Chapter Two:
'Loss and Gain' (1837–1840)

> We live in a day when it is exceedingly difficult to judge fairly whether men are returning to forms for order's sake, or whether from a want of faith to screen them from scepticism, and from a want of manliness which loves to cultivate romantic sensibility.
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> *Sermons, 5th Series*, p. 84

Young Mr Newman

The Oxford entered by Robertson in 1837 was dominated by the mind and personality of one remarkable man, John Henry Newman (1801-1890),[1] Fellow of Oriel College and Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin. Newman's novel *Loss & Gain* (1848) was published three years after his reception into the Roman Catholic Church, but is set a decade earlier, in the Oxford that Robertson had known as an undergraduate, which was divided by the controversy over Tractarianism. This name was derived from the *Tracts for the Times* written by Newman and his associates, and it was Newman, along with John Keble (1792-1866) and Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), who were the leading figures in what was later called the 'Oxford Movement,' or 'Anglo-Catholicism'.

Newman enjoyed recalling those days in fiction and includes himself in the *dramatis personae* as a character named, with mock modesty, "Smith".[2] Charles Reding, Newman's young hero, resembles Robertson in that he is preparing for ordination, and, seemingly, has no direct contact with 'Smith' or the other Tractarian leaders.[3] Both too are troubled by the contentious atmosphere in which they are expected to study, but neither can avoid what had become the most talked about subject of the day. Mark Pattison, who was close to Newman at this time, would comment retrospectively that the intense religiosity of the Tractarians was not conducive to university studies.[4]

Though a towering intellectual figure, Newman's own faith journey was representative in its 'development' – a key word for Newman – from an Evangelical youth, or childhood, to a more Catholic understanding of Christianity. That many of the participants in the Catholic Revival in the nineteenth century Church of England had been Evangelicals, or grew up in Evangelical homes, is well documented, as are the connecting threads of thought and spirituality between the two movements.[5] It was this common ground – principally, for most people, an intense religious devotion – which made the parting of the ways all the more painful when it came.[6]

Evangelicals at Oxford

In *Loss & Gain* Newman gently satirises Evangelicals for their prim tea parties, where dull scriptural expositions conclude with everyone falling to their knees on hassocks[7] (in upholstered comfort compared to the austere *prie-dieu* used in Catholic devotion) for fervent, extempore prayer. Newman's snobbery surfaces when Charles, an old Etonian, attends one of these gatherings for the first and last time, but fails to recognise the other undergraduates, who are products of minor public schools and members of a less well-connected social set.[8] (A century later it was the Anglo-Catholics who appeared socially inferior, thanks to the social conscience of the movement, though its sexual ambiguity, discussed below, still persisted.)[9] Robertson belonged to Evangelical Oxford.[10] Brasenose College, where he was an undergraduate, was an Evangelical stronghold, and his tutor, Henry Burgess Whitaker Churton, (1810-1891), and his brother Thomas Towson Churton (1798-1865), were leading figures in that movement in the University, though the Principal, Ashurst Turner Gilbert (1786-1870) – afterwards Bishop of Chichester when Robertson was at Brighton[11] – was an old-fashioned Protestant high churchman.

Robertson was the secretary of a prayer group, rather like the one in *Loss & Gain*, which he co-founded with George T. Driffield, George N.K. Ellerton, Thomas Godwin Hatchard, Edward Piggot and Edmund S. Poynder on November 15th 1837. Formally constituted with rules, regulations, and a rotating 'president', it met at Brasenose "for the purpose of Prayer and Conversation on Religious Subjects".[12] Members were expected to observe "much reserve, amounting to secrecy … on the subject of its existence" and could only mention it to other members of the university with the consent of a general meeting. A breach of confidentiality must

have occurred as a minute dated February 12th 1838 says "it was observed that the rules, especially that relating to secrecy, should be more strictly observed for the future".[13] Brooke says that Robertson founded the group to counter Tractarianism and that, although short-lived, it had a lively interest in the missionary work of the Church.[14] On February 6th 1838 Hatchard's chosen topic was Hebrews 4:15 and discussion focused mainly on "the difficulty of comprehending our Lord's sinless nature, mysteriously compatible with a sense of temptation". This was a subject Robertson explored at Brighton, but at this date he was more preoccupied with the reality of conversion. On February 20th his chosen text, Romans 8:8, hinted at another paradox – the necessity of being born again, and yet God's sovereignty in conferring the Spirit – but, inevitably, in Tractarian Oxford, "some interesting conversation arose on the disputed question of Baptismal Regeneration".

