

NORMAN DUNCAN: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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NORMAN DUNCAN: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

by



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## ABSTRACT

Norman Duncan (1871-1916) was a prolific writer, having published over 140 periodical stories and articles as well as 20 books. Though he was born in Canada, he did all of his writing and publishing in the United States. In his day he was heralded as one of the most promising authors on the literary horizon. Yet, with the exception of very brief references, he has been virtually ignored by critics. Only one biography of any significance has been undertaken, while no sustained critical assessment has appeared. The purpose of this dissertation is to present a combined biographical and critical study of this neglected Canadian writer.

It is impossible to separate Duncan the man from Duncan the writer. Many of the themes of his stories -- importance of family, idealization of masculine heroes, fondness for boys, obsession with sin and redemption, and concern for alcoholics -- have their genesis in his own life. The peak of his literary achievement came early, with the publication in 1903 of his second collection of short stories, The Way of the Sea. After that date, even though he did produce a number of fine essays on Newfoundland and Labrador, as well

as the occasional short story of merit, there was an uneven quality in his work. Though he expanded his subject matter considerably, primarily as the result of travel, he never surpassed the level of intensity and the perfection of form that he achieved in the early Newfoundland works.

Although one can detect strong influences of Dickens in Duncan's fiction, he is part of the tradition of the American local color movement and its Canadian counterpart, regional fiction. His success is due in no small part to the fact that he found a region virtually unexplored in literature, and made it his own. Over half his total literary production is rooted in his experiences in Newfoundland and Labrador. Certainly his best work comes from this group, ensuring him a permanent place in the literary history of Newfoundland.

## PREFACE

My interest in Norman Duncan originated with an undergraduate course in Newfoundland literature. Having taught several of the stories from The Way of the Sea, I became convinced that here was a writer whose worth had never been fully recognized. There was a flurry of interest in his work in his own day, to the extent that one could label him a popular writer of his time. But in recent decades, scant attention has been paid to him until quite recently. In 1977 Thomas Moore, a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, submitted an M.A. thesis entitled "A Biography of Norman Duncan"; and in 1981, John Coldwell Adams prepared a new edition of The Way of The Sea, complete with a biographical sketch and a brief critical commentary. Both these works served as good starting points for what I considered to be a worthwhile venture -- a complete critical biography of this neglected Canadian writer.

My initial plan was to write a "Life and Works," distinctly separating the dissertation into two sections. However, as I progressed I realized this was a futile attempt, mainly because Norman Duncan is one of those writers whose life cannot be separated from his works. His writing was his

life: it was his major interest and, for most of his life, his sole occupation. He was a prolific writer who deliberately sought out experiences, mostly in countries outside the United States where he lived and worked. These experiences enabled him to publish over 140 periodical articles and stories, as well as 20 books. Because of this close relationship between life and works, I finally opted for the method of the critical biography. The works are presented in the context of the details of Duncan's life as they unfold, with significant attention being paid to his major writings.

As one would expect with a work of this magnitude, I was confronted from the outset with a number of serious problems. Chief among these was the lack of any substantial body of private papers. Fortunately, there was one major source of material available, a collection of papers, letters and manuscripts held by Norman Duncan's niece, Susan Duncan of New York City. Susan Duncan's help was invaluable. Having spent several days with her perusing the material and conducting interviews, I was successful in persuading her to negotiate with the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University for the sale of the Duncan Collection. This was done, and in early 1986 the Centre acquired the material.

The Norman Duncan Collection is, unfortunately, incomplete. There is a considerable amount of correspondence, for example, for the years 1915-16, but only scanty items from large sections of Duncan's literary career. The reason for this is

that much of the original collection was lost when a trunk belonging to Susan Duncan was stolen in transit from Fredonia to New York in 1968. The Duncan Collection, however, remains my single most important source. A thorough search of other archival sources including the collections of Duncan's publishers has failed to turn up any more than the occasional piece of correspondence.

Vital supplementary material was gathered during my visits to a number of locations where Duncan lived or worked, especially Brantford and Mitchell in Ontario, Auburn, N.Y. and New York City. Again, though, there were limitations. Most of Duncan's work for newspapers during his six years as a reporter in Auburn and New York cannot be identified because of the absence of by-lines. Only the feature stories that he wrote during his last year with the New York Evening Post were signed.

As is to be expected, there were, and still are, certain unanswered questions in connection with this study. One of these, referred to in a footnote in Chapter 1, concerns several letters that Duncan claimed he wrote to the Globe while he was a student at the University of Toronto. I have not to this point been able to find any of these letters. Even more tantalizing is a reference in a St. John's newspaper in 1902 to the effect that Duncan was currently having a story published in Munsey's Magazine. Such a story does not exist (at least not in Munsey's or any of the other magazines



in which Duncan regularly published), though a story with a plotline similar to that described in the article forms part of Billy Topsail and Company (1910). I hope that some day, someone will be able to solve these problems.

A word might be in order regarding the format of my Bibliography. I decided to include a section (7) that would contain a list of all the significant items (either critical or biographical) that have been written about Duncan, whether in the form of books, articles, newspaper items, encyclopedia entries or manuscripts. This should prove helpful to any future scholar wishing to pursue some aspect of Duncan or his work. I should also point out that I have opted for American spelling in my own text, except where the British form is required either by the source (as in Duncan's fictitious Ragged Harbour) or by established practice for place-names (Battle Harbour) and locations (the Centre for Newfoundland Studies). In quotations, of course, I follow the source, even though this practice gives rise to apparent inconsistencies.

I wish to acknowledge the help of many individuals who assisted me in a variety of ways during my research. May I thank the librarians and other staff at each of the following institutions: New York Public Library; Seymour Library, Auburn, N.Y.; Darwin Barker Library, Fredonia, N.Y.; Newspaper Room, Olin Library, Cornell University; Boston Public Library; Regional History Room, Library of the University of Western Ontario; Perth County Archive at Stratford and Mitchell,

Ont.; University of Toronto Archive; Robarts Memorial Library, University of Toronto; Metropolitan Toronto Library; Provincial Archives of Ontario; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; and the Public Archives of Canada.

I also wish to acknowledge gratefully Memorial University of Newfoundland for the granting of a sabbatical leave to enable me to conduct my preliminary research. In particular, thanks go to the Dean of Arts and the Dean of Graduate Studies for financial assistance for my numerous research trips. The staff at Interlibrary Loans and the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library gave invaluable assistance. Most especially I must thank Nancy Grenville and Martin Howley. Several colleagues provided me with leads: Dr. Gildas Roberts, Dr. Ron Rompkey, Dr. George Casey, and Professor Ron Wallace. Thanks also go to Cathy Kieley of the English department office, who helped me with the printing and was always willing to assist when I lost my way in the maze of my word processor.

Finally, there are three individuals without whose help this project would have been far more difficult, if not impossible, to complete. First there is Susan Duncan. Not only did she give me access to the Duncan papers when they were in her possession, but she followed this up with many hours of interview time and numerous letters. Her assistance and advice, especially on the biographical material, was invaluable. Secondly, many thanks to John Coldwell (Jack)

Adams, who unselfishly shared with me his own preliminary research on Duncan. And finally, I must express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Patrick O'Flaherty, who encouraged me to undertake the project, and who permitted me to work through it with very little interference but plenty of help.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviated forms identify sources frequently cited in the footnotes and the bibliography of this dissertation:

EMP	Private Papers of Elizabeth Miller
MKC	Mackenzie King Primary Correspondence, Public Archives of Canada
NDC	Norman Duncan Collection, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland
PAC	Public Archives of Canada
SDP	Private Papers of Susan Duncan, New York City
TMC	Thomas Moore Collection, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland

## CHAPTER 1

## THE EARLY YEARS

## 1

On the night of March 10, 1847, a young man named James Duncan boarded a ship in Belfast, bound for New York. The son of James and Jane (Kennedy) Duncan of the small town of Newtownards in County Down, Ireland,<sup>1</sup> James was just 22 years old when he left his native country. His decision to come to America was prompted more by a general restlessness than by economic necessity, as both he and his father were at the time employed as school teachers. Young James kept a diary<sup>2</sup> which provides evidence of both his restlessness and his somewhat obsessive religious convictions. A Presbyterian, James was fanatical in his hatred of Roman Catholics and even felt aversion towards members of his own faith who did not share his fanaticism. Early in 1847, spurred on by the news that he had heard about people from his county who had already gone to America, and encouraged by the reports of

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<sup>1</sup>Family tradition has it that the Duncans had their origins in Scotland. Charlotte E. Lee, letter to Harriett Putnam Duncan, Easter Day 1938, SDP.

<sup>2</sup>James Duncan, Diary (1 July 1846 to 7 July 1848), with supplementary notes added by Susan Duncan, granddaughter of Robert Augustus Duncan. SDP.

their successes, James Duncan began to think about emigrating. Finally in March he set sail, leaving behind his parents, a sister, Henrietta, and three brothers -- Cornelius, Julius McCullough and Robert Augustus.

After a long and very rough voyage, Duncan finally arrived in New York on May 3. He spent little time in the city, making his way to Rochester where he found a job selling yard goods. But his good fortune was short-lived; out of money and work, he moved first to Niagara Falls, N.Y., and then to Toronto. His situation became more and more desperate. Finally, having heard of the possibility of employment in the town of Brantford, James walked the distance of about 55 miles and was successful in getting a job. In the meantime, he wrote home to his family regularly; however, he did not tell them about the problems and disappointments he was encountering. Consequently, he was rather concerned when he heard early in 1848 that they were preparing to follow him to Canada. In the late spring they arrived -- James and Jane Duncan, along with three of the four remaining children (Cornelius was to follow later). By July, the mother and sister were gainfully employed in Brantford, though James Sr., was still idle. Just a few days later, on July 7, young James made the final entry in his diary, following which is the sentence "Seven days from this he died." The pattern that emerges from the story of the arrival of the Duncans in Canada was one that was to repeat itself several times

during the lifetime of Norman Duncan: a restlessness, accompanied by frequent moving and a deep desire to be close to other family members.

