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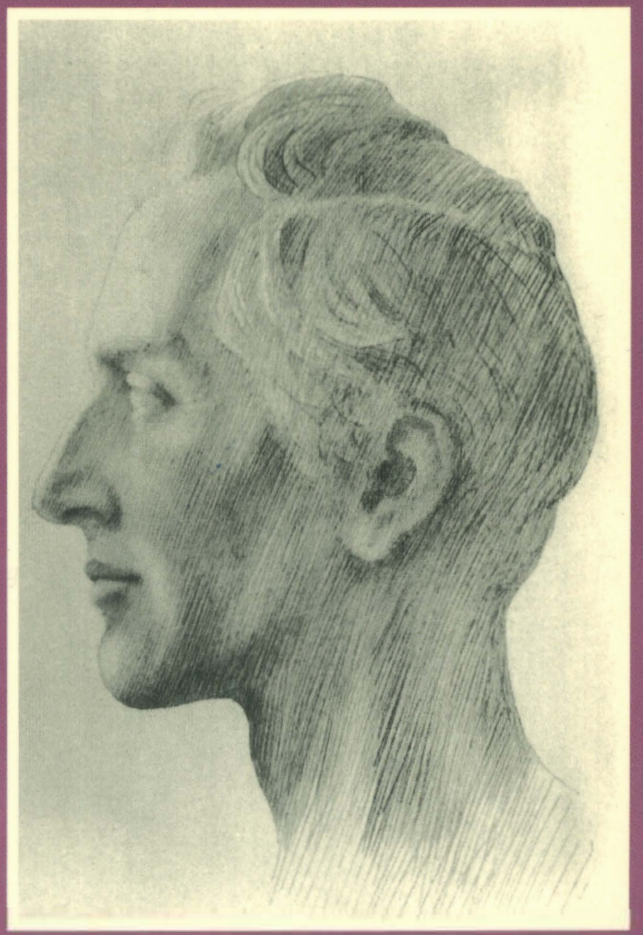
JOHN PERCIVAL
THE GREAT EDUCATOR

A short life of the founder of Clifton College, University College Bristol, Clifton High School and Somerville College Oxford, later also President of Trinity College Oxford, Headmaster of Rugby and Bishop of Hereford.



DEREK WINTERBOTTOM

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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John Percival: the Great Educator is the eighty-first pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. The author, Derek Winterbottom, is Head of History and Archivist at Clifton College. Previous publications include *Henry Newbolt and the Spirit of Clifton* and *Clifton after Percival: a Public School in the Twentieth Century*. He also wrote pamphlet No 77 in this series, *A Season's Fame*.

This account of the life of the first Headmaster of Clifton also continues the story of Percival's career after leaving the school. His contribution to the educational life of the city arising from his links with Clifton High School for Girls, Redland High School for Girls and the University College, later to become the University of Bristol, must constitute an unparalleled record in the city. His continuing career at Rugby and Oxford was equally significant and his final position as Bishop of Hereford was a fitting conclusion to the life of one who had started as the son of a humble farmer from Westmorland.

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Cover illustration: A sketch of Percival taken from the bust by Thomas Woolmer R.A.

JOHN PERCIVAL: THE GREAT EDUCATOR

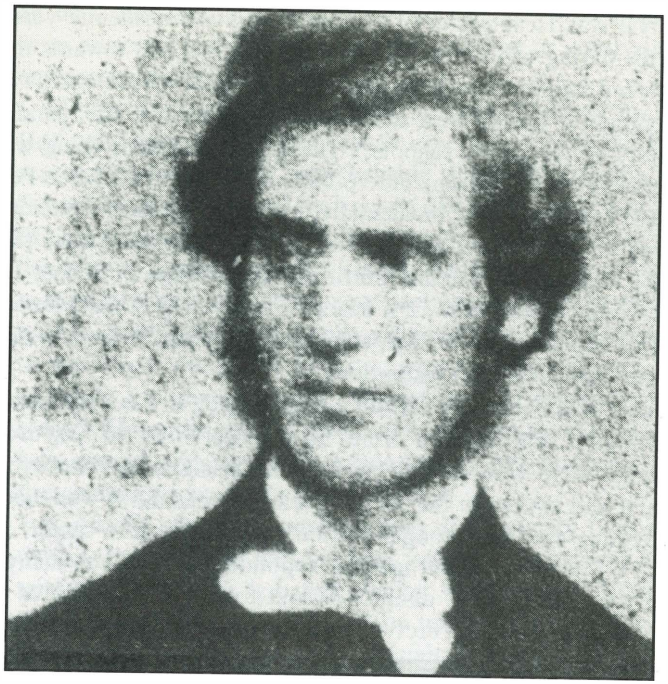
'Who is that man? I must paint his portrait.' This, we are told, was the excited reaction of the distinguished artist G.F. Watts on seeing John Percival enter a crowded room, and it gives some clue to the powerful impact Percival seems to have made on those who encountered him.[1] A son of the humblest of parents he nevertheless proved himself to be a Prince of Nature, arrestingly handsome, outstandingly intelligent, morally incorruptible, tirelessly hardworking. He was the founding Headmaster of Clifton, a creative President of Trinity College at Oxford, a reforming Headmaster at Rugby, and a radical Bishop of Hereford. He was also a decisive influence on the foundation of University College Bristol, Clifton and Redland High Schools and Somerville College at Oxford. The main purpose of this short study is to highlight Percival's achievements in Bristol, setting them in the context of his private life and public career.