Newman's anonymous *Tract I* had urged Christian ministers to 'magnify their office' and the sacerdotal tendency of Tractarianism was initially concerned with the reality of the grace conferred in Baptism, a doctrine that appeared to undermine Evangelical emphasis on personal conversion. This was to remain a controversial topic for over a decade and Robertson would return to the subject in Brighton, though from a distinctly liberal perspective. He is said to have been impressed by Newman's sermon 'On Sin after Baptism', but a study of Scripture, and Calvin's theology, convinced him that Tractarianism was mistaken on this subject. His notes[15] on Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapters 15 and 16 record that Baptism "does not merely assure of the forgiveness of past sin, because it offers to us Christ's blood whose efficacy is never obsolete. A penitent man may therefore recur for God's pledge to his baptism before sin." Accepting Calvin's doctrine of Baptism as mainly, though not exclusively, a covenant pledge, he also claims that Baptism "does not free from original sin in the sense in which it is said to do", and reviews the Protestant arguments in favour of infant baptism, which he would have to perform once he was ordained.

The narrowness of Robertson's Evangelicalism is evident from the Oxford Union debate on October 25th 1838 when John Ruskin (1819-1900) defended the theatre as beneficial to the nation, and Robertson, who had questioned the moral influence of novel reading on a previous occasion, took half-an-hour maintaining it was not.[16] Only eight men voted with him and he lost his dignity, as well as the argument, when Ruskin wittily implied that he was being unduly influenced by the devil. Speaking to a hundred strangers made him

nervous, but a fortnight later he proposed his own motion "that the object of poetry is being more attained by modern than by ancient writers".[17] It was carried – with a majority of just two – like the one he proposed in February 1839 which drew on his knowledge of British rule in India. The Union was good training for the future and he was elected Treasurer.[18]

There are several parallels between Robertson and Ruskin at this stage of their lives. Both were educated at home, and their fathers wished them to become clergymen, though Ruskin managed to avoid this; both saw themselves as poets, though this was part of a gentleman's education; and foreign travel would be, for both men, a transforming influence. Robertson never visited southern Europe, but he would discover much about its culture from Ruskin's writings, which he found increasingly valuable.[19] One of Newman's criticisms of Evangelicalism (and the Church of England) in *Loss and Gain* is its English parochialism. As Newman knew personally, Roman Catholicism abroad was an impressive phenomenon, and the comprehensive Catholic vision of Venice would prove a revelation to the young Ruskin, making him the leading advocate of Gothic as *the* Christian architecture. Robertson subsequently studied Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* with delight but at Oxford he had chosen a narrower way, though, like Reding, he was susceptible to the mood of the Catholic revival.

The high road to Puseyism

In his novel Newman acknowledges that the movement stirring Oxford in the late 1830s had more than one leader, and Dr Pusey is mentioned by name.[20] Prodigious Oriental scholar and Regius Professor of Hebrew, Pusey[21] remained a member of the Church of England, and after Newman's conversion was *de facto* head of what was already known as Tractarianism, and sometimes Puseyism. Newman and Pusey were significant contributors to *Tracts for the Times* and the term Tractarianism emphasised the teaching; Puseyism – and less commonly 'Newmanism' – the teacher. While at Oxford Robertson's friends accused him of being "on the high road to Puseyism"[22] – an image that plays with idea of the Tractarians as the inheritors of the old 'High' Church tradition. No doubt this was said partly in jest, just as the fictional Reding is said by his friend Sheffield to be a "Puseyite"[23] and 'on the road' to becoming a papist. The evidence for Robertson's incipient Puseyism was his fondness for Plato and Wordsworth's poetry.

