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258; cf. James Ross, *A History of Congregational Independence in Scotland*, p. 218.

13. Cecilia Penny (ed.), *Stuartfield our Place*, pp. 73ff.
14. *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 October 1897.
15. Escott, p. 259.
16. John Blythe Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon (the novelist Ralph Connor)," at <http://cybrary.uwinnipeg.ca/people/dobson/manitobiana/issues/005.cfm>. Accessed 2 November 2006.
17. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 83; David Smithers, "Andrew Murray: He Almost Stopped a True Revival," *The Revival*, date not stated, reprinted in "Andrew Murray: Selected Stories and Teachings from *The Revival Archives*," at <http://www.fullstature.com/articles.html#Andrew%20Murray>, accessed 17 April 2007.
18. Scotlands People, at <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>.
19. All data from <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>. My grandfather in his notes says that the couple had 13 to 15 children. It seems unlikely, yet there is a gap of five years between the first and the second birth. All the other children followed in quicker succession (1 to 3 years). So perhaps some baptismal entries are lost. There is yet another reference to the number of children: Dobson cites J.M. Bulloch, *Gordons in Perthshire As Pioneers to Canada* (Perth: The Munro Press, Ltd., 1930), for mention of "nineteen children of the Rev. James Robertson ... once Congregational minister at Stuartfield."!
20. Data from <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>.
21. This information from James Robertson's great-great-granddaughter Katherine Downey.
22. J.J. Carter and C.A. McLaren, *Crown and Gown*, pp. 81ff.
23. This valuable information was given to me from Katherine Downey.
24. As stated in the notes of my grandfather William R. Thiele.
25. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 83.
26. Charles Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, p. 412. See also *Why "Eastern Townships"* at <http://www.townshipheritage.com/Eng/Hist/ET/whyet.html>, accessed 23 March 2007. The southeast corner of the province of Quebec is home to the region known as the Eastern Townships. The region is famous across Canada and internationally for its scenic beauty and history.
27. See *Stuartfield Our Place*, p. 74, inside and back cover; also *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 October 1897.
28. Information from the present owner.
29. Cutting kindly provided by Katherine Downey.
30. Obituary of Mrs. Daniel Gordon, *The Presbyterian Revue* (Toronto), 15 May 1890, quoted by kind permission of the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Canada [hereafter UMA].
31. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 86.

32. Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon," cited above; McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 84.
33. According to the notes of my great-grandmother Alice Thiele Smith.
34. This date is definitely wrong. See above.
35. W.J. Rattray, *The Scot in British North America*, chapter vii.
36. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 6.
37. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 87. Cf. Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon."
38. This information from Katherine Downey.
39. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p.101.
40. Joseph Gibb Robertson died 13 March 1899 in Sherbrooke. Cf. Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon."
41. Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon."
42. <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>. See also L.T. Guilford, *Biographical Sketch of Mary R. Robertson*, 1897, UMA. As to the year of Mary's birth, she gives 1828, surely a lapse of memory on her part.
43. Dobson, "The Ancestry of the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon."
44. James Stark, *Rev. John Murker of Banff*, pp. 39ff. and pp. 203ff.
45. Letter from Charles Gordon to Alice Thiele Smith, 31 July 1936, UMA, Charles William Gordon (Ralph Connor) Collection.
46. Guilford, *Sketch*.
47. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 84.
48. Gwendolyn Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xiii, quoting T.S. Clouston, *Female Education from a Medical Point of View* (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 20.
49. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xii ff.
50. Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, pp. 3ff. and pp. 24ff.
51. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 84.
52. Guilford, *Sketch*.
53. Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, pp. 10ff.
54. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xiii.
55. Zorra is a township in south-western Ontario, Canada. It is part of Oxford County, which includes Harrington.
56. Guilford, *Sketch*.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, undated letter from Daniel Gordon.
60. Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, pp. 3ff.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 417ff.