Socially speaking, Percival came from nowhere. His father, William, was the son of a small-time Westmorland farmer and made good use of his powerful physique to become a successful wrestler. In 1834 he married Jane, the daughter of another local farmer, and their son John was born on September 27th in the same year: a sister followed in 1837. The happiness of this young family was short-lived because the mother died in the summer of 1838 and William Percival felt inadequate to the task of bringing up his children, so they were fostered by their mother's brother and his wife. Young John attended undistinguished village schools in Winton and Hackthorpe but his aunt Elizabeth made him learn a passage from the Bible every day so that later in life he knew most of the Psalms by heart. It was his ambition to attend Appleby Grammar School and at the age of twelve this was realised – though there were difficulties. One was that his uncle expected him to work in the fields at busy times, and another was that Appleby lay some distance from his home. It seems that he solved the former by doing the work *before* school, and the latter by walking to and from Appleby with a blue linen bag of books over his

shoulder and clogs on his feet – clogs with brass sides which made the other Appleby boys jealous of his superior turn-out.[2]

Under the tuition of his headmaster the Rev. John Richardson, Percival received an excellent grounding in Mathematics, Latin and Greek and he eventually won an Open Scholarship to Queen's College at Oxford, though not until 1855 when he was nearly twenty-one years old. By the time he began his studies at Oxford he was more mature in years and outlook than the average undergraduate, and he worked exceedingly hard, gaining in due course a Double First in Classics and Maths. He also tried to read History but his health broke down. On the strength of his Double First he was elected a Fellow of Queen's but over-exertion had made him such a physical wreck that no company would insure his life. He spent the winter of 1858–9 on a rest-cure at Pau where he chanced to meet Louisa Holland, a vivacious young English girl whose company he much enjoyed. Back in England he took the decision to enter Holy Orders, was ordained deacon and served as a College tutor at Queen's for two years. Then in 1860 he accepted the offer of a post teaching Classics at Rugby School, with a salary of £100 a year.[3] Two years later he was appointed Headmaster of Clifton.

The details of the crisis that brought Percival to Clifton have been told before.[4] The basic facts are that in 1860 a number of influential citizens, led by the Mayor, John Bates, decided to found a new school in Clifton that would provide an education of the type made popular by Dr. Thomas Arnold during his Headmastership of Rugby (1823–1842). The Arnold 'Public School' (so-called because it was open to members of the general public and not restricted, like the grammar schools, to local residents or run, like the 'private' schools, for their owners' profit) had the reputation of promoting Christianity, the conduct of a gentleman, and high academic standards. Bristol was a thriving city with a growing population: it was high time a 'great school' on the new model was established there, the founding Committee thought. John Guthrie, a Canon of Bristol Cathedral, was elected Chairman of the first Council of the Limited Liability Company formed to build 'Clifton College,' and he worked fast. Shareholders were recruited, a plot of land was bought, an architect was commissioned, and early in 1861 a headmaster was appointed. This was the Rev. Charles Evans, a senior master at Rugby School highly recommended by the Headmaster, Dr. Temple. For over a year Evans worked closely with the Council, helping to plan the buildings and to make all the necessary arrangements for the opening of the College in September 1862. Then, at the last moment, Evans accepted the headmastership of his old school, King Edward's, Birmingham, and left the Clifton Council without a headmaster within



John Percival, aged 28, in 1863
(enlarged from an early photographic miniature)

weeks of the advertised opening of the school. Canon Guthrie rushed back to Temple at Rugby for a solution to this dilemma and Temple, mightly impressed with the young John Percival, persuaded Guthrie to let the Clifton Council interview him, promising them, it seems, that if he were appointed he would do for Clifton what Arnold had done for Rugby.[5]

Frederick Temple was a remarkable man, a great headmaster and a future Archbishop of Canterbury. He was also a good judge of character for Percival was still only 27 years old at this time, he had been on the Rugby staff for less than two years and had not much enjoyed teaching elementary subjects to third formers there. Moreover, he had no money, no influential family background, and no experience of business. What he did have was a brilliant academic record, a fine presence, a strong Christian faith and, as far as Temple was concerned, a reservoir of hidden potential. The Clifton Council decided to take the risk, Percival's appointment was announced on September 4th and Clifton College opened on September 30th, 1862 with 76 pupils.

Percival was Headmaster of Clifton for sixteen academic years and two terms during which time his hair turned grey, and towards the end he suffered nightmares because of worry and overwork. Yet his achievements at Clifton were amazing and have few, if any, parallels in the history of the public schools.* The most remarkable thing was the rapid growth of the school from 76 boys in 1862 to 680 when Percival left in 1879, a fact which, incidentally, made him by most contemporary standards a rich man because he was paid a handsome salary (£800 a year), he made a considerable profit on the boarders in School House, and the Council paid him £2 a head for every boy in the school over 200.[6] This explains how he was able, over the years, to be a benefactor to Clifton and many other institutions.

Not only was Percival's Clifton a large school, it was very successful academically. During his time 50 scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge were won as well as forty admissions to Woolwich and Sandhurst and twelve to the Indian Civil Service, and it was this more than anything else that brought Clifton recognition as a 'major' public School.[7] Of the 91 assistant masters appointed by Percival, many were men of great intellectual distinction and four became Fellows of the Royal Society. Indeed Percival's insistence that Science should be taught to all boys made Clifton a pioneer in this field. He was also determined that day boys should be given the same status as boarders, and he opened a house for Jewish boys. Having inherited Charles Hansom's fine Big School and School House Percival saw to it that Clifton was endowed with buildings in the grand manner, such as the Chapel, the Library named after him, and several boarding houses along College Road. Finally Clifton was a *strenuous* school, one in which staff and boys alike were driven by the Headmaster's urgent desire that they should work hard, play hard, and pray hard. In so far as it is possible to make adolescent boys live and think cleanly, Percival's Clifton seems to have succeeded.[8]

He cannot have been, in these early years, an entirely loveable figure. Observers often remarked on the reserve which made him stand aside from informal relationships with colleagues or pupils and without question he had the ability to strike fear into the hearts of the latter and even the former. He had no time for laziness of any sort, nor for lapses of morality. Even as a young man he was unquestionably formidable, and many would quail before his stern eye and blench in the face of admonitions delivered in a strong yet resonant Westmorland accent. For

* It was presumably in recognition of this that Percival was awarded an honorary doctorate (LL.D) by the University of St Andrews in February 1874.

all that, there *was* a softer side to him, a rare but devastating smile, a love of small children, a generous impulse to entertain friends, an enjoyment of family life.