The youngest member of the Duncan family was Robert Augustus, who was only 11 years old when the group followed James to Canada. Very little information is available about his life from the time of his arrival until 1871, by which time he had married Susan Hawley of the nearby village of Cainsville and had settled in Brantford.<sup>3</sup> By this time, both James and Jane Duncan had died. Robert Augustus and his wife were living in Brantford and already had three children: two died in infancy, while the third child, Robert, was born in 1868. What kind of employment Robert Augustus was engaged in at this time is uncertain. The Ontario Census for 1871 lists his occupation as "Merchant," which suggests that he operated his own business.<sup>4</sup>

The birth of Norman McLean, the second son of Robert Augustus and Susan Duncan, took place on July 3, 1871, in

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<sup>3</sup>Susan Hawley was the daughter of Abram and Jane Hawley, both of whose families were United Empire Loyalists who had moved to Canada from New York State in the early years of the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup>Canada Census (Ontario), 1871. The Mercantile Agency Reference Book (Toronto: Dun, Wiman, July 1883) has no listing of a business operated by Robert Augustus Duncan while he was living in Brantford. He may have been employed in the pottery business of his brother-in-law, William Welding. See Thomas R. Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan," unpublished M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977, 4.



North Norwich Township, several miles from Brantford.<sup>5</sup> Information about his early childhood in Brantford is scarce, though what does exist is quite revealing. Family records indicate that his younger brother Ernest was born on Norman's fifth birthday:

Norman was told on his 5th birthday that when he returned from Sunday School, he would be given his birthday present. On his return he was presented with my father [Ernest], and therefore, during his formiabe [sic] years, considered that his baby brother, Ernest, belonged to him.<sup>6</sup>

This was the beginning of a protective attitude towards his younger brother that was to continue for the remainder of Norman Duncan's life. As soon as Ernest could walk, Norman encouraged the child to follow him wherever he went. Ernest Duncan's daughter, Susan Duncan, recalls her father telling of one humorous episode involving the two boys:

My father would hold his breath, to the point of turning blue at times, to get attention -- and at home they threw water on him. . . . One day he was out in the woods with Norman and some of his friends, and suddenly began to hold his breath. There was no water so Norman said, "Spit on him, boys. Spit on him." He never held his breath again.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Office of the Registrar General, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (Ontario), information dated 12 January 1982. However, family members consistently record the birth date as July 2; indeed, much is made of the fact that a younger brother was later born on Norman's birthday. As for the place of birth, family records indicate that Norman's mother had relatives living in North Norwich Township and may very well have been visiting them when the birth took place.

<sup>6</sup>Susan Duncan, notes, n.d., TMC.

<sup>7</sup>Susan Duncan, personal interview, 12 May 1985.

Numerous references in family correspondence and early biographical sketches of both Robert and Norman indicate that the three Duncan brothers were very attached to one another from childhood. There was also a particularly strong bond between Norman and his mother, a bond that was to strengthen over the years and have a profound effect on his writing. While the father is credited with having encouraged in his boys such intellectual exercises as debating and chess, it was the mother who instilled in them an appreciation of classical music and good books. A special family favorite was Charles Dickens, whose novels were read "as much as the Bible."<sup>8</sup> Norman Duncan was thus exposed quite early in life to a writer who was to have a major influence on both the style and the subject matter of much of his own work. As far as religious training was concerned, the emphasis in the Duncan home was not so much on formalized religion (though the family adhered to the Presbyterian faith) as on strength of character, sensitivity, honesty, and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

In 1881 Robert Augustus Duncan and his family were still living in Brantford and his occupation was listed as "commercial traveller."<sup>9</sup> But at some point between 1881 and late 1883, the family moved to Fergus, a small town in Wellington County, located about 50 miles north of Brantford. Situated

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<sup>8</sup>Susan Duncan, personal interview.

<sup>9</sup>Canada Census (Ontario), 1881.

on the Grand River, Fergus had been settled predominantly by Scots and boasted two Presbyterian churches. One account of Fergus notes that in 1883-4 it was a "flourishing incorporated village"<sup>10</sup> with a population of just under 2,000 and an economy centered mainly on its woollen mills, the manufacture of agricultural implements, and a large machine shop. It also had a public school with six teachers, as well as doctors, lawyers and one dentist. "The town as a whole presents an appearance that is both solid and attractive," records one source.<sup>11</sup> Robert Augustus was no doubt encouraged to settle there because of what seemed at the time to be sound economic prospects; an even greater incentive may have been provided by the fact that one of his wife's brothers was living near Fergus.

By January, 1884, Robert Augustus Duncan had set up his own business in Fergus, a general store listed as "Duncan & Co."<sup>12</sup> But it seems that things did not work out well for the new enterprise. A town historian records that during the

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<sup>10</sup>Looking Back: The Story of Fergus through the Years, 2 vols. (Fergus: History Book Committee, 1983) 1: 187.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted from the Wellington County Gazetteer and Directory in Looking Back, 1: 188.

<sup>12</sup>The Mercantile Agency Reference Book, n.pag. There are no records to indicate whether a partner was involved in the "company"; possibly Robert Augustus was being financially backed by his brother Julius who had established a successful business in Toronto.

1880s, Fergus was "on the down-grade,"<sup>13</sup> and its population was beginning to decline substantially. Within a few months the Duncans were on the move once again. There are hints in family correspondence that the moves were "prompted by disappointments in previous locations,"<sup>14</sup> and that "whatever the business was that the father was in was not very profitable."<sup>15</sup> Family members also suggest that the problem may have been compounded by the fact that Robert Augustus was not well, a point supported by a comment in an obituary published in 1891 which indicated that he had been seriously ill for some time.<sup>16</sup> The nature of his illness was not defined.

This time the Duncans moved to Mitchell, a town located in Perth County, Ontario. In 1884, Mitchell was a thriving community of close to 2,300 inhabitants. Incorporated as a village in 1857 and proclaimed a town in 1873, its prominent attractions included several very successful manufacturing enterprises, a large woollen mill, several small plough

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<sup>13</sup>Hugh Templin, Fergus, the Story of a Little Town (Fergus News-Record, 1933) 207.

<sup>14</sup>R. Kenneth Ruddy, letter to Thomas Moore, 14 August 1975, TMC.

<sup>15</sup>Susan Duncan recalls having heard this several years ago from a distant cousin.

<sup>16</sup>Weekly Herald [Stratford, Ont.] 10 June 1891: n.pag.

factories and oatmeal mills.<sup>17</sup> It served as an industrial centre for the numerous farms that occupied the countryside in all directions. Unlike Fergus, Mitchell was a rapidly growing community that was to enjoy prosperity for many years to come. Robert Augustus Duncan began his business in Mitchell on a very positive note. The Stratford Beacon, which carried a regular feature entitled "Mitchell Items," recorded the appearance on Main Street of a new enterprise:

Mr. R.A. Duncan, late of Fergus, has rented the store lately vacated by Mr. O'Connor, and has put in a fine stock of dry goods. Mr. Duncan has the reputation of being a live business man, and he ought to build up a fine trade here. The store has plate glass windows and is one of the finest in town.<sup>18</sup>

A month later the same newspaper reported:

Duncan & Co., the new dry goods merchants, are now open for business in the Matheson store, recently refitted and repainted.<sup>19</sup>

Advertisements for the new business in the local paper were numerous during the fall of 1884, noting that the store carried a line of goods including dresses, cashmeres, all wool serges, yard goods, ordered clothing and a variety of smaller items. Duncan set out to attract customers right away, offering special bargains in dry goods, "shirts and drawers at small prices" as well as ready-made clothing "far

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<sup>17</sup>"Historical Sketch of the County of Perth," in Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Perth (1879; Belleville: Mika Silk Screening, 1972) i-xxv.

<sup>18</sup>Stratford Beacon 26 September 1884: 2.

<sup>19</sup>Stratford Beacon 24 October 1884: 2.

below the regular prices in town." The business drew favorable attention and was supported by the local newspaper:

Messrs. Duncan & Co. are already working up a good trade. They have a fine stock and . . . their prices are down to suit the times. They will be found worthy of a share of public patronage, and buyers will find it to their advantage to give them a call.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, all indications pointed to a successful beginning for Duncan's business. Local assessment rolls record that in 1885 the value of Duncan's real property was \$2,500, while the combined value of his personal property and taxable income was \$3,500, figures that compare quite favorably to other businesses in the town.<sup>21</sup>

Duncan obviously put a great deal of effort into establishing a reputable business in a thriving town. The business continued to be listed as "Duncan & Co."<sup>22</sup> in both 1885 and 1886, and the assessment of his financial situation remained unchanged over that period. But by 1887 something adverse had happened. No longer listed as operating his business on Main Street, R.A. Duncan was now recorded as a

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<sup>20</sup>Mitchell Advocate 7 November 1884: n.pag. For advertisements, see 7 November 1884 and 14 November 1884.

<sup>21</sup>Assessment Roll for the Town of Mitchell, 1885, Perth County Archive, Mitchell. This document also notes that Duncan had rented property on Main Street, the choice business area in town.

<sup>22</sup>According to a granddaughter of Julius Duncan, Julius had a business in Seaforth, a small town just a few miles from Mitchell, which lends support to the theory that he was in partnership with Robert Augustus. (Jane Ormand, letter to the author, 8 September 1986.)

"Merchant-tenant" in a house owned by a Mrs. Humbrook and located on a side street, while the total value of his real property had dropped considerably to \$900.<sup>23</sup> Sometime in late 1886 or early 1887 he had given up his dry goods store and assumed some other occupation. He is listed in both 1888 and 1889 as a "manufactor," a description also given by a family friend years later who noted that the father "had a small manufacturing business."<sup>24</sup> At the time of his death he was referred to as an "agent and traveller";<sup>25</sup> he was possibly employed by one of the many local manufacturers who supplied the farmers with implements, or perhaps by his brother Julius. Because of his illness, however, he may not have been employed in any capacity during the last couple of years of his life.

