Notes Towards a Biography

of Dr. William Henry Drummond

Who merits a biography? Not an easy question to answer. It will be readily agreed, however, that few persons' achievements or personal stories can hold a reader's interest for two or three hundred pages without speaking of the multi-volume 'Lives' that are now popular. Then there is the matter of biographical 'material', those essential primary and secondary sources which make biography possible. Equally vital, the writer prepared to spend the countless hours required by the project and the enterprising publisher willing to commission it.

The significance of Dr. William Henry Drummond's poetry is arguable. Dialect verse has fallen out of favour but Margaret Atwood, editor of The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, believes that he "deserves re-evaluation" and it is well to remember that within a decade of its first appearance 65,000 copies of The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems were published.

His widow's biographical sketch published in The Great Fight (1908) provides the outline of her husband's career on which others who have written about him have relied. Much additional material contained in a tin trunk measuring 30 1/2" x 16" x 12" was loaned to the Osler Library on 26 April 1948 by Moira Drummond Craig, wife of Surgeon-Commander D. D. Craig, RN. The latter donated the papers permanently on 8 May 1968. A brief inventory had meanwhile been made by Dr. W. W. Francis and a complete listing was completed by Marilyn Lyons. The Drummond family endured over several decades, including 65,000 copies of The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems, were published. They spent their leisure hours recording their stories in verses scribbled while cloudy skies made it more tolerable to sit at a desk hour after hour.

I spent May 1988 in Montreal. The arduous journey from my home in Ireland which the Drummond family endured over several weeks in 1864 was completed by air in some hours. Their quarters in one of the poorer streets of a city just beginning to grow would have compared unfavourably with my comfortable apartment hotel on Boulevard de Maisonneuve in a vibrant city which has certainly lost whatever innocence it may once have possessed.

Summer's arrival was late in 1988 but Montreal's bare trees gradually gained green mantles while cloudy skies made it more tolerable to sit at a desk after hour (Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) albeit the desk was Sir William Osler's desk and the gracious background the Osler Library. Not, indeed, that 5 p.m. saw the end of my browsing for additional information was available in the nearby McLennan Library.

When George Drummond died within eighteen months of his arrival in Montreal he left a widow determined to rear her four sons without her relatives' grudging support. William, the eldest son, saw the need to assist his mother and in his early teens he became a telegrapher at a lumber camp in the forest north of Montreal where, at l'Absard-à-Plouffe he met habitant farmers who spoke French but must have reminded him of the smallholders he had known in Ireland.

The leading article in this issue is by J.B. Lyons who was an Osler Library Fellow in May 1988. A brief note on Dr. Lyons appeared on page 2 of the June 1988 Osler Library Newsletter under the title "Osler Library Fellows for 1988." He spent the greater part of his month here examining the Drummond papers which, as he describes, came to the Osler Library in 1948 in a tin trunk. They have not previously been used in a "full-scale" biography of William Henry Drummond which Dr. Lyons hopes to undertake.

Bord à Plouffe, Bord à Plouffe, W'at do I hear w'en I dream of you? Too many t'ing for sleepin' well! De song of de ole tam cariole bell, De voice of dat girl from Sainte Angele (I geyv her a ring was mark "fidele") Dat's w'at I hear.

He also encountered raftsmen who ran the rapids in dare-devil fashion, colourful men with rings in their ears, fond of songs such as "En Roulant Ma Boule," "Dans le Prison de Nantes" and "Par Derrière Chez ma Tante". These men of French, Scottish and Irish origin, the fabled voyageurs of the Canadian wilds, fascinated him. Some of them had gone with Wolsey to the Red River in 1870 to quell the Riel insurrection and later were with him on the Nile expedition of 1885. He spent his leisure hours recording their stories in verses scribbled on the backs of telegraph forms.

As soon as Drummond's brothers could contribute to the family budget he returned to Montreal High School as a mature student and thence in 1877 to the medical school at McGill where his teachers included Robert Palmer Howard and the young William Osler. When Drummond flunked at McGill he enrolled at the rival school, Bishop's Medical College, and graduated in 1884. After a period in the Eastern Townships, Dr. Drummond settled in Montreal where he built up a large practice and held a chair in medical jurisprudence at Bishop's Medical College.

A powerfully-built, genial and extraverted man with a genius for friendship, Drummond was an "out-door type", devoted to fishing and shooting. After the day's sport he was a source of fun around the camp fire with endless recitations of his
An he's careful too, 'cos firs' t'ing he do
For fear dere was danger some fever case,
Is tak' w'en he 's come leetle w'isky chaud.

