A New (Old) Biography for Stephen Dickson, Author of *The Union of Taste and Science* (1799)

by Michele Holmgren

> *Intelligent Canadians! reflect, and ye will be convinced that ye consult your individual interests, as well as the general weal, when ye encourage learning and science to flourish in your country.*
>
> —*Stephen Dickson,* Considerations on the Establishment of a College in Quebec (1799), 4.

> *Here is all liberty and few scarce known,*
> *Beyond that private circle of their own….*
>
> —*Standish O'Grady,* The Emigrant*, 1143-44.*

"Regarding Stephen Dickson, I have not been able to discover anything," wrote Fred G. Ketcheson when introducing the 1952 edition of Dickson's poem, *The Union of Taste and Science* for the Bibliographical Society of Canada. "He was likely some friend of the Prescotts, who visited them at Quebec. Possibly future research may tell us more" (v). In fact, research carried out by Marie Tremaine around the same time as Ketcheson's publication reveals much more about the circumstances surrounding Dickson's time in Quebec, from his arrival in October 1798 to his departure March 5, 1799 (551), as well as his activities, including another publication attributed to Dickson while in Quebec. Irish, Scottish, English, and American sources reveal an even more extensive view of Dickson's personal and professional career before he left Ireland, his activities while in Quebec, as well as the place and date of his death. While some questions about his life still lack a definite answer, documents discovered so far suggest one thing: he was no friend of the Prescotts.

Tremaine was the author of *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints 1751-1800* (1952), an invaluable resource for information about early Canadian publications, and was known for "the intensity with which she tackled bibliographical problems and for her meticulous study of early Canadian imprints" ("Marie Tremaine"). She uncovered an additional Dickson publication, *Considerations on the Establishment of a College in Quebec for the Instruction of Youth in Literature and Philosophy,* identifying the

author as "the Stephen Dickson who graduated from the University of Dublin (B.A., 1781; M.B. and M.D., 1793) and who was professor of the practice of medicine in that university's school of physics [sic], 1792-98" (551). On the title page to this pamphlet, Dickson lists an impressive curriculum vitae, including an honorary doctorate of Medicine from the University of Dublin, his membership as fellow of the Royal Society of Scottish Antiquities, as well as the fact that he was "lately State Physician of Ireland and Professor of the Practice of Physic in the University of Dublin" (*Considerations* 1). These qualifications identify him as the same Stephen Dickson who authored *An Essay on Chemical Nomenclature*, published in London and Dublin in 1796, and who identified himself on the essay's title page as "State Physician in Ireland; Professor of the Practice of Medicine in Trinity College, Dublin; Vice President of the College of Physicians; Secretary to the Committee of Science of the R[oyal] I[rish] A[cademy]; F.R.S.S.A. and of Different Medical Societies in London, Edinburgh, Dublin, &c. (1). This list of qualifications would make Dickson one of the more distinguished Irish visitors to Canada in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though not quite in the same category as Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Isaac Weld, or Thomas Moore.

In fact, Tremaine notes that Dickson's qualifications, along with the timing of his visit to Quebec a few months after the worst of the United Irish uprising and British reprisals, made him an object of intense suspicion to the governor of Lower Canada, Robert Prescott, as well as other colonial officials in British North America. British officials in North America, like the British government at home, were unsettled throughout the 1790s by an Irish republican movement that took inspiration from the American and French revolutions, gathered weapons and planned a rebellion, soliciting French assistance. The movement attracted Protestants and Catholics alike, particularly from the artisan and middle classes, including, significantly, doctors, schoolmasters, and other "bourgeois radicals" (Taylor 76-77). While there were some early and alarming victories for a relatively poorly-armed peasant armies near Dublin, most of the United Irish leaders had been arrested by March 1798, and a promised French expeditionary force provided assistance that was too little and too late, when finally they landed in the northwest of Ireland in the summer. Poorly-coordinated rebellions took place locally in Ulster and in the West of Ireland, but the rebellion was decidedly quashed by British forces and local Protestant militia by September, 1798 (Taylor 80).