For a town of its size and location, Mitchell offered a reasonably good standard of education. The high school had a fine reputation:

[it is] generally conceded to be one of the best conducted schools to be found in this part of the Province, wherefore it enjoys a wide reputation

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<sup>23</sup>Assessment Roll for the Town of Mitchell, 1887. It would seem that Duncan was operating some kind of business or trade from his home on Quebec Street.

<sup>24</sup>"Fine Tribute Paid to Brantfordite Who Attains Position of World Fame," Brantford Expositor 30 August 1930: 1.

<sup>25</sup>Obituary, Weekly Herald [Stratford] 10 June 1891: n.pag.

for the thoroughness and excellence of the education there dispensed.<sup>26</sup>

The building itself was "a neat and commodious structure of white brick, with red brick facings, which gives it a very pleasing effect." In the late 1880s, the school had a small library, a supply of scientific apparatus, several charts, maps and globes, a playground and a gymnasium.<sup>27</sup> When the Duncan family moved to Mitchell in 1884, Norman was still attending public school, a phase of education that normally lasted eight years. In 1886 he wrote and successfully passed the entrance examinations for high school, and began the program in the fall of the same year. The entrance examination, introduced in Ontario in 1871, was held annually at every high school in the province and consisted of "an oral examination in reading and a written examination in literature, spelling, writing, geography, grammar, composition, history, and physiology and temperance."<sup>28</sup> Of the 12 candidates who passed the examinations in Mitchell that year, Norman Duncan received the highest marks.<sup>29</sup>

The high school course of study comprised four "forms," each the equivalent of a year's work; the first three forms

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<sup>26</sup>"Historical Sketch of the County of Perth," xi.

<sup>27</sup>Report of the Minister of Education (Ontario) for the Year 1889, 50, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

<sup>28</sup>G.W. Ross, The School System of Ontario: Its History and Distinctive Characteristics (New York: Appleton, 1896) 121.

<sup>29</sup>The results are listed in the "Mitchell Notes" of the Stratford Beacon 8 January 1886: 3.



followed curricula prescribed by the provincial Department of Education, while the University of Toronto set the courses for Form IV. Since Norman Duncan began his first year of high school in 1886, it can be assumed that in 1889 he was entering the fourth form, the only pupil so registered at the Mitchell High School that year.<sup>30</sup> The curriculum at Mitchell was quite varied, offering pupils the following subjects: Reading, Orthography and Orthoepy, English Grammar, Composition, Literature, History, Geography, Arithmetic and Mensuration (all of which were compulsory), as well as Algebra, Euclid, Physics, Botany, Chemistry, Latin, French, German, Bookkeeping and Drawing.<sup>31</sup> For a school of its size, the Mitchell High School was able to provide its pupils with a program comparable to that available in most cities and towns of Ontario. The education that Duncan received during his high school years, with its emphasis on both the reading of good literature and the acquisition of writing skills, certainly provided the foundation on which he could later build a career as a professional writer. The principal of Mitchell High School during the late 1880s was William

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<sup>30</sup>Report of the Minister of Education (Ontario) for the Year 1889, 51.

<sup>31</sup>Report of the Minister of Education (Ontario) for the Year 1886, 40-1. More details on the high school curriculum are provided in "Course of Study, High School, 1887," a pamphlet in a binder entitled Courses of Study 1846 to 1900 available at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Elliot, "one of its most beloved principals."<sup>32</sup> Elliot, who held a B.A. from the University of Toronto, had a strong influence on both Norman and his older brother Robert. A classmate and friend of the Duncan boys, Herbert Casson, was to recall that influence years later:

All of us . . . owed much to William Elliott [sic], the head teacher of the Mitchell High School. He was an ideal boy-trainer. He made knowledge fascinating. He encouraged us in our hobbies. He taught us to think and create.<sup>33</sup>

One of the hobbies of both Robert and Norman was debating. They set up a debating club and, along with six other high school boys including Herbert Casson, they established their headquarters complete with chairs and a platform in a large empty loft of the Duncan home. Norman Duncan himself many years later referred to the influence of this club, claiming "there was never such another."<sup>34</sup> Herbert Casson also provided details on this club:

There were eight of us. There were the two Duncan boys. There was Fergus Kyle, who afterwards became an illustrator in Toronto. There was Wilfrid B. Race, who is now the head of the Ontario School for the Blind at Brantford. There was Alfred Hord, who became a lawyer in western Canada. And there was Warren Thomson, who became a successful business

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<sup>32</sup>Mitchell Centennial 1874-1974 (Mitchell Centennial Committee, 1974) 60, Perth County Archive, Mitchell.

<sup>33</sup>"Fine Tribute Paid to Brantfordite Who Attains Position of World Fame," Brantford Expositor 30 August 1930: 1.

<sup>34</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Ernest J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903. The original of this letter is attached to a copy of Doctor Luke of the Labrador in the private library of John Coldwell Adams in Toronto.

man. Several in that little club of eight boys afterwards climbed up into the "Who's Who."<sup>35</sup>

On one occasion, the club staged a public debate before a large group of appreciative people in the town hall with the mayor in the chair. The activities of this group of boys were not limited to debates. They also had a music club and a chess club. "We sang at local concerts," noted Casson in his tribute, "and we had chess tournaments with another club in the nearby town of Stratford."<sup>36</sup> Chess seems to have been a particular interest of Robert, who also spent much of his time carrying out scientific experiments in a home laboratory. The parents of the boys obviously cooperated in every possible way to provide a home environment that was conducive to the development of inquiring minds. The mother in particular, "a woman of great sympathy and charm," was very supportive of her sons and constantly encouraged their every endeavor.<sup>37</sup>

Just as Robert Duncan was becoming involved at an early stage of his life with the branch of knowledge that would ultimately bring him fame,<sup>38</sup> so young Norman started as a writer while he was still a student in high school. He owed

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<sup>35</sup>"Fine Tribute Paid to Brantfordite Who Attains Position of World Fame," Brantford Expositor 30 August 1930: 1.

<sup>36</sup>"Fine Tribute Paid to Brantfordite."

<sup>37</sup>"Fine Tribute Paid to Brantfordite."

<sup>38</sup>He was to become a nationally renowned chemist and founder of the Industrial Fellowship System at the Mellon Institute for Chemical Research in Pittsburgh.

his earliest venture into the world of newspaper writing to T.H. Race, the editor and proprietor of the Mitchell Recorder, a man "of wide scholarship and learning and an important influence in the community life of the town."<sup>39</sup> It appears that Race used his influence to have young Norman assigned as the Mitchell correspondent for the Stratford Beacon. The job involved writing regular contributions to the Stratford newspaper about people and events in the town of Mitchell. Most of these "Mitchell Notes" for the period during which Norman Duncan was likely to have been correspondent were very similar to dozens of other such items in the newspaper. However, one contribution stands out in that it displays a more imaginative treatment of an ordinary event, and contains characteristics that were to be pronounced features of Duncan's more mature style. The article reads as follows:

Her Majesty's birthday was celebrated here in right royal fashion, and the fire-cracker vendor, swelled with patriotic emotion, of course, as his till swelled with the copper and small silver coin of the multitude of rising patriots. The fire-cracker man was, in fact, the only adult patriot who did enthuse, for no other trader had a customer left in town. Some went to Stratford, others to Seaforth, and others again to the adjoining bushes to picnic.

The day threatened rainy and gloomy during the early hours, but about eleven o'clock it cleared off fine and bright and the picnickers [sic] according to previous arrangement procured their baskets and hid themselves to the bush. The liveries were completely drained out. The finest and most valued part of the celebration came off

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<sup>39</sup>Ernest J. Hathaway, "Norman Duncan," Ontario Library Review 13 (August 1928): 7. T.H. Race was also the father of one of the boys in the debating club formed by the Duncans.

about 4 o'clock in the shape of a splendid rainstorm, the first for three weeks. It was not rain alone, but a downpour of hail that rattled on the roofs and against the windows as if it were a shower of grape shot. The casualties of the day were a rescue from drowning, one or two minor runaways, and a few damaged eyes from the fire-cracker nuisance.<sup>40</sup>

This article, if indeed it was his, was written while Norman Duncan was still 15 years of age. It indicates a writer with an observant eye and a wry sense of humor.

Duncan's attraction to journalism led to his accepting a position as reporter with a newspaper in Windsor.<sup>41</sup> According to his own account of the experience, he spent only three months in Windsor, returning to Mitchell because of home-sickness; furthermore, at that point he "formed the firm determination never again to enter newspaper life."<sup>42</sup> This was not to be the only time in his life that a strong desire to be near his family would lead him to leave a place of employment; indeed, this was to be a recurring pattern.

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<sup>40</sup>"The 24th in Mitchell," Stratford Beacon 27 May 1887: 1. While there is no way to establish with certainty that Norman Duncan wrote this particular piece, evidence suggests the possibility. Not only is the style similar to much of his later writing, but Duncan indicated in his letter to Hathaway (24 November 1903) that he was 15 when he was Mitchell correspondent, making 1887 a likely year.

<sup>41</sup>I have been unable to determine either the date of this period or the newspaper with which he worked. In his letter to Hathaway (24 November 1903), Duncan stated that he obtained a position with the Windsor Daily Record when he was 16, but qualified this with the comment "I think."

<sup>42</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to E.J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

However, the determination never again to enter newspaper life was a temporary state of mind.

On June 7, 1891, Robert Augustus Duncan died. Following funeral services in Mitchell, his body was taken to Brantford for burial in the family plot. He died intestate and it would appear that the widow and children were left in some financial difficulty; but, as was so often to be the case in this remarkable family, a relative soon appeared with assistance. In July, just a few weeks after Robert Augustus's death, his brother Julius set up a trust fund for the two younger Duncan boys (the oldest son, Robert, had by this time left home and was attending university). The trust, to be held by the mother until the boys reached their 21st birthdays, provided each with the sum of \$4,751.20.<sup>43</sup>

Norman, now 20 years of age, was preparing to enter the University of Toronto in September, 1891; Robert had already completed three years of his degree program, and Ernest was still in high school. No doubt encouraged and assisted by Julius, Susan Duncan decided to move the family to the city. In September, the Duncans left Mitchell and took up residence at 26 Tranby Avenue, Toronto, not far from the university campus. Even though Norman was about to enter a new phase in his life, he would still enjoy the closeness to his family that was so important to him.