Eleven days after the College opened Percival married Louisa Holland, whom he had first met four years before in the Pyrenees. She was the perfect partner, very capable in her official role as hostess in School House which rapidly became one of the centres of Bristol social life. A petite figure with brilliant brown eyes, the new Mrs Percival lived life to the full and often rescued her husband from his more severe moods. She bore him seven sons and one daughter in rapid succession but the growth of a large family did not exhaust her enthusiasm for life: 'it was impossible not to love her,' wrote a contemporary, 'and she was so bright and cheery herself, that she brought brightness wherever she went.'[9] Moreover, Louisa Percival was a strong advocate of education for women and no small influence on her husband's part in the foundation of schools for girls in Bristol.

Percival's role in the establishment of University College Bristol and Clifton High School will be dealt with later because his involvement with them, though it began during his time at Clifton, continued throughout his career. It should be understood, however, that he was always deeply interested in the social problems of Bristol and did not wish Clifton to be isolated from them. In 1869 Percival sponsored a 'ragged school' in the Dings of Bristol and in 1875 a more ambitious scheme was started to link Clifton boys with the parish of St. Barnabas where the first Clifton College missioner (the Rev. H.D. Rawnsley) began work in the Newfoundland Road District in 1876. In establishing this Clifton College Mission to an 'inner City' area, Percival began a fashion followed by many other public schools.

There was only one other post to which Percival aspired during these years, and that was the Headmastership of Rugby, for which he applied unsuccessfully in 1869 and 1874. By 1879 it was clear he was the victim of his own success at Clifton because he was increasingly worried by all the problems, personal and corporate, that arose from the running of so large a school. He desperately needed a change, and this is why he accepted the unexpected offer of the Fellows of Trinity College, Oxford, to be their President. He did not abandon Clifton, however, for he very soon became a member of the Council and was Chairman of it for twenty-two years, as we shall see. Quite apart from the gifts and good wishes showered upon him by Clifton College when he ceased to be Headmaster, Percival received a handsome tribute from the citizens of Bristol in the form of 'a magnificent service of silver plate of the value of seven hundred pounds as a testimonial to the public services which he

has rendered as the first Headmaster of Clifton College and to his many successful efforts in the advancement of education in the city of Bristol.'[10]

The choice of Percival as the new President of Trinity College caused a sensation in Oxford. His predecessor, S.W. Wayte, resigned and retired to Clifton, as it happened, but this does not seem to have been the connection.[11] A number of the Fellows of Trinity apparently felt that the rather sleepy College needed stirring up and championed Percival in what proved to be a far from unanimous election. A group of Trinity graduates published a six-point protest which included the objection that 'the bestowal of such an honour on one who has done nothing for the College is significantly unfair to those who have devoted the best years of their lives to it.'[12] Indeed Percival was the first President since the seventeenth century not to have been either an undergraduate or a Fellow of Trinity.[13]

Percival was President of Trinity for eight years, and he never felt completely at home there. The Head of an Oxford College is the Chairman of a self-governing body and his authority over the Fellows and undergraduates is nothing like as strong as that of a headmaster over staff and boys. On his first Sunday in the new post Percival was shocked to see that hardly any undergraduates attended morning chapel and he summoned all of them to the President's lodgings. They came, but being kept waiting launched into an irreverent and impromptu dance. Percival frowned on smoking and drinking and once fined an undergraduate for wearing a straw hat on a Sunday. Most unpopular of all was a questionnaire which he issued to all undergraduates, seeking information on the number of lectures they attended, books they read, hours they worked and so on. This soon prompted a popular cartoon of the President and his uncompleted form which was displayed around Oxford amid general merriment.[14] The Fellows of Trinity meanwhile found that their new President was not a man easily to accept or admit defeat. If outvoted on some measure, he would patiently bring it up at a later date until he got his way. They also found unnerving the fact that Percival seemed keen not only to reform Trinity but all Oxford by making the University more accessible to poor but worthy students. Clearly he thought there were far too many public school loafers there, wasting time. Indeed, after only three years at Trinity Percival wrote to the Vice-Chancellor, his friend Benjamin Jowett, saying 'I don't suppose I shall ever be able to do much good for Trinity,' and offering to resign and take over responsibility for the non-collegiate students who were a far less privileged group in the University. Jowett wrote back to say he must do no such thing, and in any case, 'I think also that you are mistaken

about your success at Trinity. You have surely got on very well. Does not the College increase in numbers? You have helped female education, you have gathered a pleasant society about you and your hospitality is greatly valued. No one who has a great deal of energy will be long popular in Oxford . . .'[15]

In 1882 the Lord Chancellor, Lord Selborne, offered to appoint Percival a Canon of Bristol Cathedral which would involve his being resident in Bristol for certain weeks of the year. Percival was glad to accept and in due course set up a second home at Callender House in Bristol. He was thus a frequent visitor to the City between 1882 and 1887 which enabled him to keep a close watch on the affairs of Clifton College, University College Bristol and Clifton High School, and it was during these years that he helped with the foundation of Redland High School. He also started Sunday evening services in the nave of the cathedral which have been described as 'a great feature in the religious life of Bristol and a strong influence on the community.'[16] The Dean at first refused permission for services to be held in the nave because 'there is no pulpit and the chapter will not provide one because no one will come.' Typically, Percival had a pulpit made at his own expense, and the nave was crowded every Sunday evening.[17]

Between 1875 and 1880 it became fashionable to think that women should be admitted to the Universities. Cambridge led the field with the establishment of Girton and Newnham Colleges and in 1879 an Oxford Committee met to discuss the foundation of a Hall of residence for women there. Unfortunately there was bitter disagreement about religious qualifications though this was eventually solved by the foundation of two institutions, Lady Margaret Hall for Anglicans, and Somerville Hall, where it was laid down that 'no distinction will be made between students on the ground of their belonging to different religious denominations.'[19] The Warden of Keble College became the first President of Lady Margaret Hall and early in 1879 Percival took on the Presidency of Somerville. That he should have championed the undenominational institution rather than the Anglican one was typical of his liberal churchmanship, and that he should have embarked on this ambitious venture within weeks of arriving in Oxford was typical of his energy.