Upon receipt of Dickson's pamphlet[1] urging the establishment of a college in Quebec, Prescott observed in a despatch dated 7 Jan 1799,

> …from Circumstances that have taken place in Ireland, from his not having announced himself (other than merely by his Christian and Surname) until some weeks after his Arrival, and from the retired manner in which he lives compared with what might be expected of a man in that station of Life—added to the Extraordinary Circumstances of a man in such eligible Situation in his own Country to seek his Fortune among strangers, I am induced to suspect that he may be actuated from motives different from any that he may be expected to avow. (qtd. in Tremaine 550)

Tremaine concludes from this and other correspondence between Quebec officials that "Dickson was apparently implicated in the Irish rebellion of 1798, and like many of his compatriots came to America in consequence" (550). Quebec, like other parts of British North America and the United States, was certainly a destination for participants on both sides of the United Irish conflict, who settled in Canada, were posted to British North America as colonial officials, or took refuge in the United States. For instance, Thomas Addis Emmet, the brother of Robert Emmet, was imprisoned for his membership in the United Irishman, but later immigrated to New York where he became a lawyer and influential politician (Taylor 99). General Peter Hunter, commander of the military forces in British North America before becoming Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada in 1799, had been the military governor in Wexford, Ireland in 1798, where he had gained notoriety for displaying the heads of executed United Irishmen outside the county courthouse (Read, Taylor 88). Dickson may very well have needed to leave Ireland in a hurry; however, if the sentiments he expresses in both *The Union of Taste and Science* and his pamphlet are sincere, they are at odds with someone acting on a radical republican philosophy, given that the poem praises Britain's "guardian genius" and condemns "vain," "impious," and "cunning" France (*The Union of Taste and Science* 39-43). Moreover, documentary sources listing Dickson's activities in Scotland and Ireland suggest other complex reasons that compelled Dickson to abandon a comfortable and prestigious life in Dublin to try to make a new start in North America.

Dickson was born in Dublin in 1761 to Stephen Dickson, a lawyer. He entered the University of Dublin (also known as Trinity College Dublin) in 1775 at the age of 14 as a pensioner, and received his B.A. in 1781 (Burtchaell 228, *A Catalogue of Graduates* 136). He likely married in the 1780s, since *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* includes the following announcement under Births for August 1789: "The lady of Stephen Dickson, Esq., state physician, of a son" ("Domestic Intelligence" 447). According to *History of the Medical Teaching in Trinity College Dublin*

and of the School of Physic in Ireland, "after receiving his B.A., Dickson studied medicine in Edinburgh and received an M.D. in September 1783 on the basis of his thesis, *De Somno*" (Kirkpatrick 162). On returning to Dublin, he became a fellow of the Irish College of Physicians on June 14, 1784 (Kirkpatrick 162). The history also notes that Dickson received an M.B. [Bachelor of Medicine] and M.D. from Trinity College in 1793, and then "proceeded to the degree of M.A. in 1800," but this last date, again based on the *Alumni Dublinenses* entry, is slightly problematic for reasons that will be demonstrated later (Kirkpatrick 162).

The medical profession in Dublin afforded many opportunities for a doctor returning from a respected medical school in Edinburgh. In 1785, an Act of Parliament established a School of Physic in Ireland and recommended appointing professors (Kirkpatrick 155). In March 1785, Dickson, then Register of the college, was elected as King's Professor of the Institutes of Medicine, a position he held until 1792, when he resigned and took up the vacant position of King's Professor of the Practice of Medicine (Kirkpatrick 162). He was also "Physician to the Dublin General Dispensary" (Kirkpatrick 163, Cameron 48). With the position of King's Professor came another significant responsibility: he was appointed college librarian on September 19th, 1787, upon which he was "directed to give bond and security for £500" (Mills 126). He was trusted with considerable funds and spent at least £800 during the first eight years of his tenure, "and this does not, by any means, represent all the money paid for books during the period" (Kirkpatrick, "Dun's Library" 206).