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<sup>43</sup>Perth County Surrogate Indexes, Register F, 1886-1892, No.2088, Provincial Archives of Ontario.

Norman Duncan enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Science at the University of Toronto in the autumn of 1891. His years as an undergraduate student corresponded with a period of considerable expansion at the university. Following a major fire in 1890 which had destroyed much of the main building of University College, work had begun on the restoration of the central building and the erection of a new library.<sup>44</sup> The university was also expanding its academic offerings. The student enrolment in 1891-2 was 1,091 (a number that was to double within ten years), with a teaching staff of 82.<sup>45</sup>

In his first year Duncan registered for the following courses: English, Mathematics, Latin, French, German, Biology, Chemistry and Geology.<sup>46</sup> His concentration on science courses was no doubt the result of the encouragement of his older brother, who had already completed three years of study in the sciences. Norman, however, was not as interested in science as his brother, and made the comment later that he

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<sup>44</sup>For a history of the early days of the University of Toronto see The University of Toronto and its Colleges, 1827-1906 (Toronto: University [of Toronto] Library, 1906).

<sup>45</sup>R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958) 29.

<sup>46</sup>University of Toronto Faculty of Arts Student Record Card for Norman Duncan, A73-0006/016, University of Toronto Archive.

regretted his choice of courses, having found science "altogether distasteful."<sup>47</sup> In spite of this, he succeeded in acquiring a passing grade in each of his science courses as well as in the required arts courses with the exception of Latin. Academically, his first year at university was a reasonably successful one. Even more significant was the degree of his participation in student affairs during that first year. Although he was probably living with his family at Tranby Avenue, he very quickly immersed himself in a number of campus activities. As of October, 1891, his first month on campus, he was on the Directorate of Varsity, the student newspaper, having been elected to that position as a representative from the class of '95. Early in 1892 he was nominated for the executive of the Literary Society, though he was not elected to the post. In the same academic year he was appointed member of a committee to prepare the yearbook for his class, and in the spring he was reelected to the Directorate of Varsity.<sup>48</sup> Duncan's choice of activities indicates his preference for the literary side of campus life in spite of his registration in science courses. Indeed, there is no indication of any interest by Duncan in scientific activities on campus, nor was he in any way involved in campus athletics.

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<sup>47</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to E.J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

<sup>48</sup>See the following issues of Varsity: 20 October 1891, 12 January 1892, 2 February 1892, 22 March 1892.



In the fall of 1892, Duncan left home and shared lodgings with a classmate named Bill King (better known as William Lyon Mackenzie King, the future prime minister of Canada).<sup>49</sup> Duncan was now 21 and had access to the money in the trust fund set up by his uncle, giving him a degree of financial independence from his family. But his second year at university was to result in a dismal academic record. The only course for which he registered in 1892-3 was Latin, the subject he had failed in his first year. He was to write the examination for the course three more times before he finally succeeded in acquiring a pass in May, 1893. He did, at least for part of the year, continue his active involvement in student activities. In the fall of 1892, he not only continued on the Directorate of Varsity but served as one of the newspaper's associate editors. His name was also mentioned in connection with activities of the Class of '95 of which his friend Mackenzie King was president. But after Christmas of that second year, Duncan's name disappeared from the list of members on the Directorate, though he remained an associate editor until March. From that point on, he no longer worked with Varsity in any capacity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>According to King, he and Norman Duncan shared lodgings on Fremantle Street. Mackenzie King, letter to Ernest Duncan, 23 October 1916, NDC.

<sup>50</sup>See Varsity 12 October 1892, 7 December 1892, 14 December 1892, and 1 March 1893.

At the beginning of his third year, Duncan moved into a university residence. By this time his mother and his brother Ernest had left Toronto for Auburn, N.Y., where Robert had acquired a teaching position. Norman was now entirely independent of his family for the first time in his life. Academically, the year was to be a disaster: he wrote four examinations in May, 1894 -- in French, German, Minerals and Physics -- and failed all four miserably. Writing of that time in his life, Duncan would later comment: "After [my] second year [I] did less work than I care to think about now -- none, in fact."<sup>51</sup> The one significant factor in Duncan's life in 1893-4 was his friendship with Mackenzie King. The nature of their friendship after September of 1893 can be glimpsed through the number of references that young King made to Duncan in his diaries.<sup>52</sup> "N.M. will have his room very nicely fixed," wrote King after visiting his friend in residence.<sup>53</sup> King and Duncan were constant friends, sharing dinners together, going to the theater, and just meeting for a chat. Occasionally Duncan was involved in some of the pranks for which King became well known on campus. King noted that on one occasion

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<sup>51</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to E.J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

<sup>52</sup>Mackenzie King began his diaries on 6 September 1893. References to this source, hereafter given by date, are from the Mackenzie King Diaries, mfm., Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

<sup>53</sup>King, Diaries, 21 September 1893.

Norman and another friend "fired off a revolver at a target on the door."<sup>54</sup>

But Duncan's poor academic performance in his third year seems to have been caused by much more than too much socializing. King's comment on September 29 that "[I] don't know how N.M. is" may indicate concern over his friend's health, a concern perhaps expressed again in a later entry:

After tea we sang hymns[;] while singing Duncan called in and joined us. My heart filled as I sang "for you I am praying."<sup>55</sup>

That Duncan was not well that year seems to be confirmed by a comment made by King after seeing Duncan following the summer break: "[I] went to residence & saw Duncan, he looks better than I have seen him for a long time."<sup>56</sup> Whatever was ailing Duncan, however, was to continue into the next academic year. By October, King was noting that he was shocked to hear that "N.M. Duncan was very sick," adding in a later entry:

Went to see poor Duncan who is very sick [.] while talking to him I felt my consciousness going from me, before a few seconds I fell in a dead faint on the floor.<sup>57</sup>

Duncan's illness, however, appears to have been intermittent and did not deter him from joining King in a number of

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<sup>54</sup>King, Diaries, 12 December 1893.

<sup>55</sup>King, Diaries, 3 December 1893.

<sup>56</sup>King, Diaries, 30 September 1894.

<sup>57</sup>King, Diaries, 17 October 1894.

outings, the most interesting one taking place on the night of October 2, 1894:

I had dinner at residence with Dunc then we went to the theatre. We laughed a good [deal], some of the jokes were rather good. We went out with 2 girls who live on King St. and down to their rooms we were here till nearly 2 A.M. I got pretty well the history of the girls lives. When we left we had some steak at a restaurant. I stayed all night with Dunc at the residence. We both felt very badly.<sup>58</sup>

The two girls referred to in this entry were most likely prostitutes; King noted later in his diary that he returned to talk to one of the girls and convinced her to leave her sinful ways. This episode is significant in assessing Duncan's life, as it is the only hint to that date of any sexual relationship with a woman; indeed, he was to go through his entire life apparently without ever becoming intimately involved with a member of the opposite sex. It is possible that while he was at university Duncan was experiencing the beginnings of what would be a lifelong struggle with alcoholism. Whatever the nature of his illness, it quite likely contributed to his academic failure at university. There may very well have been other factors: perhaps Duncan was distressed by the fact that he was not able to match the academic standards

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<sup>58</sup>King, Diaries, 2 October 1894. C.P. Stacey in A Very Double Life (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976) uses this entry but questions whether the "Dunc" referred to was Norman Duncan or a David Duncan who was also in attendance at the University of Toronto at the same time. However, an early biographer of King notes that King frequently referred to Norman Duncan as "Dunc." See Owen E. McGillicuddy, The Making of a Premier (Toronto: Musson, 1922) 10.

set by his brother Robert; or he may have been affected by the absence of the support of immediate family members, especially his mother, to whom he was particularly close.

Duncan's friendship with King was probably the most significant feature of his university years. In correspondence with Ernest Duncan, King later referred to Norman as an "old and very dear friend."<sup>59</sup> One of King's early biographers, referring to this friendship, makes the following observation: "Friends have said that the affinity was explained by that natural law which matches physical opposites."<sup>60</sup> Although the two were unlike in physique, stamina and academic success, they had a number of qualities in common: their youthful idealism; their shared interest in social issues; their involvement in newspaper work on campus; and their closeness to their respective families, including almost obsessive attachments to their mothers. King was by far the more actively involved of the two in campus activities; for example, he was one of the student leaders in the strike of 1895 which resulted from a confrontation between the editorial staff of Varsity and the university administration. It is possible that, as King's friend, Duncan participated in this

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<sup>59</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to Ernest Duncan, 23 October 1916, TMC.

<sup>60</sup>McGillicuddy, 10.

protest.<sup>61</sup> His association with King was an important feature of his life at university, and no doubt contributed greatly to the widening of Duncan's own intellectual and social horizons. Though the two men were to pursue entirely different careers, the friendship would continue until Duncan's death. Duncan left the University residence in the late spring of 1895 without having graduated and with no prospects in sight. All indications are that he was at a rather low point in his life.<sup>62</sup> There was nothing to draw him back to the towns in which he had grown up, and there seemed to be nothing to keep him in Toronto. It is not surprising that, facing an uncertain future and possibly plagued by recurrent illness and low spirits, he would return to his family. He decided to go to Auburn to join his mother and two brothers. Once again, the members of the immediate family were together. But more important, Duncan was moving to a town where he would find employment as a reporter, the first step in his career as a writer.

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<sup>61</sup>In his letter to Hathaway, Duncan stated that he had written letters to the Globe during the protest. However, a search of the newspapers for that period has to this point failed to find these letters.