Percival's experience in the early years at Clifton proved useful in the establishment of Somerville where it was necessary to appoint a Principal (Miss Shaw Lefevre)[20] and acquire suitable buildings. A Limited Liability Company was set up to raise funds and Percival himself lent £300 towards the purchase of Walton House, just off the Woodstock Road, where accommodation was provided for 16 students

Percival and his Clifton Staff in 1865 (College Archives)

in the first instance. It is clear from reading the minutes of the Council's earliest meetings that Percival chaired nearly all of them and was the guiding influence in the secure establishment of Somerville Hall. He offered to resign as President when he left Oxford in 1887 but was urged by the Council to stay on, remaining President until 1893. In 1900 the Council commissioned a portrait of Percival from his artist daughter Bessie (Mrs. Basil Johnson) which hangs in Somerville still.

Though Percival had to struggle to get his way at Trinity, there is no doubt that he did in the end. The pressure he put on the undergraduates produced better examination results and those, in turn, attracted good men to Trinity so that the numbers in the College increased significantly. Up to the year in which he became President the number of undergraduate admissions throughout the century varied from a low of 8 in 1804 to a high of 31 in 1837. After 1879 the average number admitted was 40 and the average number of resident undergraduates was 140. [21] It was in Percival's time, too, that the College was transformed by the construction of the 'New Buildings' in mock Jacobean style by the architect T.G. Jackson, R.A. Begun in 1833, these were ready for use two years later, and in 1887 a new home for the President, described as 'large and sunny' was completed. At Trinity, as at Clifton, Percival lived for several years in the middle of a building site.

In fact he and his family never moved into the newly-built President's lodgings because rather late in life he now received the call from Rugby that he had hoped for years earlier. He did not apply: the Chairman of the Rugby governors offered him the post in a letter dated November 17 1886 and the next day Percival wrote to accept. The schoolmaster in him yearned to be at work again and, strange though it may seem towards the end of the twentieth century, at this point in the nineteenth century an Oxford Professor and Fellow of Trinity could describe the position of Head of Rugby as 'probably one of the most important in England.'[23]

Between 1869 and 1874 Rugby had suffered a disaster because a new Headmaster, Dr Hayman, had failed to command the respect of staff or boys. In 1874 he had been replaced by Dr Jex-Blake whose conciliatory methods had restored order, but the Rugby governors sensed that the school had grown slack and Percival was their unanimous choice to restore its discipline. A boy who was at the school just before Percival arrived wrote that 'there was a good deal of bullying and a tradition of much worse things in the recent past . . . and there was a great deal of foul talk and immorality – a great deal.'[24] Percival had not expected to discover such serious problems and realised that a lot had to be done in a short time. Early on he expelled five boys, publicly striking their names from the School List. 'Nobody who was present at that gathering in New

Big School will ever forget it' wrote an eye-witness. 'One could feel the School wincing and writhing – the tall, stern figure on the platform (he seemed about forty feet high), the white face lit up with intense but controlled moral indignation – the pause, and then the word or phrase from him like a lash. And behind it all the feeling of power and righteousness and judgement to come.'[25]

Percival's moral crusade, thus launched, continued unabated. Minor athletic distinctions were abolished because he considered sports 'swells' a dubious influence: the Sixth Form was castigated in Percival's most unrestrained northern tones for using 'filthy language', test questions were introduced at the beginning of every lesson, a boy with a very bad half term report was flogged and indeed as a famous Rugby master G.F. Bradby made clear, 'The rod in his left hand was no toy weapon'. He appointed some outstanding young masters to the Rugby staff, many of whom had an important influence on the educational world of the next century – Frank Fletcher chief among them. He would go into these young masters' lessons and ask impossible questions ('in what order did the American colonies revolt?') just to keep everyone on their toes. In the matter of masters' salaries he was considered mean, or as Bradby put it more tactfully, 'some instinct for a bargain, inherited with his northern blood, influenced him unconsciously'. Even his admirers regarded some of his pronouncements against immorality as bizarre, such as his condemnation of hot cross buns as 'a relic of paganism and an excuse for guzzling', and in his final year his famous ban on football shorts that exposed bare knees. 'There are many bad boys here, there is a lot of evil in the place', he would say to new boys: 'Eh, I shall be watching you every day of your lives'.[26]

It would be wrong, however, to deduce that late middle age and the task of purifying Rugby had turned Percival into a monster. He was housemaster of School House as well as headmaster, and one of the boys in his house wrote that 'under the austere surface there was, in spite, at times, of appearances, a real sympathy, abundance of kindness, and a genuine sense of humour. Above all, his simplicity of character was no less remarkable than its strength. If his rule reveals an almost despotic firmness and austerity, it was based on trust . . . he was trusted absolutely.'[27] And there was always Mrs Percival in the School House drawing-room, dispensing sweetness and light.

In May 1894 Percival wrote a long letter to *The Times* in which he argued in favour of the Liberal Government's Bill to disestablish the Welsh Church – on the grounds that most churchgoers in Wales were Presbyterians who were on the whole hostile to the 'official' Anglican

Church. This point of view was totally unacceptable to the Tory Party and raised a storm against Percival in Tory circles: several boys down for Rugby were withdrawn and plots were hatched in London Clubs to silence him. He had been a supporter of the Liberal Party all his life and the paradox is that though he ran both Clifton and Rugby with an autocrat's hand, he had little respect for 'establishments', either political or religious. Indeed, almost as if to emphasise that his letter was not written to curry favour with the Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, he followed it up shortly afterwards with a sermon in Westminster Abbey denouncing gambling and lamenting Rosebery's recent win in the Derby. This did not prevent the Prime Minister writing to him in January 1895 with the news that 'I am extremely anxious that you should fill the vacant see of Hereford. It is not merely that your standing, experience and ability give you a claim to a bishopric; but the circumstances of Hereford make it of the highest importance that it should be presided over at this juncture by one who entertains large and liberal views as to the true nature and function of church establishments.' Rosebery's offer was prompted by political motives and Percival wrote back expressing doubts 'whether with my democratic sympathies and general views I should be justified in taking charge of such a Diocese as Hereford' for, as he knew, it was a largely agricultural, conservative, county. He would have preferred a post in the industrial north, or perhaps the Deanery of Durham. He took five days to decide, then accepted.[28]