In May 1788, Dickson also became State Physician, a position that came with £200 annual salary (Cameron 105). He purchased this position from Dr. Robert Emmet for £1000 (Geoghegan 57); it had originally been held jointly by Dr. Emmet and his son, Thomas Addis Emmet, before the latter decided on a law career, and then became entangled in the United Irish movement. Of course, Dr. Emmet was also the father of "the brilliant and unfortunate Robert Emmet, the United Irishman, who was executed on the 20th September, 1803, in Thomas-street" (Cameron 105), but there seems to be little evidence indicating that Dickson shared anything other than the lucrative state appointment with the Emmet family. If he held any strong nationalist views, they may have been in keeping with the more moderate Irish Patriot movement of the eighteenth century, or the early aims of the United Irish movement before it became more radical. Both the Patriot movement and the United Irish movement promoted Irish culture, history and antiquities, and Dickson was prominent and active in learned societies that encouraged this study.[2] He is listed as a subscriber to

many publications of his time, the most significant perhaps being Edward Ledwich's *Antiquities of Ireland* (1790). Of course, his interest in Irish culture might simply be reflective of more wide-ranging interests, given that he was admitted to the Edinburgh Speculative Society in 1780, and presented essays titled "Beauties and Defects of the English Language," and "Rise and Effects of Political Oratory" (*History of the Speculative Society* 148). In 1785, the Royal Irish Academy evolved out of a more informal literary society of "Paleosophers," and "Robert Perceval, and Stephen Dickson, Doctors of Physic" are listed as some of the founding members of the academy council, along with prominent Irish antiquarians such as Charles Vallancey and Sylvestor O'Halloran, and well-known Irish politicians such as Henry Flood and John Philpot Curran. The society formed distinct committees to promote "Science, Antiquities and Polite Literature" (Gilbert 228-231). In 1792, the Academy awarded £50 to "Stephen Dickson, State Physician &c. &c" for an "Essay on a System of National Education, adapted to Ireland" (Carlisle 200, 508, *Proceedings* 409). The essay discussed how education "concerns health… [and] promotes morality" and how it "relates to instruction in the knowledge requisite for the several departments of society." In it, Dickson proposed a system of "elementary instruction of the children of the laboring poor as well as "instruction in professional and polite literature," covering themes that Dickson would later take up in both his long poem and his proposal for a college in Quebec (Carlisle164).

As an active and influential member of Dublin's medical and intellectual communities, Dickson should have been able to look forward to a fulfilling and prosperous life. Unfortunately, the newly configured School of Physic was beset by ongoing logistical and legal problems. According to Kirkpatrick's *History of the Medical Teaching in Trinity College Dublin and of the School of Physic in Ireland,* the estate of Sir Patrick Dun (1642-1713), whose generous bequest funded the School of Physic and medical library, was subject to various academic and legal disputes, in which Dickson seems to have figured prominently. The college had no hospital, and could not find appropriate facilities in which to care for the patients needed as case studies for the King's and University professors' clinical lectures. These difficulties "proved an obstacle which the united wisdom of the Colleges was unable to overcome, and the effort to solve this difficulty resulted in open rupture among the Professors" (Kirkpatrick 178). In 1794, the King's Professors, including Dickson, went to court arguing that a greater share the profits of Dun's estate should go to them. This dispute may have been one of the things that contributed to the decline of Dick-