<sup>62</sup>For example, Wilfred Grenfell was to write of Duncan that "His own experience of poverty and struggle after leaving the university opened to him channels for his sympathetic portrayal of humble life." See Wilfred Grenfell, "Norman Duncan: An Appreciation," Battles Royal Down North by Norman Duncan (New York: Revell, 1918) 7.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE BEGINNINGS OF A LIFE OF WRITING

## 1

The move to Auburn, N.Y., proved to be an important one for Duncan. Not long after he arrived there, he was successful in acquiring a position as a reporter with a local daily newspaper, the Auburn Bulletin. Whether he was aware of this opportunity for employment before he came to Auburn is unknown; it appears more likely that the move was prompted by a desire to rejoin his family, and that the reporting job became available later. It is not surprising that he accepted work as a reporter. His years at university had not prepared him for entry into any of the professions, including journalism. But his earlier experience with newspaper work, both while he was a high school student in Mitchell and later in Windsor, would indicate that he was more qualified for this line of work than for any other. In spite of his avowed intention after his brief stint in Windsor never to return to reporting, he had shown an interest in newspaper work while he was a student at the University of Toronto. While he did not write for the university paper, the Varsity, he was involved in its operation for a couple of years.

Located about 25 miles southwest of Syracuse, Auburn was the county seat for Cayuga County, N.Y. Founded in 1793, the village was incorporated in 1848. The availability of water power afforded by the Owasco River enabled Auburn to grow into a thriving manufacturing center in the midst of a fertile agricultural district. The town attracted a number of industries, including iron and steel companies, flour mills, and plants manufacturing farming equipment. In many respects Auburn was similar (though on a larger scale) to the town of Mitchell where Duncan had spent much of his boyhood. In 1895 Auburn had a population of close to 30,000. It was a prosperous town with many large magnificent homes and spacious grounds, and even boasted five theatres and its own opera house. The Auburn Bulletin, one of two local evening newspapers, had been founded in 1870 to fill the need in the town for

a low priced daily paper within the means of the poor as well as the rich, independent of all cliques, devoted to the welfare of the taxpayer, the mechanics, the laboring man and the rights and interests of all classes.<sup>1</sup>

Publishing daily except Sunday in issues of eight pages, the Bulletin provided extensive state and local news coverage, with lesser attention given to national and international

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<sup>1</sup>Sylvia Faibisoff & Wendell Tripp (eds), A Bibliography of Newspapers in Fourteen New York Counties (Cooperstown: New York Historical Association, 1978) 39.



events. The newspaper was advertised as "fearless and independent."<sup>2</sup>

As a reporter, Duncan was on the first step towards a lifelong career as a writer. While most of the material that he wrote for the Auburn Bulletin cannot be identified, it is known that one of his most important assignments was the coverage of a locally famous murder trial that included an interview with the accused man. These accounts, numbering 16 articles over a period from March 14 to April 7, 1896, represent the first sustained piece of writing by Duncan that can positively be identified as his.<sup>3</sup>

Duncan's account of the trial of Charles Burgess, accused of murdering local resident Henry Whitlock and assaulting Whitlock's wife, captures the essence of courtroom drama at its best. The articles demonstrate the characteristics of style that were to be pronounced in Duncan's major works: careful description, abundant dialogue and effective narration. His descriptive passages give the reader the sense of "being there." For example, he captures the mood of anticipation as the crowds arrived for opening day:

When . . . the door was finally opened, the crowd poured into the court room and rushed pell mell to

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<sup>2</sup>New Century Atlas of Cayuga County, New York (Philadelphia: Century Map Co., 1904) 15.

<sup>3</sup>A scrapbook entitled "Norman Duncan as Reporter," containing the articles he had written about this trial, forms part of the Norman Duncan Collection. Quotations taken from this scrapbook are acknowledged by date of original appearance in the Bulletin, as pencilled in by Duncan.

the front. Among the first to gain entrance were a number of ladies who evidently had been waiting, and most uncomfortably so, for at least an hour. They came in with a rush, in common with the men, their progress being greatly accelerated by the pushing crowd behind (March 23).

Duncan successfully picks up details of courtroom activities, frequently reporting in dialogue the accounts of witnesses, and interspersing throughout comments about the reactions of the spectators and expressions on the face of the prisoner.

While the articles present the activities in the courtroom from a vantage point of detached objectivity, Duncan occasionally shows signs of wanting to interpret the actions of the participants. For example, following the description of the physical appearance and demeanor of the accused on the first day of the trial, he adds this commentary:

He [Burgess] seemed to feel the horror of his position keenly, to realize that he had outraged the laws framed to protect the men who surrounded him, and to be hopeless of escaping the penalty which the law has fixed (March 16).

At the end of the trial, as the guilty verdict is read, the reporter again draws close to the subjects of his narrative: "The heart of every spectator," he writes, "beat a little faster at every indication that the jury was about to return a verdict." Mrs. Whitlock "munched sweetmeats from a bag which her stepdaughter held," while in contrast the prisoner "moved about restlessly, clasping and unclasping his hands." As for the verdict itself, "The words came with a rush as if the juror were anxious to have his unpleasant duty finished," while in the prisoner's docket, "The blood mantled to the

swarthy cheeks and brow of the doomed man" (April 7). These excerpts indicate that Duncan was not satisfied with merely reporting the news. His sense of the dramatic combined with an inclination to speculate on the thoughts of the people of his story suggests a talent more suited for the writing of fiction than for news reporting. It is possible to detect, even as early as this, a distinct lack of satisfaction with the facts alone. His fondness for characterization, as well as for the creation of atmosphere and for authorial commentary, is indicative of a writer who would not be content to confine himself to factual reporting for any length of time.

## 2

By 1897 Duncan was preparing to make another move, this time to the city of New York. While the city may have had a great appeal to him as a young reporter, it seems that the move was prompted once more by a desire to join his family. Soon after Norman's arrival in Auburn, Robert had left the town to take up a teaching position at Dr. Julius Sach's Collegiate Institute in New York, while Susan Duncan and Ernest had remained in Auburn with Norman. By 1897 Ernest had finished high school and was leaving home to enter the University of Pittsburgh, prompting Norman and his mother to leave Auburn and join Robert in the city.

Very little is known of Duncan's personal life while he was living in New York. When he first moved to the city, he may very well have stayed with his older brother and his mother; however, by 1898 Robert had left New York to take up a teaching position at the Hill School in Pottstown, Pa. In 1899, Norman was listed as having an apartment at 173 Fifth Avenue, located at the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Avenue in what was then a fashionable area of Manhattan.<sup>4</sup> An acquaintance of Duncan's from that period, Gordon Hill Grahame, has provided information on the writer's living quarters:

Norman Duncan had a small suite in the Cumberland bachelor apartments located in the triangular plot where Broadway and Fifth Avenue cross one another at Madison Square. The plot is today occupied by that pioneer skyscraper, the Flatiron Building. Norman was a dear friend and he lived with us more often than he did in his own attractive little apartment; in fact, he did a lot of writing in the quiet of our Brooklyn flat.<sup>5</sup>

Duncan used his influence to secure a reporting job for Grahame's father when the Grahame family came to New York. Norman and Grahame, who was a young boy at the time, became very close friends and spent much time together:

I spent several week-ends with him in the Cumberland

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<sup>4</sup>New York City Directory (New York Public Library) lists Norman Duncan at this address for 1899-1900 and again for 1900-1. For the year 1902-3 his residence is listed as 53 Washington Square South.

<sup>5</sup>Gordon Hill Grahame, Short Days Ago (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972) 46.

and these were happy occasions. He took me to all the places of great interest to a curious boy.<sup>6</sup>

This attachment is significant as it was one of several such friendships with young boys that were to be characteristic of Duncan's personal life. The first evidence of this pattern occurred while Duncan was a student at the University of Toronto. Mackenzie King made the following entry in his diary:

Had dinner at Residence with Duncan. . . . Had ice cream at McConkie's with "Dunk" & Doc. We then went to Musee where we had great fun. After the show we went behind the scenes, Duncan took a little actor boy with him & we again had another lunch at McConkie's. Got home about 12 p.m.<sup>7</sup>

Again on the following day King wrote:

The rest of the morning was spent with Duncan & "Dickie Gardiner" which is acting at the Musee, & who Dunk was looking after for the day. . . . Tonight Dunk & I went to the Musee with Dickie & had a great time.<sup>8</sup>

Many years later, King commented on Duncan's fondness for young boys, noting that while Duncan was an undergraduate he frequently brought boys that he had befriended to lectures with him.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, no evidence in any of these relationships of any explicit sexual interest on the part of Duncan. In fact, Gordon Grahame, as if anticipating such a conclusion, addresses this assumption:

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<sup>6</sup>Grahame, 46.

<sup>7</sup>Mackenzie King, Diaries, 4 October 1893.

<sup>8</sup>King, Diaries, 5 October 1893.

<sup>9</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to S. Edgar Briggs, 10 June 1918, MKC.

Norman was a tolerant and generous companion for a small boy, and his interest in me was purely fatherly. I say this in all seriousness for I was the type of youngster who attracted males, young and old, whose interest in sex was definitely unorthodox.<sup>10</sup>

Whether there was a latent homosexual attraction on Duncan's part cannot be determined. However, it would not be surprising if there were, considering the number of such attractions in his own life and the frequency with which relationships between men and young boys appear in his fiction.

There is no evidence of any other friendships during this New York period, nor is there any indication of an interest shown by Duncan in women. He seems to have spent almost all his time at his writing, and his closest companions, other than family members, were the people who became the subjects of his writing.

Shortly after his arrival in New York, Duncan obtained employment with the New York Evening Post, which was by 1897 well established as one of the city's most influential newspapers. Founded in 1801, it had gained prominence throughout the nineteenth century under a series of distinguished editors, including William Cullen Bryant and Park Godwin. By the 1890s the newspaper had reached a peak of respectability: its "literary reviews were unexcelled, and it was free of morbid sensationalism."<sup>11</sup> The supplement to the Saturday

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<sup>10</sup>Grahame, 46.