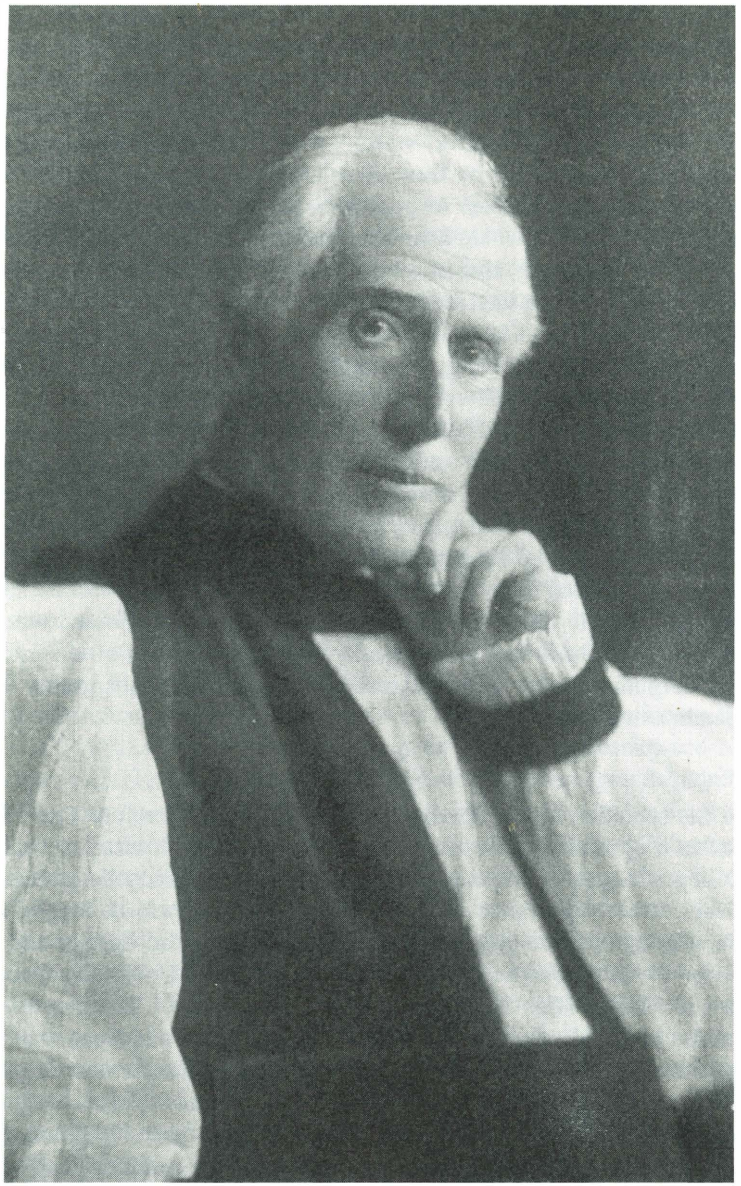
The staff and boys of Rugby School may well have breathed a sigh of relief at the news and even nature made her comment at his departure, for on the Sunday that Percival left Rugby by train for his consecration as Bishop a great gale brought down seventeen elm trees in the School Close and reaching Fulham Palace, having witnessed this desolation, Percival was observed to be 'almost in tears.' He was consecrated by Archbishop Benson, one of the very few other men who had built up a great school (Wellington College) from its opening day. His first act as Bishop was to take confirmation at Rugby in the remaining days of the Lent Term of 1895. There cannot be many headmasters who have done this. Then came the end of the term and his move from School House at Rugby to the Bishop's Palace at Hereford, a rambling building standing very close to the venerable Norman Cathedral. From the outside the Palace has an eighteenth century appearance with long sash windows looking on to pleasant lawns, but the interior contains a late 12th century hall, one of the oldest in Britain. Here, in the heart of a small cathedral town on the borders of England and Wales, Percival was to be based for the next 22 years.

'My farmers were staunch Conservatives, and had a holy horror of Liberals and Radicals, so that they did not look with favour on the appointment of Dr Percival, nor were they prepared to give his Lordship a very hearty reception.' This was the situation in one of the parishes of the new Bishop's diocese, and it proved to be typical. However, the 'humility and tolerance' of the Bishop soon made an excellent impression. So did life at the Palace, for one of his clergy wrote that 'he has been called a puritan, but those who knew him at home surrounded by young people saw his power of enjoyment, his delight in merriment.'[29] A great shadow fell across his personal life, however, in the summer of 1896 when his wife died after only a year at Hereford. Two of their eight children, Charles and William, had died in early childhood and Frederick, their promising youngest son, had died in a tragic accident on Port Meadow during their Oxford years. Now he had this great loss to bear and he found the next two years difficult and lonely. However in 1899 he walked down the aisle of Westminster Abbey with a new bride, Mary Symonds, the daughter of Dr Frederic Symonds who had treated him when he was an undergraduate at Oxford. This second marriage provided him with domestic happiness and companionship for the rest of his life, though tragic blows fell upon three of his remaining five children. The eldest, Robert, died in 1908 after a long illness; his next son, John, died of pneumonia in 1914 and Arthur Percival died in October 1914 on the eve of promotion to the rank of Brigadier. Only Percival's daughter Elizabeth (Bessie) and his son Launcelot (Lance) survived him, though he had several grandchildren.