son's fortunes in Ireland. The bitter trial, which found against the professors, led the Lord Chancellor to label their conduct "a gross and shameless fraud: and whether the letter of the Act will bear them out in the attempt, or whether it will not, at any other tribunal, it seems to me to be most perfectly clear that they should be scouted from a Court of Equity with shame and disgrace" (Kirkpatrick 178). (Dickson felt compelled to provide his side of the dispute in a 90-page published work, A *Letter from Dr. Dickson To his Medical Brethren relative to the School of Physic in this Kingdom)* (1795) (Kirkpatrick n.176). In the same year, professors Robert Perceval and James Cleghorn accused Dickson and other professors of failing to carry out their teaching duties or collect adequate fees to support teaching at the hospital. While the college "acquitted the Professors of any neglect and considered that they had discharged the duty they owed to their patients, their pupils, and themselves with credit and advantage to the general interests of the school," the College board appealed, but eventually the matter was dropped (Kirkpatrick 178-79). Dickson's conduct in running the library also seems to have led to questions about his integrity, sufficiently so that an inquiry carried out by an Irish House of Lords committee after Dickson left Ireland suggested "that considerable laxity in the care of the library was disclosed," and that "bills for books were presented to the College for the delivery of which neither the bookseller nor the Librarian could vouch" (Kirkpatrick, "Dun's Library" 206). An 1800 catalogue "notes, alongside the titles of many of the books, the damning statement "Lost by Dr. Dickson" (Mills 127). Dickson's conduct even merits a mention in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book:* "The then librarian, Dr Stephen Dickson, was deemed to have absconded with these books in 1797" (Lake n. 11 577). He resigned as librarian in 1797, but his troubles were not limited to the library. In the same year, Dickson was again "admonished by the electors for neglect of duty and for persistence of this neglect he was, on December 4, 1797, deprived of his office" of King's Professor (Kirkpatrick 229). Perhaps this accusation of neglect arose from his inability to lecture, given the absence of a teaching hospital, the implications of dishonesty regarding the library, or from Dickson's own inquisitive and possibly unfocused nature, which he publicly acknowledges in his *Letter from Doctor Dickson to his Medical Brethren*: "My inclinations lead me to dedicate to other occupations whatever hours I can spare from the ordinary duties of my profession" (2).

In the same year that he lost his professorship, he was also succeeded as State Physician by James Cleghorn (Kirkpatrick 229). Robert W. Mills notes that Dickson subsequently "disappeared from Dublin" (127), and on

May 27, 1799, he was deprived of his Fellowship of the College of Physicians for having 'been absent from the meetings of the College for two years without leave" (Kirkpatrick 162). (Part of this absence is, of course, accounted for by his departure from Ireland and his subsequent arrival in Lower Canada in the autumn of 1798). Possible disgust at the infighting within the School of Physic, real or implied disgrace, as well as the loss of several remunerative positions are all reasons that might make Dickson contemplate the extreme expedient of emigration to Lower Canada. His choice of destination, a British-controlled territory of North America, again suggests that involvement in the United Irishmen did not force him to flee, although the raids of United Irish members in Dublin, and general martial law and risings that destabilized the counties around Dublin may have provided an additional incentive to leave.

The arrival of Dickson and presumably his young family in Quebec in 1798 could not have been worse timed. Arriving in Quebec from a country that had just narrowly defeated a French-assisted uprising and invasion, Dickson inadvertently reawakened many fears among British officials in Lower Canada, including Prescott. From the mentions of Dickson in Prescott's dispatches and elsewhere, Tremaine concludes that Dickson remained "under close surveillance of Authority" from his arrival from New York in October, 1798 to his departure from Lower Canada March 5, 1799 (551). The information coming out of Ireland about the recent rebellion, combined with news about American and French republican activities in North America, fed the paranoia that already existed in the British-held territories. For instance, upon his arrival in Lower Canada in June 1796, Prescott found himself in charge of a province already unsettled by rumours of French invasion via the American territories, and by French-Canadian riots over unpopular British policies (Burroughs). Prescott viewed the French-Canadians with deep suspicion, as did his deputies and the Attorney General, who believed that much of the unrest was being encouraged by French politicians in league with the United States, and that secret societies were plotting to massacre the British. The capture of the American ship, the *Olive Branch*, with arms intended for Lower Canada, and the execution of the one of the United Columbia conspirators, David McLane, did make Lower Canada appear more secure by 1797 (Burroughs, Bentley, Taylor 89). However, the arrival of a well-born but circumspect Dubliner a few months after the 1798 Irish uprising seems to have stirred up these fears again.