In the Oxford syllabus Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* were set texts for the University examinations, and the influence of this Aristotelian training can be traced in Robertson's writings, which are also noted for their Platonism.[24] During his time at Oxford he heard the public lectures on Plato by William Sewell (1804-1874), Whyte's Professor of Moral Philosophy, which portrayed the *Republic* as an anticipation of the Christian Church.[25] Sewell was not a Tractarian but he was sympathetic towards the movement, and the revival of Platonism cohered with its interest in the writings of the Greek Fathers. This passion for Patristic authors contrasted with Evangelical enthusiasm for the Protestant Reformers, and both parties were vying for the interpretation of the Early Church and the Reformation.

As for Wordsworth's poetry, despite its philosophical imperfections from Robertson's Evangelical perspective, he loved it, and prior to taking up residence at Brasenose he had visited Tintern by moonlight, accompanied by his mentor, Mr Davies. The 'lines' Wordsworth composed there had affected him profoundly and later, in Cheltenham and Brighton, he quotes or adapts the phrase "unintelligible world" from that poem in his sermons.[26] Tractarians tended to favour the later Wordsworth of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, whereas Robertson implied, some years later, that it was the early Wordsworth he admired then: "the high priest of Nature, weaving in honoured poverty his songs to liberty and truth".[27] No doubt these ideals had moved him prior to his conversion, but they did not sit easily with Evangelicalism.[28] Nevertheless, the Romantic associations of Tractarianism help to explain its allure for Robertson. His own tutors were stolidly learned, conscientious and pious, but a teacher like Newman who was intensely, albeit donnishly, passionate for truth, addressed the questions that agitated the young with careful argument and faultless prose. Robertson is often ranked with Newman as one of the great preachers of the nineteenth century[29] and his reading of Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* presumably began at this time.

The Claims of Party

In *Loss & Gain* one of the characters defends church parties as an inevitable price of free inquiry, and argues that sometimes party leaders attain their position inadvertently through scholarly pursuit of truth.[30] Intellectual honesty was imperative for many Victorians, especially for Liberal Churchman, amongst whom Robertson would eventually be numbered. Newman is interesting in this respect, for

while he rejected liberalism (as he defined it) he had experienced the bracing intellectual atmosphere of the Oriel Common Room when Richard Whately (1787-1863) and other Noetics (Whig intellectuals who were critical of Christian orthodoxy, and advocated a more comprehensive religious establishment) were fellows, and his complex mind was a conduit for British empiricist philosophy as well as Enlightenment philosophy.[31] The heart of Newman's search was for the seat of authority in religion, and by the time he wrote *Loss & Gain* he recognised the strain that this had imposed on impressionable young minds.

In Newman's novel, Reding is driven from Oxford into the welcoming arms of the Roman Catholic Church[32] by the unwarranted suspicion that he might influence the other undergraduates in that direction. Even though he is not fully aware of his own mind on religious matters he is interrogated and removed from the college. On the other hand, Brooke claims that Robertson was pressed to ally himself with the Tractarians, and Mark Pattison confirms that talented young men were 'recruited' for the cause.[33] For the next few years the academic world of Oxford, and the National Church itself, would be dominated by religious debate, but intellectual argument alone could not effect a change of party or Church allegiance. Impression, aesthetics and emotion all played a part. As a pious Evangelical, well read in the Romantic poets and the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Robertson was ideally suited to a Tractarian trajectory, but something was lacking at an emotional level. His feelings appear arrested at this stage, perhaps because of the disruption of his parents' marriage. For the fictional Reding, on the other hand, it was a kiss from his friend Willis that clinched his decision to join the Roman Church, just as Willis had done.[34]