This is not the place for a detailed enquiry into Percival's work as Bishop of Hereford, which is excellently documented in over 200 pages of Archbishop William Temple's distinguished biography of his godfather. In general it would be true to say that his outspoken involvement in Liberal (and later Labour) politics and his appointment of many liberal churchmen to offices within the diocese caused great controversy and alienated many of the more conservative spirits among the clergy and laity, as did his enthusiasm for closer co-operation between nonconformists and the Anglican church. On the other hand, Hereford, previously dubbed 'the dead See' because of its sleepiness was certainly brought into the public consciousness under Percival and if he had his critics, he also had earnest admirers. On the national stage his main concerns were the fight against drunkenness and gambling, in which cause his voice was often heard in the House of Lords, and Education in all its forms, especially the provision of University places for women and working men. Whatever people thought about the Bishop's policies, however, 'in spite of everything,' as his *Times*

obituary declared 'to know him was to admire.' He remained in office until poor health forced his resignation in the summer of 1917 and he retired to live in Oxford for a few months before his death on December 3 1918, aged 84. Tributes were paid to 'our bishop, orator – in a grave and weighty and thoughtful style – who, scholar and administrator though he was, set little by these gifts but rather aspired to create a new episcopal type, the citizen bishop, ever asking himself, and insistently pressing on all who would hear him, the question what our Christianity should be inspiring and moving us to do amidst all the complex relationships, the glaring inequalities, and the undeserved hardships of our social life.'[30] 'In his public life,' another preacher said, he was 'a lonely and commanding figure – lonely because he thought in advance of his times, and like all who have vision, found himself a voice crying in the wilderness, in conflict with tradition and prejudice. He loved men of strength, vigour, truth and duty. Laziness and insincerity brought forth his stern rebuke. His work in the diocese will remain because, though he made few converts to his point of view, he decreased inertia and apathy and quickened men to fulfil their responsibilities. He loved nature and gloried in its beauties and had an intense love for his home amongst us. He delighted in joy and merriment, and joined whole-heartedly in games and amusements. The entertainment of his friends and neighbours was to him a real pleasure, and his hospitality will remain a tradition.'[31]

At his specific request Percival was buried not in Hereford Cathedral, but in a special tomb constructed beneath the high altar of Clifton College Chapel, and it is fitting that his remains should lie in Bristol. Despite the importance of his achievements in Oxford, Rugby and Hereford nothing compares with his creation of Clifton College and the major contributions he made to the foundation of University College Bristol, Clifton High School and Redland High School. The fact that he ceased to be Headmaster of Clifton in 1879 did not mean that his influence in the school came to an end: far from it. For the next 38 years he was a member of the Council, and Chairman from 1895 to 1917. His was the dominant voice in all the major decisions taken at Clifton until 1917 and he saw to it that the school remained true to his original ideas and aspirations.[32] Above all he had the main say in the appointment of four of his successors as headmaster, who included a former Rugby colleague (James M. Wilson), a master he had himself appointed to Rugby (A.A. David), and an ex-pupil of his from School House at Clifton (J.E. King). Their attitude is summed up by David who wrote to



Percival as Bishop of Hereford

Percival on his appointment 'It is a particular pleasure to me to think that I shall be doing my utmost to maintain traditions which you created.'[33] During this period the buildings, numbers and reputation of the school steadily increased so that King George V could say on his visit to mark its Jubilee in 1912 that 'the steady progress of your school since its foundation fifty years ago has earned for you a place among the great public schools of England.'[34]

It is easy to forget that when Clifton College opened in 1862 the system of education nationally was by modern standards very limited. There were only four universities in England, (Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and London). There were a considerable number of ancient grammar schools, many of them very small (even Bristol Grammar School was only educating about 20 pupils over sixteen in 1864) and there was a growing number of large and thriving fee-paying 'public schools'. Elementary education for all had not yet been established while Percival's great enthusiasms, the education of women and working men, were considered very daring and novel. Early in 1868 John and Louisa Percival took the lead in forming a committee in Clifton to promote the Higher Education of Women and arranged lectures on the subject by distinguished visiting speakers. In 1872 Percival wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Connection of the Universities and the Great Towns* in which he argued that towns like 'Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Liverpool' should be allowed to develop their own universities with the initial help, both financial and academic, of Oxford and Cambridge colleges.[35] This idea was enthusiastically received by a few influential figures, notably Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol, who became from this time a firm ally of Percival. In 1873 Percival was co-opted on to a committee chaired by the Dean of Bristol (Gilbert Elliot) which brought together several groups dedicated to the establishment of a College for Higher Education, and in June 1874 a meeting was held in the Victoria Rooms in Bristol with 'many distinguished educationists present and a fine array of the citizenry'. The purpose of this was to raise funds for the establishment of a 'College of Science and Literature for the West of England and South Wales', and the response was sufficiently encouraging to allow 'University College Bristol' to open on October 10 1876. In the complicated manoeuvres and discussions that led to this development, it is generally agreed that Percival's role, especially in winning the support of figures such as Jowett in Oxford, was crucial. Lewis Fry, son of the chocolate magnate, a Liberal M.P. and close collaborator with Percival on this project was 'quite of the opinion that they owed the foundation of the College – as far as that statement can be made – to Dr Percival.'[36]

In 1876 an acre of land was bought near the top of Park Street and in 1880 the first part of the University College's buildings was opened. The architect was Charles Hansom, who had built Clifton College and had worked closely for many years with Percival. A unique feature of the new institution was that it admitted women as well as men, so that Bristol 'became the first town in England to possess a University College open to men and women alike.'[37] As both President of Trinity College, Oxford, and a Canon of Bristol, Percival was well placed to give every assistance to University College, whose life in the early years amounted to a struggle for survival, mainly because of lack of funds. It was not at this stage an independent institution and its students sat the external exams of London University. Many were local and also part-time, and their numbers were not large. Between 1883 and 1909 about one hundred external degrees in Arts and Science were awarded to University College students. In 1893 Percival was elected President of the College and in 1901 he publicly stated that it should aim for the status of an independent university, which Birmingham had recently achieved.

As Bishop of Hereford Percival was well placed to use his influence in the House of Lords and other political circles to pave the way for the grant of a University charter. The chief need was for an endowment and this was eventually provided by Henry Overton Wills, one of the richest men in Britain. In 1908 he promised £100,000 for the new university, making it a viable proposition at a stroke. This announcement was made at the University Colston dinner, and Professor G.H. Leonard found Percival's response unforgettable: 'I remember just where he stood and how he looked, and the sound of his voice – so unlike our West of England voices. His was a very noble and beautiful figure to look upon in old age – an old man of a ruddy countenance, venerable with the fine white hair which added so much to the natural dignity of his earlier days, drawing himself up to his full height and speaking to us, like a prophet, about our city, "the lantern of the west," and his dreams for it, and the sense he had of a warfare accomplished, and a work that he left to us, who were present there that night, to carry on the old spirit'.[39] The Charter of Bristol University was granted in 1909 and H.O. Wills became its first Chancellor. Percival had worked for well over thirty years helping to launch what was to become one of Britain's most distinguished universities.