William Osgoode, the Chief Justice in Lower Canada, went further in identifying the mysterious Irish visitor as a United Irishman. In an August

7, 1799 letter to the undersecretary of state, John King, he recounted that "Doctor Dickson, the noted Irish partisan of whom such honourable mention is made in the Report of the Secret Committee of both Houses in Ireland…came here under every Circumstance of Suspicion…" (Tremaine 551). A "Doctor Dickson" is indeed mentioned in the 1798 *Report from the Committee of Secrecy, of the House of Commons in Ireland as Reported by the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Castlereagh*. This report details the events of May-June 1798, including the Battle of Ballynahinch, a disastrous defeat for the northern United Irishmen that arose in part because the United Irish colonels could not agree "to act on any plan but on the invasion of the French, or success to the efforts of the insurgents about Dublin" (130). United Irish plans were thrown further into confusion because "at this time [June 5] an account was brought that Doctor Dickson was made a prisoner in Ballynahinch about nine o'clock yesterday evening by Lord Annesley's yeomen….The people of Ballynahinch were of the opinion they could rescue Dickson the moment the county meant to act, and it was their intention so to do" (130). It seems hard to credit that a well-established Dublin professor of medicine should find himself in Co. Down in the north of Ireland on United Irish business, or that he would so quickly command such fervid loyalty on behalf of the people of Ballynahinch that they would risk a jail break. However, the mystery is easily cleared up if the "Doctor Dickson" is identified as the well-known United Irish adjutant-general, "the Presbyterian minister William Steele Dickson,"[3] who was arrested shortly before the battle (Elliot 205-206). That "Doctor Dickson, the noted Irish partisan" was a doctor of divinity, not medicine, is what likely created the confusion in Lower Canada.

This inauspicious arrival, according to Tremaine, may be the genesis of Dickson's poem, *The Union of Taste and Science.* "Dickson, aware that he was regarded with suspicion, obtained an introduction to the Chateau, composed and published an impressive eulogy of its incumbents…, then, his ingenuousness neither established nor disproved, departed for Boston en route to England (551). Dickson's own account of his time in Quebec tells a different story: rather than plotting with republicans or trying to establishing his innocence, he emulated his allegorical figure, Science. "Full of stupendous projects" (*Union of Taste* 53), Dickson seemed fascinated with the opportunities for meteorological and physics experiments afforded by Quebec's extreme winters, upon which he eventually published an article:

> I procured two exactly equal and similar cylinders of tin, closed at the extremities, except by a small pipe in each issuing from the upper surface. One

> of these I filled with pure but ordinary rain-water; the other with water which I had carefully distilled. The apertures of both were closed alike by well fitted plugs of wood, which I had previously boiled in oil. I exposed them to the open air, on the surface of the snow, in Quebec, the night of the 5th of January, 1799, when the thermometer stood at 28 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit's scale…. ("On the Expansion of Water" 35)

If it turns out that Dickson was subjected to the questioning Prescott apparently planned for him, the poem may be read as a protestation of his pro-British, conservative sentiments, but it is equally possible that Dickson was completely oblivious to government suspicion and that the poem was composed to curry favor in order to gain a position that replaced the ones he left in Ireland. In the poem, Prescott and his wife are portrayed as the favorites of the allegorical figures Taste and Science in order to celebrate the spirit of inquiry as well as Britain's scientific, technological and economic achievements. These pro-British themes complement the sentiments expressed in Dickson's pamphlet, *Considerations on the establishment of a College in Quebec for the Instruction of Youth in Literature and Philosophy*, where he asks, "Does not the cultivation of that *Literature* which enlarges and embellishes the human mind tend to promote good order, obedience to government, integrity in dealings and suavity of manner among the people?" (3). He further argues, "Does not the cultivation of that *Philosophy* which is immediately applicable to the uses of life tend to develope [sic] the native riches of a country, to render them profitable to the community, and by promoting agriculture, the arts, manufactures, and commerce, to enhance the prosperity not only of the colony, but of the parent state?" (3).