Den 'noder wan too jus' before he go,
He's so scare carry fever aroun' de place.12

The ballads included "Phil-o-rum Juneau" based on a legend of "La Chasse Galerie" current in French-speaking Canada, which held that on New Year's Day the voyageurs and coureurs de bois who had persisted in the wilderness came back in mid-air through snowstorm and hurricane to kiss the girls and visit their folk, and "Maxime La Belle", a voyageur's description of the Nile expedition and of Queen Victoria's request for recruits:

An' so she 's write Joseph Mercier, he 's stop on Trois Rivieres -
Please come right off, an' bring wit you t'ree bonder voyageurs.

I got de plaintee sojer, me, beeg feller six foot tall,
Dat 's Englishman, an Scotch also, don't wear no pant at all;

Of course, de Irishman 's de bes', raise all de row he can,
But noboddy can pull batteau lak good Canadian man.13

The book was successful. The first edition sold out within days. Putnams had a best-seller on their hands. The Habitant was reprinted in November and twice in December 1897; it would be reprinted again in July and October 1898 and the demand continued so as to necessitate two reprintings in December 1898. The Drummonds had moved in 1897 to a larger house on the corner of Mountain and St. Catherine Streets. Their phone was busy with congratulatory calls in those white weeks before Christmas and on the evening of December 23rd the poet was the guest of honour at a supper in the St. James's Club arranged by some thirty of his medical colleagues.

Sir William Hingston, a leading Montreal surgeon, proposed the toast to their guest. Replying, Drummond said that the medical man is a specialist in the analysis of all that is human and if he, in his painting of types, in his delineation of human weaknesses, passions and foibles had gained his colleagues' applause he felt satisfied that his work had been well done:

His engagements took him across Canada in the summer of 1901 and on September 1st he wrote to his wife from the Hotel Vancouver: "I came, I saw, and was conquered." Accustomed to eastern landscapes, he was fascinated by the wheat-lands of Manitoba and astounded by British Columbia's incomparable mountains. From the train he had also seen "thousands of cattle dotting the vast plain; here and there a wandering band of Indians (wild ones), and Thursday evening at sunset a regular Western picture of the Remington type."

The director of a New York lecture bureau became one of Drummond's warmest admirers. His friendly letters gave the doctor details of his agonizing "rheumatism" - actually a classic account of tabes dorsalis, an inexorable nervous disorder. "An ulcer has developed on the ball of my right foot and my doctor has been trying to find out if gan-

Drummond's verses introduced a variety of appealing types:

- the contented habitant farmer:

An' some cole winter night how I wish you can see us,
W'en I smoke on de pipe, an' de olewoman sew
By de stove of T'ree Reever - ma wife's fader geev her
On day we get marry, dat's long tam ago

- the nubile village beauty, "De Nice Leetle Canadienne":

O she's quick an' she's smart, an' got plaintee heart
If you know corre' way go about.
An' if you don't know, she soon tole you so
Den tak' de firs' chance an' get out;
But if she love you, I spik it for true,
She will mak' it more beautiful den jak de eye
Of dat nice leetle Canadienne

- the proverbially wise country doctor, "Ole Docteur Fiset":

Let her rain or snow, all he want to know
Is jus' if anywan' 's feelin' sick,
For Docteur Fiset 's de ole fashion kin'
Doin' good was de only t'ing on hees mien'
So he got no use for de politike.
The awful pain. The centre of it is my pain.

The lilacs were in bloom when Mr. Donal d K. Roy, Manager of the Mount Royal Cemetery Company, directed me to the Drummond family plot, a green area dominated by an impressive Celtic Cross sacred to the memory of George Drummond, died 13 November 1865, aged 53 years, and Elizabeth Morris Soden, his wife, died 17 May 1906, aged 83 years.

"The shadows pass - I see the light / O Morning Light how clear and strong" - the lines are by William Henry Drummond who before a year had passed was laid to the rest in the Irish Constabulary to which his father was posted. His brothers joined them in due course with that inevitability from which there is no redress: John James Drummond (1856-1917); George Edward Drummond (1860-1916).

I had already visited Mohill, the small cruciform town in County Leitrim where William Henry Drummond was born on 13 April 1854, and Tawley the townland overlooking Donegal Bay where his early years were spent close to the barracks of the Royal Irish Constabulary to which his father was posted. Springs of life, vital and pure, in the West of Ireland; a last resting place in Canada high on Mount Royal; and meanwhile, after the desolation of emigration, a fulfillment in medicine and the arts retraceable in the tin trunk's assorted papers. William Henry Drummond's biography will be more fully set forth in the Drummond Papers, Osler Library.