Special Friendships

More even than the Army, the Oxford that Robertson knew was an exclusively male preserve: there were no female undergraduates; fellows of Colleges were celibate and had to resign if they wished to marry. Only Heads of Houses and professors were allowed wives and children. Women were involved in domestic duties in the colleges, and young ladies visited their relatives, but in a society which is predominantly male some men can become bearers of the feminine principle. In his book *Oxford Apostles*[35] Geoffrey Faber discusses the intense male friendships among the Tractarian leaders and concedes that, although it would be anachronistic to describe Newman as

'a homosexual' as currently understood, his close emotional relationships were with men: Hurrell Froude at Oxford and later, in Birmingham, Ambrose St John, with whom he was buried.[36] In Newman's case this preference was combined with a refinement of personality that contemporaries perceived as 'feminine' rather than masculine in its sensibilities.[37] Newman's novel spies on the meals and conversations of a group of close male friends, a world he knew extremely well.

By the time he was debating at the Union Robertson claimed to be "getting a very delightful little circle of friends around me in Oxford".[38] The image is revealing, as if their lives revolved round him. These were not the men who had called when he first arrived in college, who were probably repelled by his Evangelical 'seriousness', but a select group who were "more worth knowing". One of them demonstrated his loyalty to Robertson by obtaining an apology from a man who had spread malicious rumours about him. Something in his character made him susceptible to these attacks, and later, in Brighton, he was disappointed when a friend failed to defend him.[39] This was the boyhood code of honour he had enjoyed with Moncrieff, who was also at Oxford at this point, and may even have been the friend who defended him. Presumably his schoolboy crush on Moncrieff was long over, and he would recall it later, without embarrassment, as an instance of normal human development. A classical education too, especially for a student of Plato, would raise the issue of male friendship, though, as a boy at least, he seems not to have understood the "licentiousness" of ancient Greek culture.[40] That he was heterosexual as an adult would not preclude the usual adolescent anxieties about homosexuality, but he was twenty-four by the time he left Oxford and unmarried.

Celibacy was regarded as a suitable state for young dons as it enabled them to concentrate on collegiate life, and in any case, it was assumed that many would eventually marry, for since the Reformation the Church of England had tended to promote marriage and the family as the ideal state for its people and ministers. In this respect the Tractarians' interest in religious orders and the celibate life appeared sinister and threatening[41] and its ascetic ethos would later be dismissed by Charles Kingsley as 'unmanly' and 'effeminate'.[42] Kingsley objected to practices that appeared to thwart normal human urges for love and recreation, but initially he had been attracted by the 'higher key' that the Tractarians seemed to offer.[43] For a generation recoiling from the unbridled sexuality of the Regency, celibacy had obvious appeal, and the young Kingsley was drawn to Tractarianism

as a source of discipline for his high libido. Robertson may have had similar motives and he had serious reservations about marriage.

Intense male friendships, and the notion of celibacy, added an element of danger and exoticism to the Tractarian enterprise, like its fondness for the furnishings and ornaments of Continental churches with which White, Willis and the Misses Bolton alarm their elders in *Loss & Gain*.[44] Reluctant hitherto to defy his parents, Robertson may have sensed the rebellious potential of Tractarianism, but its greatest appeal would have been its urgent call to holiness – so dear to Evangelicals – grounded on the practice of the primitive church. Appalled at the worldliness of many clergy and "private nominal Christians", he admired the self-denial of the early church and that it was "mighty in the Scriptures".[45] The Tractarians also encouraged a romantic heroism with tales of saints and martyrs. The young Kingsley created a verse drama about St Elizabeth of Hungary,[46] and privately integrated his eroticism and his spirituality. As a curate, Robertson's devotional reading included *The Imitation of Christ*, by St Thomas á Kempis, a classic of Western spirituality, which further stifled his emotions.