<sup>11</sup>Frank L. Mott, American Journalism (New York: Macmillan, 1962) 428.

edition included feature articles on topics of general interest, a short story by a guest contributor, and a number of regular columns devoted to literature, music, art and drama.

Duncan began with the Evening Post as a reporter. While most of his reporting cannot be identified, it seems quite probable that one of his earliest assignments was an interview with a prominent anarchist of the day, Johann Most.<sup>12</sup> In style and tone, this article is very similar to Duncan's pieces on Charles Burgess. Commenting on Johann Most's announced intention to leave New York for Buffalo, the reporter noted:

New York is about to lose, through lack of appreciation, Herr Johann Most, the apostle of Anarchy to America, so called, whom Buffalo will gratuitously acquire.<sup>13</sup>

What followed was a mixture of biographical information, bits of dialogue taken from the interview (in which the heavily accented idiom of Most is retained), and accounts of Most's anarchist philosophy, his unsuccessful attempts to spread his message, and his optimism about future victory. While much of the account is direct reporting, one can sense in the writing a number of attributes that would become distinctive characteristics of Duncan's mature style. One

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<sup>12</sup>This claim is made in "Chronicle and Comment," Bookman [New York] 11 (August 1900): 502. It can be substantiated to some degree by the fact that the Most story was published early in September 1897, about the time that Duncan would have moved to New York.

<sup>13</sup>"Passing of Herr Most," Evening Post [New York] 4 September 1897: 2.

example is his fondness for presenting a subject through a noticeable physical attribute:

His social creed is betrayed by his malformed head, his wiry, grizzled hair, cropped to a stubble; his asymmetrical jaws, a deformity that a bushy beard and moustache do not conceal, and his constant expression of malignant discontent.

As with his earlier reporting on the Burgess trial, Duncan at times allowed his own strong impressions to influence his accounts. After reading the article on Most's departure from New York, the reader would have had no doubt that the reporter for one would be glad to see him go.

The only other material that has been attributed to Duncan while he was working as a reporter with the Evening Post is a series of articles covering Theodore Roosevelt, first during his naval preparations at Montauk Point for the Spanish-American War and later during his successful gubernatorial campaign in New York.<sup>14</sup> Numerous articles appeared daily in the newspaper regarding the war, and it is impossible to identify any of them as Duncan's. However, the coverage of Roosevelt's campaign for governor in the fall of 1898 consisted of a single daily report from the field, and it is quite possible (though again this cannot be established

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<sup>14</sup>See "Chronicle and Comment." The claim is also made by Frederick Niven, "To Remember Norman Duncan," Saturday Night 57 (20 June 1942): 29.



with any certainty) that at least some, if not all, of these articles were Duncan's.<sup>15</sup>

Following his coverage of Roosevelt's campaign, Duncan found a new outlet for his writing. Whether or not he continued to do occasional news reporting for the paper is uncertain; what is clear is that he began to write special articles for the Saturday supplement. One account suggests that Duncan turned down the opportunity to become assistant city editor in order to devote his time to writing feature articles.<sup>16</sup> Feature writing was certainly more suited to Duncan's temperament as a writer. The feature story, unlike the news story, "is a creative, sometimes subjective, article designed primarily to entertain and to inform readers of an event, a situation or an aspect of life."<sup>17</sup> Certain characteristics of feature writing must have appealed to Duncan: its scope for greater freedom of expression and creativity; the potential for more subjectivity in the presentation of material; and the emphasis on people rather than events. The feature writer is more like a storyteller, employing anecdotes, dialogue, and

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<sup>15</sup>Certainly, a number of them share the stylistic features that are characteristic of the other reporting that has been identified. For example, see the following articles in the Evening Post: "Colonel Roosevelt's Day," 11 October 1898: 1; "Colonel Roosevelt's Tour," 19 October 1898: 1; "Roosevelt's Second Tour," 24 October 1898: 1; "At State Headquarters," 3 November 1898: 1.

<sup>16</sup>"Chronicle and Comment," Bookman [New York] 11 (Aug 1900): 502.

<sup>17</sup>Daniel R. Williamson, Feature Writing for Newspapers (New York: Hastings, 1975) 12.

similar devices into his material. Rather than give an exact rendition of an event, feature writers "relish the strange, inconsistent antics of the human race and, to a large degree, earn their livelihoods by astutely observing and reporting these antics."<sup>18</sup>

Feature writing apparently had a very great appeal for Duncan. It provided him with the opportunity to explore out-of-the-way places and meet unusual people, a fascination that was to remain with him for the rest of his writing career, and his later books abound with accounts of such people. The first such group were the Syrians of Manhattan, people he had encountered while he was exploring little known parts of New York in order to find subject matter for his feature stories. According to one early biographical account, he discovered the Syrian Quarter during his first year with the Evening Post and spent much of his spare time exploring the area and becoming acquainted with the residents:

He found a little Oriental Cafe kept by an old Syrian, with whom he developed an unusual intimacy, and over a green baize table he spent many an evening with his friend in the study of Syrian poetry and music.

For a long time he could make little of the weird sounds of the Syrian music, but when he saw how deeply the emotions of the people were stirred he felt that there must be something beneath, to which he had not penetrated. His friend helped him with the translation and in the interpretation of the music, and as it was played he abandoned himself to the strange airs until he, too, was able to catch the melody and the feeling.

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<sup>18</sup>Williamson, 112.

He now, for the first time, seriously attempted to write stories. He now had something to write about. He was getting below the surface and seeing life in its elemental form. These Syrian people had been transplanted from their sunny native land and deposited in one of the squalid sections of a great Western city, but they were still Syrian in heart and in sympathy and in their customs and traditions.<sup>19</sup>

What indeed was the nature of this Syrian community and its people, and what was its appeal for Duncan, the reporter and creative writer? By the late 1890s a substantial community of Syrians had settled in lower Manhattan in an area that became known as "Little Syria":

At its height, the colony was contained in approximately seven city blocks, bounded on the south by Battery Place, on the west by West Street, on the east by Greenwich Street and Trinity Place, and on the north by Cedar Street.<sup>20</sup>

Washington Street was the center and cultural base of this Syrian community. The largest emigration of Syrians to America occurred between 1890 and 1914, although there had been a small influx in the late 1870s and through the 1880s. Philip Hitti reports that in 1899 (when Duncan was in the midst of writing his Syrian material), 3,708 Syrians emigrated to the United States, a large proportion of this number settling in the Manhattan colony.<sup>21</sup> In one of his own articles,

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<sup>19</sup>Ernest J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature: Norman Duncan," Canadian Bookman 8 (June 1926): 172.

<sup>20</sup>Philip M. & Joseph M. Kayal, The Syrian-Lebanese in America (Boston: Twayne, 1975) 86.

<sup>21</sup>Philip K. Hitti, The Syrians in America (New York: Doran, 1924) 62.

Duncan noted that some 5,000 Syrians were living in the Quarter, immigrants who had left their homes in Syria,<sup>22</sup> a country that at that time included present-day Syria as well as Lebanon and Israel. The reasons for the migration were many. Kayal notes that "religious, economic, and political considerations were all intermingled, making it impossible to isolate one variable as causal."<sup>23</sup> But as far as the immigrants themselves were concerned, their wholesale expatriation was blamed on to the oppression of the Turkish government that controlled their native land. Local newspapers in the Quarter were generally unanimous in their anti-Turkish policy and placed great emphasis on political and religious persecution as major causes of dissatisfaction with the government back home. Duncan succeeded in capturing in his accounts the yearning for freedom combined with a hatred of Turkish oppression on the part of the Syrians in New York:

Thus it is in his security from the tyranny he has so long known that the refugee finds his chiefest delight, rather than in the strange liberties to which he has come. It is not the freedom from insult, but the freedom to insult, in which he rejoices. To cry down the Sultan without restraint or fear of death is the privilege he first learns to prize. There are nights when the streets of the Syrian quarter in New York ring with the call to arms for the freedom of Syria. Here is no illusion! This is Liberty!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Norman Duncan, "A People from the East," Harper's 106 (March 1903): 556.

<sup>23</sup>Kayal, 66.

<sup>24</sup>Duncan, "A People from the East," 556.

The main characters of Duncan's accounts seem to have been drawn from people he actually met: the proprietor of the coffee house, the editor of a local anti-Turkish newspaper, and a musician. It would appear that Duncan succeeded in becoming close to these people and established some very warm friendships:

He [Duncan] became intimate with the principal men of the colony, and formed friendships with several of the leaders. Disputes were referred to him for settlement, and his advice was sought and followed. . . . When the Turkish Minister came to this city from Washington and visited the quarter, Mr. Duncan was present at the request of the leaders. He made the principal speech of the evening, and presented to the Turkish representative the requests of certain ambitious Syrians.<sup>25</sup>

Certain characteristics of the Syrians so impressed Duncan that he emphasized them in his articles and short stories. He obviously identified with their passionate desire for freedom of expression and the fervent attempts of their newspapers to promote their cause; and this led him to use a fictitious newspaper editor as a main spokesman in a number of his short stories. The idealism and imagination of these people as expressed in their poetry and music also had an appeal for the young reporter. As Hitti notes in his study of the Syrians: "A typical Syrian standing on the shore of the body of water separating Manhattan from Brooklyn would instinctively sing a song, whereas a Yankee would think of

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<sup>25</sup>"Chronicle and Comment," Bookman [New York] 11 (August 1900): 502.

building a bridge."<sup>26</sup> Duncan drew attention as well to Syrian hospitality:

A generous hospitality may be found everywhere, whether in the home of the peddler or of the rich importer. The welcome is genuine, and no sacrifice is too great if it contributes to your pleasure.<sup>27</sup>

The bond among family members also struck a sympathetic chord with Duncan.

