

# A MAKER OF CANADA.

## Appreciative Sketch of Dr. J. W. Robertson Who has Done so Much to Develop the Material Interests of this Country

### Started Life on His Father's Farm and has risen by His Own Unaided Efforts.

The visit of the Agriculture Committee of the House of Commons to MacDonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue, Que., Saturday brings into prominence one of the great educators of Canada.

Some thirty odd years ago James Wilson Robertson, a Scottish immigrant lad of 17, settled, with his parents, on a farm near London, Ont. A quarter of a century later he had created and was directing one of the greatest educational movements of the age. The story of the intervening twenty-five years gives to young men one of the best living examples of what can be accomplished by hard work, high ideals and a burning enthusiasm.

In Ontario we have been accustomed to hearing that our educational system was the best in the world, when, as a matter of fact, little progress had been made for twenty-five or thirty years. Children in country schools were within technical education, and were not being trained and fitted for the keen competitive struggles of the present day. Dr. Robertson has, after long years of careful thought and study, supplied the need.

And yet the Scottish immigrant lad had no idea of becoming a great teacher. He wanted to become a doctor, but the family finances would not permit of it. Young Robertson turned in and did a man's work on his father's farm. He toiled early and late, but no amount of hard work could quench his innate love for learning. His father became interested in the dairy export business and his son soon made a thorough study of its details. To do this he entered a cheese factory near Ingersoll, and learned the business at first hand. He made such a success of the work that when the manager of the work fell sick young Robertson was asked to take his place, and made good. His brand became famous. The demand exceeded the supply and a high price for the Robertson product was the result. Soon he managed a dozen factories. Other makers and farmers came to him to learn the secret of his success. And here, early in life, Mr. Robertson showed a trait of character that is one of his greatest assets and charms. He wants others to succeed, wants to give them the benefit of his experience, to lift them up and give them a wider outlook in life.

And so, scarcely out of his teens, this young man gathered his neighbors together and told them how he had succeeded. He emphasized the things he had found the most helpful—cleanliness and care. These neighborly lectures and talks brought him to the notice of the Ontario Government, and he was made professor of dairying in the Agricultural College at Guelph. His work here was singularly successful. He toured the country, lecturing at farmers' institutes or wherever he could get a handful of people together.

As a lecturer he has been unusually successful. He always knows his audience. When he faces them he makes sure he knows something of their character and circumstances, something of their desires and difficulties. Then he talks a language man understands. His success was the more remarkable when we remember that his audiences were very largely made up of hard headed conservative farmers. Many of them were opposed to theories, slow to take fire over new ideas, distrustful of the theorist, but otherwise thoughtful and intelligent. But despite all this, Robertson succeeded.

After serving the Ontario Government for some years his services were appropriated by the Dominion Government, and he was made Dominion Dairy Commissioner and later on Commissioner of Agriculture for Canada. He travelled from end to end

of the country, planning, lecturing, and working to improve our agricultural conditions. As he journeyed and fro over the country the thought came to him that it would better to interest the young. They were more pliable and plastic and an interested child meant a converted parent. With this idea in mind, he launched his crusade in behalf of young Canada. He had seen the profit in scientific dairying, and he now took up the question of sowing good selected seed. He offered \$100 in prizes to boys and girls who would send him the largest heads of wheat and oats from their father's farms. The response was most gratifying, and Prof. Robertson saw its future possibilities. He enlisted the support of Sir William Macdonald, who offered \$10,000 as prizes. As a result the yields of grains increased 27 and 28 per cent and from this movement has grown the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, who estimate that in three years crops have been increased in value by half a million dollars.

From seed grain Professor Robertson interested Sir William in manual training. Professor Robertson had studied the best systems in vogue in the United States, England and elsewhere, and adapted their best features to his manual training schools. He founded twenty-one of these, attended by 7,000 children. Sir William contributed the whole cost for three years, and then left the municipalities free to continue the schools if they wished. In every case they have been continued, and the movement is spreading rapidly. In Ontario the number grew from three to forty.