On March 31st, the day before he was taken ill, Drummond wrote to his old Knowlton friend, Judge S. W. Foster,

From far off wild Temagami
Land of the silver gnome
My warmest greetings go to thee
Among the hills of Brome.19

The dates and titles of this year's presentations are as follows: October 28, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Leonardo da Vinci"; November 25, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Andreas Vesalius"; January 27, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Athanasius Kircher", February 24, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Robert Fludd"; March 31, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Ulisse Aldrovandi".

Notes
7 E. H. Bensley, Bishop's Medical College, CMAJ, 72, 463-465, 1955.
8 Louis Fréchette (1839-1908) was the unoffi cial poet laureate of French Canada.
11 Ibid, 32.
12 Ibid, 119.
13 Ibid, 42.
14 Frederic Remington (1861-1909), a master in the depiction of horses in motion and western scenes visited the Drummonds in Montreal in 1899.
15 Charles Barclay Drummond died on 29 July 1933.
16 Drummond Papers, Osler Library.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.

J. B. Lyons
Professor of the History of Medicine, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Osl er Day

The Osler Library Newsletter for June 1988 contained an announcement that Osler Day - 1988 will be held on November 2nd with Dr. Lewis Thomas as Osler Lecturer. Dr. Thomas has been obliged to cancel his engagement as Osler Lecturer on November 2nd. Osler Day has therefore been postponed until April 1989; further details will be available in the new year.

Fridays at Four in the Osler Library

"Fridays at Four in the Osler Library" is the title of a new series of informal talks about the history of science and medicine to be presented by Dr. Faith Wallis, History of Medicine Librarian. As the title suggests, the talks will be given at 4 p.m. on Friday afternoons, a time when medical students, teaching staff and the community at large, drained by a hard week's work, may appreciate some mental refreshment and a change of intellectual pace. The talks are designed to focus on scientific and medical writers whose works are richly represented in the Osler Library's collections, and to give participants an opportunity to examine these historic books at first hand. Everyone is welcome to attend. The dates and titles of this year's presentations are as follows: October 28, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Leonardo da Vinci"; November 25, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Andreas Vesalius"; January 27, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Athanasius Kircher", February 24, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Robert Fludd"; March 31, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Ulisse Aldrovandi".

Friends of The Osler Library: A Report and an Appeal

Were I to choose a single word to summarize my experience of stewardship over the funds donated to the Osler Library by its Friends during the past year, that word would be "diversity". In my experience, 1987-1988 has seen a greater variety of uses and projects for the Friends fund than at any time in the past. The first and most important priority for the fund is, of course, collections, and our Friends have contributed over $10,000 to our book budget over the year. This money has been used to buy both current and historic works, and to acquire new serial subscriptions. Probably the single most spectacular purchase was the Regimento dei regi spedali di Santa Maria Nuova e di Bonifazio of Vincenzo Chiarugi, printed in Florence in 1789. Chiarugi was a pioneer of modern psychiatry in Italy, and his description of the asylum of Santa Maria Nuova provides a wealth of detail concerning the organization of humane care for the mentally ill. The volume is also graced with extensive and very elegant architectural plans. In making possible the acquisition of works such as this, the Friends are contributing not only to the richness of the Osler Library, but to the intellectual life of McGill University; Chiarugi, for example, has already excited the interest of students in the new graduate programme in architectural history and theory, and of participants in the history of psychiatry seminar.

Friends of The Osler Library:
A Report and an Appeal

Collection-building is the Friends' traditional concern, but this year has seen some important innovations in the Library's programmes, innovations which were only made possible by the generosity of its Friends. For example, this year the Library initiated a policy of sponsoring visiting speakers to give public lectures on the history of medicine. Our first visitor was Prof. Jackie Pigaud of the University of Nantes in France, a distinguished classicist and historian of psychiatry, who spoke on "L'influence de l'Antiquité sur les débuts de la psychiatrie française". We also hosted Prof. Dr. Gundolf Keil, director of the Institute for the History of Medicine at the University of Würzburg in West Germany, who addressed an audience of medievalists, art historians and historians of medicine on "Ortolf von Baierland (ca. 1250) and the Beginnings of Medical Illustration". Honoraria for both
The Friends have also contributed two important pieces of equipment to the Library this year. In conjunction with the Medical Library, we have purchased, using Friends’ funds, a microfilm-microfiche reader-printer. The presence of this machine not only permits students and researchers to more readily exploit our extensive microform holdings, but also contributes to our conservation efforts; many of the more important Bibliotheca Osleriana books have been microfilmed, and now we can make copies for readers from the film rather than running the risks of photocopying. Our second purchase, a Kaiser copy-stand for 35 mm cameras, will permit some of the work of making slides and photographs of our books to be done in the Library; this is a convenience for our users, and reduces the security and conservation hazards of sending books out for reproduction.