Clifton High School for Girls seems to have its origins in the 'National Union for improving the Education of Women of all classes,' founded by Maria Grey in 1871. Branches were soon formed in 36 countries and by 1874 the Committee for 'Somersetshire' consisted of twelve people, one of whom was John Percival. In 1877 he, together

with Lt. Col. A.C. Pears persuaded a number of people to join a committee which would set up a company to start a girls' school in Clifton. Percival was Vice-President of the Committee and the detailed planning for the new school was done in twelve committee meetings held in School House during the course of 1877. No. 65 Pembroke Road was acquired in the first instance and the school opened on January 24 1878 with sixty-seven girls under the control of the first Headmistress, Miss Alice Woods. The first name on the school roll was that of Bessie, Percival's only daughter.[40]

There was so much enthusiasm for the new school that it very soon became clear that the Pembroke Road house was too small and as a result of eighteen further Council meetings and much additional work by sub-committees a larger house was bought standing in an acre of land bordered by Clifton Park Road and College Road. To these (the present) premises the school was moved for the January term of 1879, which was Percival's first term in Oxford. As effective Chairman of the Clifton High School's first Council he had been at the centre of the hectic events of 1877 and 1878 that had seen the new school established in one building, then another. This was exactly the period when pressure of work of various kinds was causing him to suffer from recurrent nightmares. At least his daughter, Bessie, was able later to record that her time at the High School had been 'a dream of delight'.[41] Percival's personal involvement with the school waned during the 1880's though the new Headmaster of Clifton, J.M. Wilson, was a member of the Council, as were George Wollaston, a Clifton housemaster, and his wife Constance. The school made steady progress, and numbers stood at 200 in 1913. The decision to join the Direct Grant system in 1920 was very popular with parents and within four years there were 400 girls at the school, with all the necessary expansion of buildings that this involved.

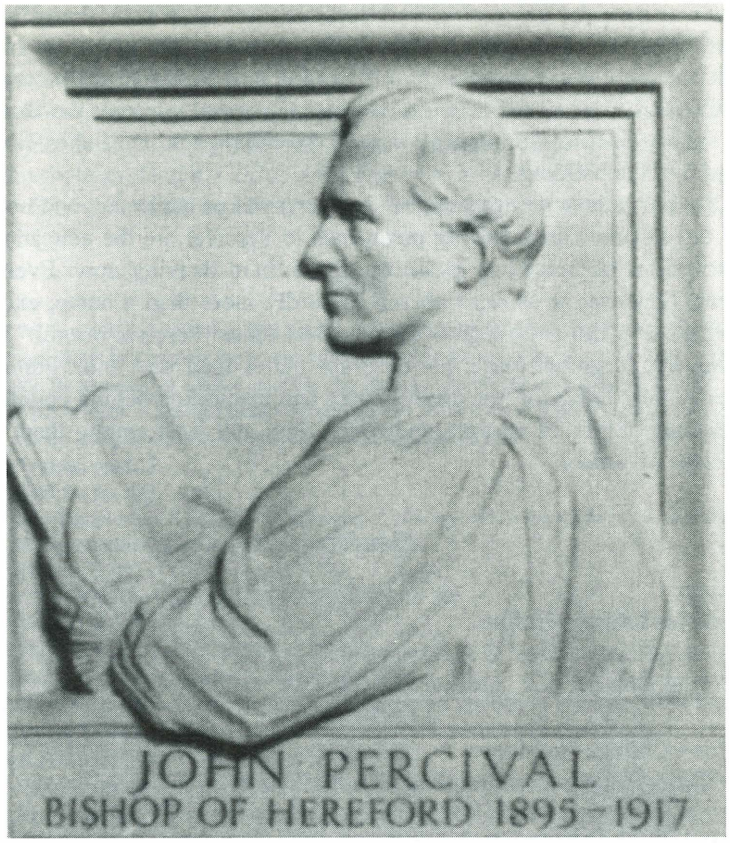
Percival played no part in the earliest years of the High School at Redland which opened in September 1880 at numbers 27 and 28 Redland Grove with four pupils, two of them the daughters of the Rev. T.G. Rose who had been Minister of Clifton Down Congregational Church, and who originally founded this little school. Within a year there were 40 girls and in 1882 Rose sold the school to a Council formed for the purpose of establishing it more securely. With Elizabeth Cocks as Headmistress the school prospered and in April 1883 Percival was invited to become President. Rather in the way that he had been instrumental in acquiring suitable premises for Clifton High School and Somerville Hall, he very soon urged the purchase of the Palladian style Redland Court, one of Bristol's most attractive private houses, to which the school duly moved with 150 pupils in May 1885. Percival presided

at the opening ceremony of this splendid new home with its gilt mirrors, its grey, pink and gold drawing-room and its library whose walls were hung with thick corded crimson silk, like 'a veritable fairy castle'.[42]

In 1887 numbers reached 202 and at the end of 1889 Percival came from Rugby to distribute examination certificates and announce that he wished to found a scholarship to be held by girls in the Sixth Form. In 1896 he was elected Chairman of the Council as well as being President, though the Rev. Urijah Thomas usually acted for him when he was unable to travel over from Hereford. Percival's Prize-day speech that year was sufficiently controversial to be reported in *Punch* which announced that Dr Percival 'sometimes saw very smart young ladies in waistcoats and so on, which suggested imitation of men, and he always felt it was a mistake.' This came quite soon after his ban on shorts at Rugby and *Punch* was doubtless striking a blow for the young in mischievously suggesting that a Bishop in formal dress surely looked more like a woman than a man.[43] Numbers at Redland reached 300 in 1913 and in 1917 the school was divided into four houses, one of them named after Percival who, though he died the next year, had presided over the fortunes of this flourishing institution for thirty-five years.