Another move was to consolidate rural schools. Professor Robertson took up this work with his characteristic energy, and again enlisted the sympathies of that good friend of education, Sir William Macdonald. In these consolidated schools the course was broadened to include gardening, sewing, cooking and manual training. Dr. Robertson felt that our elementary education system was backward, that it did not apply to the skill of hand and eye which calls out intelligence, and prepares for the home, the farm, the workshop, or the mill, where most boys and girls spend their lives. These schools were successful beyond all anticipation. The attendance was larger, the education better and broader, the results more prominent and effective. In these schools selected seed was sown in the gardens, attention paid to the value of rotation of crops, the protecting of crops against insects and fungous diseases.

The educational movement of these two men was now so broad that teachers required to be trained. Recognizing this need, Sir William has provided at Guelph two large buildings fully equipped for instruction of teachers. Here are courses for manual training, household science, cooking, sewing etc; also a course in nature study and gardening. At St. Anne's he has taken all that he found best at Guelph and in other colleges, and combined them into a system as unique and perfect as is possible to obtain.

The farm consists of 561 acres, divided into three parts, the campus 75 acres with plots for illustrations and research in grains, grasses and flowers, the small culture farm of 100 acres for horticulture and poultry-keeping, and the live stock and grain farm of 387 acres. All the buildings are modern, fireproof structures, models of simplicity and good taste.

The college has three departments: School for teachers, which takes the place of the former Provincial Normal School. In this special attention is paid to the needs of the rural districts.

School of Agriculture, which aims to provide a training by combination

of theory and practice.

School of household science, to impart instruction in all that pertains to good housekeeping.

In the school for teachers there are five classes—elementary, advanced-elementary, kindergarten, model school instruction and pedagogy.

The school of household science gives instruction to a wide range of subjects, including the study of foods, cooking, household economics, clothing materials, dress making, millinery, fuels, ventilation, home nursing and hygiene and home art. These courses admirably supplement those of the school of agriculture, and show the wonderful educational instinct of the Principal. In the school of Agriculture boys are taught how to win wealth from the soil, the cow, the cattle farm and the poultry yard. How to earn a good income is taught here, and how to spend it wisely and carefully is taught in the department of household science.

Professor Robertson's work has been a natural growth. From seed selection and manual training grew the movement to re-organize rural schools. From consolidated rural schools grew the plans for the great MacDonald college at St. Anne's. The question naturally arises, Will he succeed in the larger sphere? To know the man is to say "Yes". No person can look into his clear blue eyes or talk with him for five minutes and doubt his ability to succeed.

Further, we have but to look back over his busy, varied career and see success spelled large in his every movement. When he made cheese it sold at record prices. His dairying crusade increased our exports from less than \$10,000,000 in 1890 to over \$25,000,000 in 1900, and \$32,000,000 in 1907. His selected seed movement grew to become a national organization.

So with all his plans. He stood by till they had taken root, and then rushed off to launch new schemes.

The old was left to local authorities to carry on.

Allegedly Dr. Robertson's work at St. Anne's has won more than a national reputation. Delegations from United States and Europe have visited MacDonald College in numbers. Prof. Robertson has so won the confidence of that illustrious and eminently successful business man, Sir William Macdonald, that together they go forward developing ideas and applying them to the advancement of education and the "building up of the country." Sir William has put over five millions of dollars into the movement for the betterment of rural conditions by means of education. No man is able to inspire such confidence as to receive co-operation and backing so magnificent. That is as true of one man as of the other, for Prof. Robertson says Sir William has ever been the predominant partner in ideas and good-will, as well as in wealth.

But Professor Robertson is not an ordinary man. He inspires confidence. He is able to work with and outstep men. His staff is loyal. His students love him. To meet and know the man is to become a convert to the Robertson ideals. Tall and slightly stooped, face lean and angular, jaw prominent and firm, eyes of the clearest blue deeply set in his head, a high forehead, grey hair, and moustache grey and grizzled, the man betrays his nationality in his face and speech.

High-hearted and generous, eager, almost boyish in his enthusiasm, quick to think, quick to act, ready to catch at new ideas, he inspires one with some of his own enthusiasm. He is a man who has done things, yet he is always eager to learn, and from everyone he meets he gets a new viewpoint. He is the student, the teacher and the worker combined in as happy a combination as has ever been found. He has done a great work for Canada, and stands to-day equipped and ready to do even a greater work in the years to come.

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