Dickson then proposes a course of education that would cover languages, "history and civil policy," philosophy, "mathematics and natural philosophy" and, significantly, given the subject of his poem, a course in "Taste," in which "the principles of fitness and beauty should be ascertained, and applied to the fine arts; Oratory, Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Gardening and Music" (8). The curriculum and method of instruction should be fitted particularly for the national character of Canada, "since the people of this country are all destined for active life" (4). It would unite the two different modes of instruction currently taught at European universities (7), and be funded primarily by Canadians themselves, as well as through a transfer of funds "formerly set apart by the French King for the endowment of a college in Quebec" (12). Finally, since "little aid can be expected without recompense, I can only propose in the infantile and unendowed state of the college of Quebec, the humble but

zealous offering of my exertions" (13). To set up the college, he offers to donate his own "scarce books" to create a public library, set up a laboratory, create a "natural history" cabinet not unlike the one he describes the Prescotts possessing in *The Union of Taste and Science (Considerations* 13*, Union of Taste* 224-290), oversee the creation of a botanical garden (a project, incidentally, that had been proposed, but frustrated at the School of Physic in Dublin), and "lastly" to give "lectures in Literature and Philosophy…according to the best of my abilities until adequate assistance can be afforded" (13-14). He modestly adds, "Were I not apprehensive that without this part of my proposal every thing else might end in languid speculation, I should never have risqued [sic] incurring the suspicion of self-sufficiency, (which I deprecate as truly foreign from my feelings) (13-14). In spite of his protestations, it is possible that this pamphlet, along with the fulsome flattery to the Prescotts in his poem, was an attempt to gain some sort of modest occupation in Quebec, although it seems that Dickson was "apparently oblivious of the abortive Dorchester-Smith plan for a non-sectarian college, which had precipitated bitter controversies throughout the colony in 1790-91" (Tremaine 550). His motives in the pamphlet and the poem were nevertheless met with cynicism, and failed to dispel official suspicion. In his dispatch about Dickson Prescott wrote, "It does not appear to me that this Country is yet Ripe for such an Establishment" (Tremaine 551). Other reports submitted by observers of Dickson note "Means taken, but unsuccessfully, to confirm or remove the suspicions against Dr. Dickson. He has obtained an introduction to the Chateau" (Brymner 179). In his August 1799 letter to King, Osgoode remarked that "Doctor Dickson…in return for Three Dinners a week at the chateau…wrote a Poem called The Union of Science and Taste [sic], and talked of Prescott's reflecting 'Lustre on the Throne'. He took care to be off Scampato! alla fuga! before any intelligence respecting him could be received from home" (Tremaine 551). If Dickson did escape to flee, it may have literally saved his neck, since Osgoode added ominously that General Hunter, former scourge of the United Irishmen, "regretted he had not stayed a little longer" (Tremaine 551). Tremaine notes that having published his poem, Dickson then "departed for Boston en route to England" (Tremaine 551). The fact that *Alumni Dublinenses* lists Dickson as having received a Master's degree in 1800 could support the notion that he left North America and returned to Dublin. However, Dublin University, like Oxford, historically awarded Master's degrees to degree holders after six years of receiving their bachelor's, so this degree may have been awarded to Dickson as a matter of course, especially since Kirkpatrick notes that he

"proceeded" to the degree. The *History of the Speculative Society of Edinburgh* notes simply that Dickson "went to America, where he died" (148). However, the birth and death dates in the history's entry for Dickson are left blank.

