

JOHN WATSON was born in the parish of Gorbals, Glasgow on 25th February, 1847. He was the eldest of four children born to John Watson and Elizabeth Robertson. He had a brother William and two sisters, Margaret and Mary. His father was a block printer in Glasgow, whose family were farmers from Lanarkshire, and his mother came from a Northumbrian family. He was educated in the Free Church School in Kilmarnock. After leaving he became a clerk in Dumbartonshire and Glasgow. He attended the minister Dr John Jeffrey's Church in London Road and became an active member of the young men's literary association. His sister Margaret took a menial job to help pay for John Watson's further education. The money along with a small bursary enabled him to enter Glasgow University in 1866 where he intended to study to become a minister. At Glasgow he came under the influence of Edward Caird who dissuaded him from this vocation. Caird thought that Watson and Henry Jones were his best students, finding it difficult to decide between them when recommending a successor for his chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow in 1892. Jones, in the end, narrowly secured Caird's support.

Watson distinguished himself at Glasgow by winning the Coulter Prize for philosophy, and the Buchanan Prize for English Literature. He also won the Rector's Prize in the year that he graduated with the highest honours in mental philosophy, May, 1872. In 1874 he married Margaret Patterson Mitchell. They had one son and three daughters.

On the recommendation of Caird, Watson was appointed in 1872 to the chair of Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics at the traditionally Presbyterian University of Queen's in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Despite many offers of chairs from elsewhere, including Cornell in 1885, he stayed at Queen's. In 1889 he became Professor of Moral Philosophy, and Vice-Principal from 1901-1924. He was awarded the degree of LL.D. by Glasgow University in 1880 and later by the University of Toronto. Michigan awarded him a Litt. D., and Knox College, Toronto a DD. Watson was a charter member of the Royal Society of Canada which was founded in 1882, and was the first Canadian to be invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University (1910-12). He died in Kingston at the age of ninety-one and is buried in Cataraqui Cemetery.

Biographical: R. C. Wallace, Some Great Men of Queen's (Toronto, Ryerson, 1941); W. E. McNeill, 'John Watson', Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd series, xxxiii (1939); D. D. Calvin, Queen's University at Kingston (Kingston, Ontario, Queen's, 1941); Times, 28 Jan, and 3 Feb., 1939; Kingston Whig Standard (Canada), 28 Jan. 1939.

Principal Works: An Outline of Philosophy, 4th ed. (1908); The Interpretation of Religious Experience (1912); The State in War and Peace (1919). All published by Maclehose, Glasgow.