62. Daniel Gordon to his son Andrew, 11 March 1898, UMA.
63. J.M. Bulloch, *Gordons in Perthshire as Pioneers in Canada* (from a transcript).
64. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xv.
65. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 84.
66. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 87.
67. "A Notable Woman" (31 March 1897) — obituary notice, UMA.
68. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 85.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 87ff.
70. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. ix.
71. "A Notable Woman," UMA.
72. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xv.
73. McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*, p. 92.
74. Interestingly there is some disposition to a neural tube defect in the European branch of the family.
75. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, pp. xxxi ff.
76. William R. Thiele placed a note in his copy of that novel, saying that the story describes the emigration of the Robertson family. Though that copy has since been lost, the note in question was transferred into another copy purchased later.
77. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xxx.
78. *Ibid.*, p. xi
79. Elizabeth Waterston, *Rapt in Plaid*, p. 241.
80. Guth, *Preface to Shenac's Work at Home*, p. xiii.
81. "The literary work of the late Miss Margaret M. Robertson," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 31 March 1897, UMA.
82. See for example McMullen et al., *Silenced Sextet*; Waterston.
83. Unless otherwise indicated, all information concerning Charles Gordon is taken from Charles Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, and University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, "Charles William Gordon (Ralph Connor): An Inventory of His Papers...", at http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/collections/complete_holdings/ead/html/gordon.shtml, accessed 10 April 2007.
84. "John M. King School," at www.wsd1.org/johnmking/history.htm, accessed 26 February 2005.
85. Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure*, pp. 34, 117, 173.
86. *Ibid.*, p. x.
87. 31 July 1936, UMA (author's emphasis).
88. In Scotland (unlike England) the first degree in Arts is and always has been the M.A.
89. See *Drawings of Aberdeenshire Castles*: ed. Third Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1936),

p. viii.

90. Mary Herdman, "A Painter Rediscovered," *The Scots Magazine* (June 1970), pp. 255-66:
91. Bill of Suspension from January 1817.
92. Cf. Herdman.
93. Burial records for Glasgow, kindly supplied by Sarah Dart, a descendant of the Giles family.
94. *Aspects of Landscape, A Bicentenary Celebration of James Giles RSA* (Aberdeen City Council, 2001), p. 3.
95. *Aspects of Landscape*, p. 1.
96. D.O. Hill, R. Chambers, and J. Wilson, *In the Land of Burns*, which contains several engravings by James Giles.
97. Nathaniel Parker Willis, *American Scenery; or Land, Lake, and River*, 2 vols. (London, 1840), facing 2:45.
98. Though Peter's granddaughter, Alice, believed that there might have been a little son, who only lived for a short time, there is no evidence for one being born of that marriage. Probably she confused this with Mary Ann.
99. William Lindsay (1802-1890), *Some Notes Personal and Public* (1898), pp. 20-25.
100. There is a hand-written note in my personal copy reading: "Black Peter" — Uncle's teacher also...."
101. Alice Thiele Smith, *Children of the Manse*, p. 20.
102. *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 January 1843.
103. *He did not only live for the day alone, but for much more.* (Freely translated)
104. "Mr. Smith's Report" in Katherine Burton, *A Memoir of Mrs. Crudelius* (1879), p. 94.
105. John Ferguson McLennan (1827-1881), Scottish lawyer and ethnologist whose ideas on cultural evolution, kinship, and the origins of religion stimulated anthropological research.
106. "Dr. Begg on [the] Fall of Tay Bridge," in J. Campbell Smith & William Wallace, *Robert Wallace: Life and Last Leaves*, pp. 280-82.
107. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Here the references are always to the ninth edition.
108. WRS: *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, First Series: The Fundamental Institutions* (Edinburgh : A. & C. Black, 1889).
109. *Aberdeen Journal*, 1 September 1897.
110. An extended biography is *The Life of William Robertson Smith* by his close friend J.S. Black and G.W. Chrystal, which was published along with *Lectures and Essays of William Robertson Smith*, by A. & C. Black (London, 1912). Shorter biographical sketches appear in the following works, among others: Donald Carswell, *Brother Scots* (London: Constable & Co., 1927), pp. 54-120; James Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1903), pp. 311-26; and Sir James George Frazer, *The Gorgon's Head* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1907), pp. 278-

90, which gives more detail of WRS's later work. For a more detailed summary of WRS's life and work see "William Robertson Smith," at <http://www.william-robertson-smith.net/>. An insight into a part of WRS's enormous correspondence can be found at <http://www.gkbenterprises.org.uk/letters/index.html>.

111. Gustav Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874).
112. "The Green Sun," *Christian College Magazine* (1883).
113. Later Sir George Reid (1841-1913), president of the RSA.
114. *Notes and Sketches* by WRS and George Reid (privately printed, 1876).
115. John Forbes White (1831-1904), WRS's friend, famous Scottish patron and collector of fine arts, supporter of many young artists.
116. Alice's reminiscences were published as *Children of the Manse* in 2004.
117. So Alice wrote in her recollections, referring to the kookaburra or laughing jackass bird.

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