

# THE CONSTITUTION OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY

BEING THE ANNUAL UNIVERSITY LECTURE OF THE SESSION OF 1888-89.

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The subject of this lecture has been suggested by the departure from among us within a few years of several old and valued members of the university, and by the fact that the men who took part in the revival of McGill University under its amended charter in 1852, have now almost entirely passed away, while the few who remain must soon follow. It is therefore desirable that the new generation which has come upon the stage should know something of the causes which gave our university its present constitution, and which have in some respects moulded that constitution as time has proved its original excellences or defects. Great universities are not usually created by any sudden or arbitrary act of establishment. They grow by slow accretion of men and means, and adapt themselves by degrees to the changing conditions of their existence, while the value and stability of their organization are proved by the vitality and vigor of growth which they exhibit, and the capacity which they show to continue in efficiency after their originating minds have passed away. McGill is now in the position to show the capabilities of its constitution in these respects.

Of the original band of citizens of Montreal who constituted the first board of governors under the new charter, Mr. Ferrier, the late Chancellor, was the sole survivor. Mr. David Davidson, it is true, one of the most able and zealous of these men, still lives, but he has long since removed from Canada and has resigned his connection with the university, though showing his interest in education in Montreal by continuing his gold medal in the High school. Of

the staff of professors organized between 1852 and 1855, not one now remains on our list of teachers except my friend Dr. Howard and myself. A few others still live, but have retired from active work. Thus the men of the University have passed away and have been renewed in about thirty-three years, and the government and educational work are for the most part in new hands, while ten generations of students have in the meantime graduated and have gone into the active work of life, and very many of them are older men than Dr. Howard and I were thirty years ago, and are now occupying the most important positions in the University and in public life.

McGill university, like many of the greater universities and colleges of other countries, originated in a private endowment. It is, however, almost alone in this respect among the colleges of Canada, and owes I think much of its prosperity and success to this fact, more especially in connection with the unique position which it occupies as the highest educational institution of an influential, progressive and intelligent minority in this city and province.

THE FOUNDER OF THE UNIVERSITY, JAMES M'GILL, was born on the 6th October, 1744, in Glasgow, Scotland. He received his early education and training in that country, but of these little is known. He arrived in Canada before the American revolution, and appears, in the first place, to have engaged in the Northwest fur trade, then one of the leading branches of business in Canada. Subsequently he settled in Montreal, and, in partnership with his