The experiment of marriage

While he was at Oxford his brother Duke was posted to Bermuda for five years. After seeing him sail away on the *Sovereign* Robertson wrote, "I felt as if I had never loved you until that moment".[47] He recalled those feelings in his sermon 'The Christian Church a Family', preached in 1852, which remarks that family members are often strangers to each other "and it is only when the Atlantic rolls between, and half a hemisphere is interposed, that we learn how dear they are to us, how all our life is bound up in deep anxiety with their existence".[48] Before Duke left an artist called Williams painted his portrait as a memento for the family, and afterwards, Robertson sat for a portrait that was intended for Duke, which he felt was a good likeness, albeit a flattering one: "as he has given me a most amicable and benevolent expression."[49] The painting did not depict a 'serious' Evangelical and although he was already an undergraduate he was dressed in a military cloak.[50] Robertson did his best to keep Duke up-to-date with the latest Cheltenham gossip. He writes about their friends the Ramseys and the Jopps, the increasing urbanisation of the town,[51] and the subscription to buy a new house for Mr Close, which he questioned, for while the vicar was "a hard working man" the money might be better used "to the glory of God".[52] He sounds

misanthropic as he waits for Lady Trench's carriage to take him "on one of those fearful picnic expeditions with a parcel of children, and a very tiresome family, the Mansfields"[53] but, alert to a pretty female, while his father is "chaperoning and flirting" with the Norths, he notes that "the eldest appears a nice girl as far as I have had an opportunity of observing her". This was the sister of his friend Brownlow North (1810-1875) whose mother resided in Cheltenham. His letters mention forthcoming weddings.

> Harriet Bond is about to be married to a Mr Adams … a good match as it is called, so far as money is concerned, and more particulars I am not acquainted with.[54]

He was probably under pressure to 'make a good match' and struggling to reconcile his reluctance to marry with the fact that he found women attractive.

His confusion is particularly apparent in the manuscript version of Letter VII dated June 24 [1840] which concludes Chapter I of *Life & Letters*.[55] As published it ends with an idyllic account of Robertson gallantly entertaining twenty-five young ladies, sisters of his contemporaries, during Commemoration Week. The manuscript reveals that "The Norths" were present again, including Brownlow North who was studying at Magdalen Hall with a view to ordination (though he became a lay evangelist) at Robertson's suggestion, following a spiritual awakening. Spoiled, boisterous and from a privileged background, he used to fill his time with shooting and gambling, and had reputedly proposed to nineteen ladies in a single winter, all of whom accepted.[56] Gregarious and at ease in women's company, he was already married with children, and was accompanied by his wife, on this occasion which, in Robertson's account, is reminiscent of Tennyson's as yet unpublished poem *The Princess*,[57] where the battle of the sexes is lyrically expressed. However, the contrast is striking, for unlike the young men in the poem, who cross-dress to literally invade the women's academy, these ladies are invited guests, free to roam Oxford's colleges or Blenheim Palace, watch the boat races, and dine in a young graduate's rooms, "bright forms" bearing solace who do not blur traditional gender roles. The remainder of the letter, tactfully omitted by Brooke, gives a fascinating insight into Robertson's views of women and marriage.

Robertson was quite content to spend the long vacation reading in his deserted college but he was summoned to Cheltenham to meet Robert Montgomery (1807-1855), the eccentric, fashionable preacher and popular poet, who was to dine with his father. He arrived just

before the meal and was greeted by his mother and sister, both of whom were dressed for dinner, and seemed pleased to see him until he noticed that Emma was looking over his shoulder. "Immediately both their countenances fell. 'Then you have not brought him?' 'Him?' said I. 'Yes, him,' said Emma. 'Mr Sutton' said my mother.'" He was furious to discover that the invitation had been a pretext to lure his friend into Emma's orbit, and that six young ladies were apparently longing to see him too. "Now I shrewdly suspect that their object was to get me to fall in love with a young lady said to have £30,000." First he "threatened to cut their dinner, poet and all" and then he deliberately sabotaged their plans.

> After dinner I walked into the drawing-room, wrapt myself in impenetrable politeness and silent abstraction and the only word I spoke to the fair strangers was an explanation that I preferred the singing of a rook to that of a nightingale.