Apart from buying and preserving books, the Friends have also beautified them this year with a newly-redesigned bookplate, illustrated here. Friends’ funds also provide for the printing of this Newsletter, and they help the Library to meet a wide variety of expenses associated with collection-building and our public programmes. For example, many of our rare books are purchased from Europe; the Friends cover the costs of transatlantic telegrams and telephone calls that enable us to obtain unique items before being pre-empted by European collectors. The Friends’ generosity enables us to have books and archival collections professionally appraised, and helps with dozens of services and purchases which, if not always visible to our readers, nonetheless make the difference for us between mere survival and positive growth.

With this issue of the Osler Library Newsletter, we launch our appeal to the Friends of the Osler Library for the 1988-1989 academic year. Your support of the Library is vital to its development on every front, and we deeply appreciate all that you make possible for us.

Faith Wallis

Osler Society of McGill University

Report for the Academic Year 1987-88

The Osler Society of McGill University was founded 67 years ago by four second year medical students. On a fall evening in 1920, they stood on the corner of Prince Arthur and University Streets and, inspired by the writings of Sir William Osler who had died just one year earlier, decided to organize a special group of medical students. Such an "Osler Society" would have regular meetings at which papers relating to Osler’s historical writings and related subjects would be presented.

To this day, the Society continues in a tradition started in 1920 and later firmly established through the efforts of W.W. Francis, the first Osler Librarian. In fact, the fundamental structure and principles of the Osler Society have remained largely unchanged since its inception. Medical students continue to organize the presentation of papers, seminars, lectures and other events, striving to uphold Sir William’s ideal of a liberal education.

The 1987-88 year for the Society started with an introduction to the life of Sir William Osler by Dr. Faith Wallis. Her command of English combined with an obvious enthusiasm for the subject material made an excellent start to the new academic year. It was also a rare opportunity to view some of the Osler Library’s treasures.

November 4th was Osler Day, the highlight in the Society’s year of events. Dr. Robert Gale, internationally known for his efforts to save many victims of radiation after the Chernobyl disaster, was our Osler Lecturer. He gave an informative and challenging lecture entitled “The Medical Consequences of Nuclear Energy: Lessons from Chernobyl.” Following the lecture, a “sold out” Osler Banquet was enjoyed by an enthusiastic group of Oslerites who still have fun passing around Osler’s Loving Cup.

And now new plans will forget the “McGill Garrison Quarters” rendition of “Our Regius Prof.”

Our December meeting was a treat for those with an artistic bent. The dynamic Dr. Rigas Bertos, Chairman of McGill’s Department of Art History, provided a lively evening of art analysis, allowing our imagination to flow freely as we dissected Titian’s “Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple.”

In January, for the first time in a number of years, the Society had a film night. With buttered popcorn and soda-drinks in hand, we watched and discussed two National Film Board films: “Bethune” and “Bitter Medicine: The Birth of Medicare.” The Bethune film was a snapshot view of the life of one of McGill’s and Montreal’s most colorful personalities, Dr. Norman Bethune. The “Birth of Medicare” film was a fascinating account of the early days of Canadian socialized medicine.

Our February meeting took us from the film screen to real life dramas. Dr. Yves Clermont presented a talk on “The past one hundred years in the Department of Anatomy.”

Largely as a result of encouragement from our Honorary President, Dr. William Feindel, the March meeting’s format was a return to the Society’s original design of students presenting to students. This was a success, so much so that two such evenings are planned for next year.

In April, Dr. Marilyn Li of the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario spoke to us concerning “Women in Medicine.” She helped us to recognize that, while many of the issues in medicine are of concern to both men and women, the latter have faced, and continue to face unique challenges.

Our last Society meeting of the academic year in May provided the forum for our Honorary President to talk to us about “Penfield, Osler and the MNI.” Dr. Feindel brought to life a remarkable part of our McGill medical heritage. He explained how Penfield’s Montreal Neurological Institute was indirectly linked to the influential writings of Sir William himself.

The academic year 1987-88 was a good one for the Society. Oslerites everywhere will be pleased to know that, sixty-seven years later, the Osler Society of McGill University is alive and well!

David B. Clarke, President

N. Kevin Wade, Vice President

Fiona A. Donald, Secretary Treasurer

Osler Society, 1987-1988