What became of Dickson after his flight from Quebec in March 1799 must be pieced together from other accounts. The last document Tremaine finds related to Dickson's Quebec visit is the *Catalogue of Mr. Dickson's Books to be sold at auction by Burns and Woolsey, Quebec, April 19-20, 1799,* printed by John Neilson, which describes "a large Collection of valuable Books, the property of a gentleman gone to England" (550). Tremaine speculates that it "may be a list of books belonging to Stephen Dickson, who, though he remained in Quebec but six months, and apparently lived in a small way, may yet have abandoned here, the library from which he proposed to endow a college to be established in Quebec" (550). Since the catalogue refers to a Mr. Dickson and not a Dr. Dickson, it is possible that this document describes another man entirely. However, if these are Stephen Dickson's books, then they do indeed speak volumes. A number of historians have spoken with regret of the disappearance of the original books that Dun bequeathed to the School of Physic library in Dublin. "It is sad to think that of the three hundred books [in the library] in 1756, not one can now be identified with certainty," observed Kirkpatrick in 1938 ("Dun's Library" 206). "Today only one book in the entire library can positively be identified has having belonged to Dun," writes Mills in 1995 (126). Did some of the books that formed Dun's original bequest and that may have been catalogued by Dickson end up in Quebec after he "absconded" with them? A more charitable interpretation would be that the "scarce" books Dickson alluded to in his pamphlet were the many that he had subscribed to or collected himself. If so, the sale of a library that was apparently very dear to him suggests either a panicked flight from Quebec officials as Tremaine surmised, or else financial desperation after all his projects came to nothing.

The next credible mention of Dickson is included in *Reminiscences of Charleston*, by Charles Fraser:

> However, Charleston has never been without its full share of skillful [medical] practitioners, although all of them have been educated abroad—in Edinburgh chiefly, for those of earlier date—Philadelphia afterwards. Repeated efforts have been made here, at different times, to create a taste for liberal studies connected with the profession. Dr. Gallagher lectured in the Charleston Library, on several popular branches of natural philosophy. Dr. Chichester, an English gentleman, gave public lectures on chemistry. He was

> succeeded by Dr. Dickson, an Irish gentleman, who was said to be very accomplished. (67)

Again, there is not sufficient information to irrefutably identify the Irish gentleman as Dr. Stephen Dickson, lately of Quebec, but his profession, and particularly his knowledge of chemistry and interest in public education are in keeping with Dickson's character. That Stephen Dickson was in South Carolina in 1799 is confirmed, sadly, by the final document concerning him: an obituary dated Tuesday, September 10, 1799 in the *City Gazette* of Charleston, South Carolina, which noted, "On Sunday last, [September 8] a short illness put a period to the invaluable life of Dr. Stephen Dickson, Fellow of the College of Physicians of Ireland, formerly State Physician of Ireland…" (Register 188). Characteristically, he had "been arrested by the fatal messenger while engaged in pursuits calculated to infuse the highest kind of knowledge in the rising generation, in accomplishing which the force of his superior genius and attainments, softened by ease and affability were such as gained him the esteem of all who knew him…In a word, a man of science is snatched from Carolina" (Register 188). This last attempt to find a home and a living was disastrous for both Dickson and his family. The *City Gazette* obituaries noted that many "have fallen within the space of a few days…victim[s] of the fever now prevailing among the foreigners in this city," and which the historian who collected these notices speculated was probably an "epidemic" of "yellow fever at this time prevailing on the Atlantic Coast" (Register, "Marriage and Death Notices from the City Gazette (Continued)" 188-89, 192). While Dickson's "short illness" was not identified as fever, the newspaper reported a week later the death of "Master Stephen Dickson, aged 12 years, son of the much lamented Dr. Stephen Dickson, whose death happened on the Sunday before" (Register 189). They were followed on September 28 by "Mrs. Ann Dickson, widow of the late Dr. Stephen Dickson," who died "of the epidemic fever which has proved so fatal in this city to strangers" (Register, "Marriage and Death Notices from the City Gazette (Continued)" 45). Stephen Dickson's obituary implies that he had been survived by more than one child; what became of the survivors—if any—is unknown. His reasons for being in Carolina are also unknown: Whether he was engaged in setting up another college or academy or practicing medicine, the obituary notice's final words about Dickson sum up his various scientific and scholarly endeavors, and convey what he attempted to do in *The Union of Taste and Science*: "He informed while he seemed to enquire, and charmed, while he conveyed instruction" (Register 188).

Notes

1 I was able to obtain a copy of the pamphlet from The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, part of the Colonial Office Holdings (CO42/112 C551511).
2 For more on this, see Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fior-Ghael,* and Thuente, *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism.*
3 William Steel Dickson received his doctorate in divinity from Glasgow University (Lundy 126).

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