Presumably this pose had protected him on previous occasions. Angry too with Cheltenham's ladies for their twittering, uncritical admiration of Montgomery's affected pulpit style and questionable oratory, he launched into a misogynistic tirade:

> O ye daughters of Jerusalem when will ye learn that woman was made to listen not to chatter, to learn not to teach, to obey not to dictate. From the kitchen to the throne all is turned topsy-turvy. Yes, I am resolved, I will marry. The experiment shall be tried. I'll sacrifice myself in chivalric devotion to the public good. Every article of my furniture, every book in my house, every tree in my garden, shall inculcate, like Hotspur's … and lacking one word, only one. I will devote my whole life to the hope of teaching one woman the meaning of the word she has called heaven to witness, obey. Oh for the good old days of penance, O for the shorn-locks, now alas they curl in uncontrollable haughtiness on the supercilious brow. O for the white sheet, the taper and the stool. When will they learn that the loveliest and brightest ornament of a bright and lovely woman is a meek and quiet spirit? Radicalism and liberty are the watchword and curse of the day and woman leads the van! [But I fear I shall never get her beyond 'O'.]

His views are simple: women need to know their place; wives should be obedient, in accord with biblical ideals of marriage. There is nothing here about love. His social conservatism, evident in his

remark about radicalism and liberty, makes it very doubtful that he shared Wordsworth's early ideals at this particular stage. Ironically, he would eventually become a fashionable preacher in Cheltenham and Brighton, where his words were scrutinised by the ladies he referred to playfully as his "muslin episcopate".[58]

Glittering prizes

Robertson felt sufficiently confident in his poetic abilities to enter Oxford's annual verse competition for the coveted Newdigate Prize. The actual year is unknown, but if, as seems most likely, it was 1839, then he had the disappointment of being beaten by John Ruskin,[59] who had upstaged him at the Oxford Union, and he was among the crowd in the Sheldonian Theatre on June 12th 1839 to witness his beloved Wordsworth receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law[60] and hand Ruskin the prize for his poem, *Salsetta*.

Robertson's classical education at Beverley and Edinburgh had prepared him well for Oxford, and he showed an aptitude for study. Unlike Mark Pattison, who needed a good degree to fulfil his father's ambition that he should become a fellow,[61] Robertson only needed to pass and decided not to read for honours. Brooke attributes this to his modesty and dislike of public show, but afterwards Robertson blamed "religious people" for diverting him from the systematic study required for honours.[62] Brooke also says that, except for the Newdigate, Robertson did not compete for prizes at Oxford, but this was corrected by someone who had shared a college prize with him and another undergraduate.[63] Robertson told Duke that he had been placed in the first bracket in a college examination and that his prize entitled him to choose books worth £5 to be stamped with the college arms.[64] In 1838 he also sat the examination for the Magdalen Hall Scholarship.[65]

After one particularly dreadful term, when six Brasenose men were sent home ill or deranged, Robertson expressed "astonishment" that Moncrieff, who had arrived at Oxford before him, had been awarded a Second rather than the expected First in Classics.

> He was more fortunate in Mathematics. In talent I should say he was far the first man of his year, but he had given up his time too much to discursive reading, politics, general history, metaphysics, etc. instead of confining his intuition more exclusively to the particular book he was to be examined in.[66]

As schoolboys he was ever a close second while Moncrieff "always carried everything before him", and although he writes soberly of

Moncrieff's fortitude in disappointment, Rochefaucauld's lines, which he had once quoted in a poem, may have sprung to mind:

> " 'We all our friend's afflictions bear
> " 'With pain, at least a decent measure,
> " 'Yet not unmixed with secret pleasure.' "[67]

His old rival was finally dethroned, but if Moncrieff was 'second class' where would he be placed? He wrote to his mother, "Poor Moncrieff. A pluck[68] would be much more in proportion to my abilities than a second class is even to his attainments".[69] Just before he sat his final examinations a newly appointed tutor read his latest essay and was surprised to learn that he was not entered for honours, but he was unable to persuade him to do so.