Three of the four feature articles by Duncan that appear in the Evening Post between December 10, 1898, and May 27, 1899, deal with life in the Syrian Quarter.<sup>28</sup> The first of these, "A Syrian Coffee-House," is set in a popular gathering place which provides Duncan with an opportunity to observe a cross section of residents at close range. The reporter himself merges into the background, and does not allow his own presence to intrude into the account. The story is essentially descriptive, of both scenes and people. In a lengthy opening paragraph, Duncan permits the reader to approach the establishment from outside, allowing him to share the sights and sounds of the neighborhood:

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<sup>26</sup>Hitti, 44.

<sup>27</sup>Duncan, "A People from the East," 558.

<sup>28</sup>The three Syrian articles that appeared in the Evening Post are as follows: "A Syrian Coffee-House," 10 December 1898: 18; "Fianee, the Musician," 7 January 1899: 13; and "In the Syrian Quarter," 13 May 1899: 13. The fourth feature story is "Training Acrobats," 27 May 1899: 13.

Bright lights are in the windows of the little basement shops, where strange Eastern wares, in hap-hazard arrangement and covered with dust, are exposed for sale; sounds of harsh laughter, maudlin loud talk, and discordant singing come from the open doors of the low saloons scattered the length of the quarter, where Syrian, Turk, Armenian, Irishman, Hungarian, Scandinavian, it may be, have gathered to make a night of it; the street swarms with slatternly, dark-skinned women, vicious-looking men, and grimy children in boisterous play -- idlers all, who slink in and out of the cellarways and dark halls, and peer from the shadows and chatter on the walks, until the saloons and coffee-houses are closed for the night.

In prose replete with adjectives, Duncan conjures up for the reader the exoticism as well as the realism of the scene. He then narrows the focus as he takes the reader inside the coffee house, and casts his eye around the premises. Only after having established carefully the setting does Duncan introduce his readers to the people: the proprietor, Atta the wrestler; Yousseff, the boy who takes the orders and makes the coffee; and a cross section of customers, each with his own peculiar attribute and each in himself worthy of a story.

As Duncan came to know these people better, he began to expand the themes of his features to include the political aspirations of many of the immigrants. The article "In the Syrian Quarter" is much more than another description of Syrians chatting over coffee. Here Duncan introduces us to Khayat, the editor of a local Arabic newspaper, the Kawkab

America,<sup>29</sup> "which the people read with great appreciation, though in fear." This article explores the conflict between the desire on the part of some of the Quarter's inhabitants to express openly their opposition to the ruling power in their homeland, and their fear that such a declaration might endanger their relatives still living there. While Duncan does not intrude into the story with his own ideas, there is no doubt that he identifies with the editor as he views with irony the reports of his colleagues who have entertained a representative of the Turkish government visiting from Washington and "in a yielding mood":

The editor of the seditious Kawkab listened and smiled and sneered and closed his book and went home, saying, as he went: "I will write about it to-morrow. What you said I will not say; what I will say is what you feared to say and left unsaid. You are a consistent people, are you not? But I forgive you, for you have relatives in Turkey."

Duncan obviously had great admiration for this editor, as he was to use him later as the central character of his short stories based on the Syrian immigrants.

These features on the Syrians provide us with the first example of Duncan's attempts to imitate local dialect. In his quest for authenticity and realism, he listened carefully to the speech of the people he met, and tried in his writing

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<sup>29</sup>This newspaper, which published in both English and Arabic, had been established in 1892 and was in business until 1909. Information supplied by the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Philadelphia.



to duplicate both the idiom and the accent. He also listened to their music, with its strange and unfamiliar sounds, and wrote of it in some detail in "Fianee, the Musician." Throughout all the articles, one senses the uniqueness of these people who were well out of the mainstream of North American life. Indeed, this is what attracted Duncan to them, as it was to attract him to many other groups of people later in his career. Part of this interest was no doubt sparked by newspaper and magazine editors of the day, who wanted stories about unusual people and exotic places. But the reader can detect much more than that in Duncan: there is a genuine warmth, a close identification with and sympathy for the people he writes about that reflects his own sensitivity and love of humanity.

Duncan's earliest writings on the Syrian Quarter were these feature articles in the Evening Post. However, he soon undertook the writing of short stories for publication in magazines. His first attempt, a story entitled "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," was not immediately successful:

It was a short story; [it was] declined several times; [I] rewrote it again and again; [I] spent, in all, a year on that one story; [I] published it at last.<sup>30</sup>

Hathaway elaborated further on this:

His first Syrian story was returned by several editors to whom he had submitted it. He determined to make it as perfect as possible in craftsmanship. He re-wrote it again and again, spending many months on it, and so

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<sup>30</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to E.J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

carefully did he master his art, that never again had he a story rejected by a magazine editor. Finally, he submitted it to McClure's Magazine. Miss Ida Tarbell, then editor of McClure's, saw at once its value, but, realizing that it was not a McClure story, suggested that he send it to the Atlantic, where it was accepted immediately.<sup>31</sup>

If Ida Tarbell did indeed recommend to Duncan that he submit the story to the Atlantic Monthly, she was paying him a compliment of the highest order. The Atlantic Monthly was at the turn of the century one of the leading periodicals in America and had as its editor the well-known literary figure, William Dean Howells. According to one authority on American magazines, the Atlantic Monthly "offered the finest American imaginative and critical writers a suitable, periodical vehicle for their work."<sup>32</sup> The appearance of Duncan's first story was followed by the publication of five others based on the Syrian material, two more in the Atlantic Monthly, two in Ainslee's and, eventually, one in McClure's.<sup>33</sup> By this time it would seem that McClure's was convinced of the suitability of Duncan's material for their own publications, as not only did their monthly magazine accept one of his

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<sup>31</sup>Hathaway, "Who's Who," 172.

<sup>32</sup>James P. Wood, Magazines in the United States (New York: Ronald, 1956) 79.

<sup>33</sup>The six Syrian stories were as follows: "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," Atlantic Monthly 85 (February 1900): 255-61; "The Greatest Player in All the World," Ainslee's 5 (April 1900): 206-213; "The Lamp of Liberty," Atlantic Monthly 85 (May 1900): 649-56; "For the Hand of Haleem," Atlantic Monthly 86 (September 1900): 347-55; "The Under Shepherd," Ainslee's 6 (September 1900): 129-137; "The Spirit of Revolution," McClure's 15 (September 1900): 466-73.

stories but their book publishing division, McClure, Phillips & Co., agreed to publish a volume containing all six Syrian stories. A contract for this publication was signed on May 16, 1900, and the book appeared in print early in December of the same year.

The progression from periodical writing to book publication was a common practice for writers in the United States around the turn of the century. A large majority of serious writers began their careers with contributions to magazines; indeed, by the 1890s numerous writers considered magazine publication their immediate aim:

Once a writer had appeared in two or three of the leading magazines, he was likely to go on, hit the stride of the successful contributor, become adept in furnishing the editors with what they wanted, and make himself a good income and a certain amount of fame.<sup>34</sup>

It is estimated that in 1900 there were 20,000 persons in the United States writing for magazines.<sup>35</sup> William Dean Howells, editor of the Atlantic Monthly, noted that "most of the best literature now sees the light in the magazines, and most of the second-best appears first in book form."<sup>36</sup> The number of periodicals being published at the time was also phenomenal; by 1900 over 5,500 magazines were available in

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<sup>34</sup>Frank L. Mott, A History of American Magazines 1885-1905, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) 4: 38.

<sup>35</sup>Mott, 4: 38.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Mott, 4: 41.

the United States. Improvements in the printing and distribution of magazines as well as lower prices were two of the factors responsible for the increased interest in periodicals on the part of the reading public. Along with the demand for periodical literature was an increasing interest in the genre of short fiction. The major American magazines were anxious to publish new and promising writers of the short story. The list of American and British writers whose works appeared in periodicals during this period is impressive. New York was the center of the American periodicals industry and Duncan, as a reporter in the city, was in a position to avail himself of the opportunities that periodical publication provided for young writers.

## 3

Duncan's first book, The Soul of the Street (1900), was subtitled Correlated Stories of the New York Syrian Quarter. The book, a collection of six short stories, was dedicated as follows: "MOTHER/Here is the Flower of/YOUR LOVE." Written on his mother's copy of the book is the following inscription:

To my mother: from whose love and faith -- abiding in time and trial as well as promise -- it has all all proceeded, this book is given, with the undivided and indivisible love of the author, her son Norman.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>NDC.

The book drew some attention from the critics and reviewers, especially in the New York area. Shortly after its appearance, the New York Times published a favorable review, calling it a "most sympathetic book . . . replete with human sympathy."<sup>38</sup> The Nation also had words of praise for the writer's intimacy with the subject and called the book "a noteworthy document upon a little-known phase of our city history."<sup>39</sup> A much more comprehensive and critical appraisal of the book was provided by Hutchins Hapgood in the New York Bookman.<sup>40</sup> While praising the lyrical quality of the prose, Hapgood asserted that although the book deals with the soul, "it has nothing to do with the street." Idealism and sentimentality were the qualities criticized most strongly in this review, though the conclusion was that it is an "excellent book in a limited way."

Two of the stories in The Soul of the Street are worth examining in some detail: one, "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," because it is Duncan's first piece of fiction; and "The Lamp of Liberty," arguably the best story in the volume. The central character of "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran" is Khalil Khayat, a fictionalized version of the Khayat of the feature articles. An examination of this character reveals what is to become a familiar aspect of

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<sup>38</sup>New York Times 22 December 1900: 938.

<sup>39</sup>Nation 72 (4 April 1901): 280.

<sup>40</sup>Bookman [New York] 12 (February 1901): 583-4.

Duncan's method. The resemblance between the fictional character and his model in real life is quite striking, so much so that it becomes very difficult to distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Though the name of the newspaper of which Khayat is the editor is changed from Kawkab America to Kawkab Elhorriah, the real editor's enthusiasm for liberty and his anti-Turkish sentiment become immediately apparent. But these are not the main concerns of this story. The narrative centers on the editor's friendship with a young crippled boy, Billy Halloran, whose drunken mother has denied him the love and companionship he desperately needs. Khayat comforts the boy by telling him a story, the legend of George and the Dragon, that he himself had heard from his mother in the old country.