Even an investigative journalist of the late twentieth century would find it very difficult to drag Percival down from the ranks of the Good and the Great. Psychologists might consider his humble origins a main cause of his dynamism and ambition, while the early death of his mother and rejection by his father might be seen as the reasons for his reserve. He drove everyone so hard that it is probably true that many people at Clifton, Oxford, Rugby and Hereford were glad to see him relinquish his posts there, and on occasion he could seem mean, unforgiving and relentless. According to E.M. Oakeley 'a prominent Cabinet Minister, about 1906, asked by a warm admirer of the Bishop of Hereford how far the Peers were getting to appreciate him surprised the enquirer by the curt rejoinder "Why, they hate him like the devil".'[44]

However, the positive side to Percival's achievements is so overwhelming as to render criticisms trivial. Unlike Arnold he did not quite find a Thomas Hughes to immortalise him in the pages of a literary classic, though Henry Newbolt made a brave attempt with his 'Dr Cumberland' in his novel *The Twymans*: 'the tall spare figure, the chiselled face, with its lofty and remote air, saved from too dominant an austerity by the grace of the slightly stooping head . . . the lingering north-country accent that gave so curious a distinction to the voice, and the unconscious melancholy cadence that softened its strenuousness with a grave beauty of resignation.'[45] Percival was, nevertheless, well served by his biographer, William Temple, his godson and a pupil in



Percival's memorial in Hereford Cathedral

School House at Rugby when Percival was Headmaster. By the time he wrote his *Life of Bishop Percival* in 1921 Temple had already been a headmaster himself (at Repton), as well as a bishop (of Manchester) and would soon become Archbishop of Canterbury. The biography is a fine piece of scholarship, elegantly written, and containing a wealth of primary source material relevant to every stage in Percival's career. By contrast the Clifton master E.M. Oakeley published in 1919 his *Bishop Percival*, subtitled 'A brief sketch of a great career' which is, indeed, the briefest of sketches, touching only on a few aspects of Percival's life.

Although several paintings of Percival survive, the most outstanding likeness of him is the superb bust by Thomas Woolner, one of the nineteenth century's finest sculptors. In Henry Newbolt's opinion

Percival had 'the grace of a marble statue', and in Woolner's masterly work Percival's face, seen from one side, smiles grimly: yet on the other side the same smile appears entirely benign. A second fine sculpture, his white marble memorial tablet in Hereford Cathedral, presents the Bishop in stately profile, dominating one of the most prominent sites in the centre of the building.

Yet portraits and sculptures can be destroyed or neglected, and books go out of print. More lasting memorials to Percival are the educational institutions he helped to establish, all of them thriving now. Even in these, however, he is remembered as hardly more than a name, except perhaps at Clifton College – though even there 'Percival's tomb' is a shadowy, forgotten place. He deserves better than this: John Percival was a Great Educator, the driving force and inspiration behind countless men and women of all ages and every class, not least among them the citizens of Bristol.

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Notes

1. W. Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival,* p. 42 The full story, as told by Percival's wife, is that Watts had refused the commission of George Moore, a friend of Percival, to paint the Headmaster of Clifton because 'he liked to choose his own subjects and did not wish to paint a schoolmaster.' Moore invited them both to a party, and this was the result. The portrait was eventually painted for a fee of £500.
2. Temple, pp. 2, 3.
3. Temple, pp. 4, 7.
4. See Temple, pp. 11, 12; O.F. Christie, *A History of Clifton College,* p. 25; Derek Winterbottom *Clifton After Percival* pp. 12–20.
5. Temple, p. 11.
6. Clifton College Company Ltd Minutes Vol. 1 p. 39.
7. Temple, p. 38.
8. *The Cliftonian* Vol. 15, p. 299.
9. Mrs H.C. Watson, quoted in Temple, p. 16.
10. From an anonymous press-cutting announcing the election of Percival as President of Trinity College, in the possession of Trinity College Archives, Oxford.
11. H.E.D. Blakiston, *Trinity College,* p. 235.
12. From a scrapbook in the Bodleian Library, Oxford ref G.A. Oxon c 287 No. 158.
13. M. Maclaglan, *Trinity College,* p. 26.
14. The cartoon is contained in a volume entitled *Oxford Caricatures* in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, ref. G.A. Oxon 4° 415 No. 627.
15. Temple, p. 84.
16. Temple, p. 80.
17. ibid.
18. Named after Mary Somerville, widely acclaimed as the greatest woman scientist of the nineteenth century.
19. Somerville College Council Minutes, February 7 1879.
20. On £100 a year, the salary Percival had drawn in his first year as an assistant at Rugby.
21. H.E.D. Blakiston, *Trinity College,* pp. 226, 227.
22. Temple, p. 94.
23. Professor Robinson Ellis, writing to congratulate Percival. Temple, p. 91.
24. Temple, p. 100.
25. G.F. Bradby, quoted in Temple, p. 101.
26. Temple, pp. 104, 105, 106, 113.
27. H.E. Butler, quoted in Temple, p. 109.
28. Temple, pp. 118–121, 130, 131.
29. Temple, pp. 135, 137.

30. Canon Bannister preaching on 8 December 1918 at Hereford. *Hereford Times,* December 14 1918, p. 3 in Hereford Public Library.
31. Prebendary Wynne-Wilson, speaking at St. Nicholas' Church, Hereford, 8 December 1918. *The Hereford Times,* December 14 1918, p. 3.
32. See my *Clifton after Percival,* pp. 7–51.
33. Clifton College Council minutes Vol. 5, p. 259.
34. *The Cliftonian* magazine Vol. 22, p. 337.
35. Temple, p. 262.
36. James Sherborne, *University College, Bristol,* pp. 4–6.
37. Temple, p. 263.
38. Sherborne, p. 14.
39. Temple, p. 264.
40. N. Glenday and M. Price, *Clifton High School,* pp. 7–10.
41. Glenday and Price, p. 9.
42. M.G. Shaw, *Redland High School,* pp. 15–23.
43. M.G. Shaw, pp. 41,
44. E.M. Oakeley, *Bishop Percival,* p. 9.
45. Henry Newbolt, *The Twymans,* p. 99.

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