It was not just Evangelical piety that held him back. He knew that he had frittered time away on theological controversy and other ephemeral reading and would not achieve his best. After reading the *Record*'s review of *Life & Letters* an old college friend wrote bluntly:

> Probably you are aware that the reason, or certainly the main reason, why he did not go up for honours at the university was that he could not brook the idea of being placed behind others, and therefore would not submit to encounter the risk of it. I had this from himself.[70]

Though the *Record* happily printed anything that belittled Robertson it sounds plausible as he evidently enjoyed competing for academic prizes, and was unwilling to repeat his Edinburgh experience, especially after Moncrieff's misfortune. This is what he wrote to Brownlow North:

> I wish to tell you my decision on … the going up for a class. The flattering & kind interest of Churton & Bazely[71] rather unsettled me, & visions of ideal honor *(sic)* floated before me as in happier days of boyhood. But a little cool reflection this morning dispersed the airy fabric & I once more saw the head of F.W.R. no longer coroneted with a fancy wreath of laurels, but surmounted with a very substantial pair of long ears, which had evidently been fabricated by 'Puck' in a single night as a reward for his vanity. Need I say that I felt glad at once to sink back to native insignificance, & leave every dream of class list to men of lighter hearts & clearer heads.[72]

On Thursday May 7th 1840 Robertson was "examined in the paperwork in the Oxford Schools"[73] and a week later *viva voce* by Jelf, Greswell and Ashworth: "Complimented by them and invited into the class schools, which I refused."[74] Their response was the usual one in those circumstances, and they awarded him fourth class.[75] That he had the discipline to succeed academically is evident from the way he committed the whole of the Greek and English New Testament to memory during these years.[76] This prodigious feat shows that his priority was to build his future ministry on a thoroughly biblical foundation. As he told Duke, "The Bible is not studied with the stern hard application which nothing else can replace. The consequence is we have superficial views, and error in every denomination is rife."[77]

Reading with Golightly

Robertson trained for ordination at a time when there were very few theological colleges, and his formation was fairly typical of the Church of England at that period: an Oxbridge degree followed by reading for ordination with a clergy tutor. Some men joined a clerical friend or relative in his parish, but not having this option, and preferring to be "Anywhere but home," Robertson "very magnanimously" declined his father's invitation to return to Cheltenham and remained at Brasenose.[78] There he spent his time visiting the sick and the dying,[79] discussing the pastoral offices with Whitaker Churton[80] and studying early church history under the supervision of the eccentric Charles Portalés Golightly (1807-1885).[81] Famous for his "high, cackling voice" and "known in rueful affection or contempt as Golly", he has been described as "the notorious skirmisher of the age".[82] A Protestant Anglican, rather than an Evangelical, he was once Newman's pupil, but had already distanced himself by initiating the campaign for a Protestant Martyrs' Memorial in Oxford. Supposedly disqualified by his wealth from becoming a fellow, Golightly made himself useful as a tutor and was known for his concern for the spiritual welfare of undergraduates. Friends remembered his kindness and generosity: the finest grapes in Oxford grew in his garden but they were given to the clergy to distribute to the sick and poor.[83] Robertson needed a guide to the set texts for his deacon's examination and believed he had an admirable tutor in Golightly who was "a fund of general information and … a close reader".[84]

Golightly's interest in the small print was to make him one of Oxford's foremost controversialists in 1841 when he orchestrated

the University's condemnation of Newman's *Tract XC* which sought to reconcile Roman Catholic dogma with the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church of England.[85] The meaning of the *Articles* was not insignificant as graduates of Oxford had to subscribe to them before they could be awarded their degree, or on taking up a fellowship. Ordination candidates were also examined on the *Articles* and had to subscribe to them when they were ordained. One of Newman's characters in *Loss & Gain* remarks that liberal churchman had adopted a relaxed attitude to subscription to the *Articles*[86] but that their Protestant theology posed an acute problem for those, like Newman's protagonist, Reding, who were drawn to a more Catholic understanding of Christianity. As he prepared to leave Oxford "Tract discussion"[87] appears in Robertson's diary and he was keen to escape from "the paralysing effects of this Oxford delusion heresy",[88] but the controversy, like Golighty's long reach, would follow him to his first curacy in Winchester.