The opening lines of this story succeed in conveying in distilled form the essence of the narrative to follow:

The screaming of the child in the next room suddenly subsided into wailing; and Khalil Khayat, the old editor of Kawkab Elhorriah, -- knew that the day's causeless beating was over (27).

Here the author not only introduces his two main characters. He also hints at the motivating force in the editor's life, his passionate love of liberty; he captures graphically the domestic crisis in the boy's life; he anticipates the sensitivity and warmth of the older man; and he immediately draws a sympathetic response from his reader with the reference to a screaming child.

The technique of telling a story within a story results in a heavy reliance on dialogue. The narrative present of the story contains very little action, but this is compensated for by an abundance of activity in the story that Khalil tells the boy. This contrast reinforces the essential tension in the story, between the escape afforded by the realm of the imagination and the harsh reality that eventually intrudes with the return of the boy's mother. The editor's attempts to conclude the story of the rescue of the King's daughter by the heroic George are overpowered in the boy's mind by the more immediate image of his drunken mother, and the story ends on a melancholy note:

And Billy Halloran was left alone on the fire- escape, in the dusk and chill of evening, between the things of home, that repelled him, and the romp and laughter of the street, far below, that were greatly to be desired, but were out of the reach of a little boy who chanced to be a cripple from birth (47-8).

"In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran" demonstrates the extent to which Duncan's fiction was influenced by his personal life. The strong friendship that exists between the boy and the editor reflects Duncan's own fondness for young boys; the drunken mother defiles the principles of motherhood that Duncan admired so much; and, possibly, Mrs. Halloran's excessive drinking and its devastating effects on her family life may well offer a glimpse into Duncan's already commencing anxieties about alcohol.

This story was, however, replaced as the opening piece in the volume by "The Lamp of Liberty," perhaps selected because it provides a more substantial thematic introduction to the whole book. "The Lamp of Liberty" not only introduces the reader more fully to Khalil Khayat, the only character common to the entire volume, but concentrates on the conflict that echoes throughout the other stories. Khayat, the idealistic editor, and Salim Shofi, the more utilitarian newspaper owner, differ on the freedom with which the editor can express his anti-Turkish sentiment. The editor is writing for publication in the local newspaper a tale of an imaginary trial of the Sultan of Turkey on charges of cruelty and murder. The more conservative owner of the paper, anxious not to offend the Turkish representatives in Washington, refuses to publish the story. But he eventually agrees to do so, but only after the editor offers to work for reduced wages. While the author obviously sympathizes with the idealism of the editor, he is not oblivious to the harsher realities of life. This dichotomy is condensed with fine artistic control in the closing sentences of the story:

Khayat laid down his pencil, and lifted the window, that the dawn might rest him; and he looked out over the quiet city to the night's furthest limit, and was rested.

Long, long before, Salim Shofi had fallen asleep as he smiled (24).

As he wrote his stories Duncan never lost sight of his role as author, and frequently this role is brought to the



attention of the reader. For example, he prefaces his introduction of Salim Shofi to the reader with the comment, "This may be written of Shofi." Again he shares his awareness of the process of his craft with the reader when he comments:

I do not know where Khayat went -- he has forgotten; but there are many places in that neighborhood which are comfortable to men who shrink from militant contact with the world (18).

What we also see here is the presence of Duncan himself, as he draws directly from his own contacts with the people of the Syrian Quarter in his fictional representations. In much of his fiction, Duncan is never far away from his experiences, rooting his imaginative creations in the world of observed reality.

This story also demonstrates that Duncan was aware of the fact that many of his readers may not have been familiar with the section of New York of which he was writing. The narrator frequently intrudes to make some point clear and to provide a statement that might help the reader interpret the events before him. For example, having described the grimy windowpanes of the newspaper office, the narrator qualifies Khayat's action in raising the sash with the following comment:

He had never said: "I cannot see the sky for the dirt on the panes, Salim. Would the cost of cleaning be very great?" He had patiently raised the sash; for this is the way of the Syrian: day after day to step aside, rather than stoop once to lift the stone off the path (1).

Yet at other times throughout the six stories the narrator adopts the more limited perception of the Syrian, referring, for example, to St Patrick's Day as a "mysterious occasion" when "the Irish have sprigs of green on their coat lapels"(52), and to the homes of wealthy New Yorkers as "the palaces of the princes of the American people"(63). Duncan has not yet decided how to handle his narrative voice, shifting frequently from the stance of an outsider presenting an obscure world for an unfamiliar readership to the narrow perspective of the Syrians themselves.

Three of the remaining stories in The Soul of the Street deal with more domestic concerns within the Syrian Quarter: the pursuit of a Syrian woman by two rival men, the musical prowess of a local violinist, and the relationship between the people and their Orthodox priest. The volume concludes with "The Spirit of Revolution," a story which returns to the theme of the opening narrative, the yearning on the part of many expatriate Syrians to free their homeland from oppressive Turkish rule. Again the central character is Khayat whose passionate desire to see the development of a revolutionary movement in the Quarter is chastened by the realization that many of his compatriots are motivated by more expedient factors. The announcement that a representative of the Turkish government is visiting the Quarter quickly melts the resolve of the less determined supporters, and the editor is left alone to dream of the overthrow of the Sultan.

The presence of Khayat and the recurrence of the theme of freedom from Turkish rule are the main unifying elements in the six stories. There is no chronological sequence from story to story; indeed, characters referred to as deceased in one story turn up alive in the next one. At times, explanatory phrases used to introduce the reader to a character or scene reappear, a repetition that can be accounted for by the fact that the stories were originally written for issues of periodicals published over a period of months. Yet at other times, Duncan seems to have been conscious of these unnecessary recurrences. For example, each initial reference to Kawkab Elhorriah in the original magazine stories was followed by an explanation to the effect that the name of the newspaper translated into English meant "Star of Liberty"; but all of these references except the first are eliminated from the text of The Soul of the Street. Duncan, then, was obviously aware of the need for such changes, though the process was not meticulously pursued. Indeed, the volume demonstrates a certain carelessness in the preparation of previously published stories, a carelessness that he never completely overcame in his literary career.

In many of the stories in The Soul of the Street, Duncan relies heavily on the material he gleaned as a reporter in the Syrian Quarter. Not only the editor, Khalil Khayat, but many of the other characters are drawn from real people mentioned in the earlier feature articles written for the

Evening Post. Incidents reported earlier, such as the visit of a representative from the Turkish Consulate in Washington, are absorbed directly into the fictional accounts. Duncan's identification with the people he encountered as a reporter shows itself in a number of significant ways. An aura of charm and exoticism permeates all of the stories in the Soul of the Street, providing a counterpoint to the more realistic presentation of everyday life in the Quarter. While some attention is paid to the less desirable aspects of tenement living, notably in "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," and "The Under-Shepherd," in most of the stories the idealism of Khalil Khayat dominates to the point of didacticism. This enthusiastic re-creation in fiction of people and traits that impressed him in real life results in a somewhat romanticized portrayal of life among the Syrian immigrants.

By 1900, Duncan seems to have garnered all the potential he could find in his Syrian material. Even though he was to introduce a few of his characters from The Soul of the Street into three later stories, he turned his attention elsewhere. But his first book stands as a significant statement, not only about an obscure group of people on the very doorstep of his New York readers, but about the method that he would use during the rest of his life as a writer. He was never to show any interest in depicting people with whom either he or his readers would be readily familiar. Instead he would always seek out the unfamiliar and the unusual, finding in

them worthy subjects for both his nonfiction and his fiction. His method would always be the same: to gather material from firsthand experience among virtually unknown people in faraway corners of the world, and to refashion that material in his writing.

## CHAPTER 3

## NEWFOUNDLAND VISITS

## 1

Duncan's decision to come to Newfoundland in the early summer of 1900 was the most significant landmark of his literary career. That trip and return visits in the years to follow provided him with material for over 80 articles and stories as well as for 11 books, well over half his total literary production. It is difficult to establish with absolute certainty exactly what prompted that first trip to Newfoundland. There is no reference to it in any of Duncan's correspondence, although E.J. Hathaway gave the following explanation:

he had long wanted to write stories of the seafaring folk. He felt within him -- he, an inland man who had never seen the sea until manhood -- that he could do it. He had visited the fishing settlements along the Atlantic coast, but there were too many visitors there and too much sophistication, and it seemed impossible to get below the surface and reach the hearts of the people. Finally it occurred to him that Newfoundland offered the opportunities he was seeking.<sup>1</sup>

A similar motivation was suggested by a reviewer in the

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<sup>1</sup>Hathaway, "Who's Who," 172.

London Bookman, who wrote that Duncan was "seized by an impulse to write of the sea."<sup>2</sup>

The actual reason for the trip was probably more practical, though not without its touch of romanticism. S. Edgar Briggs, a friend and associate of Duncan's who was also managing editor with Fleming H. Revell, commented in 1918 that by 1900 Duncan was tiring of the atmosphere embodied in his Syrian stories and was ready for a fresh direction.<sup>3</sup> This desire on the part of Duncan, ever the reporter, to break new ground may very well have been encouraged by the work of other writers with the Evening Post. The Saturday supplement frequently carried articles and stories about the northern reaches of the continent, including several on both Newfoundland and Labrador. Of special note is the fact that in the column next to Duncan's own article "Fiancee, the Musician" in January, 1899, was a feature by A.C. Laut entitled "In Northern Seas," which gave an account of that writer's observations of whaling off the coast of Newfoundland.<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup>"Norman Duncan," Bookman [London] 26 (June 1904): 81.

<sup>3</sup>"Biographical Note," Battles Royal Down North by Norman Duncan (New York: Revell, 1918) 10. While this article is unsigned and has been incorrectly attributed to Wilfred Grenfell (for example, see Thomas Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan"), a letter from Mackenzie King to S. Edgar Briggs written 24 July 1918, MKC, clearly implies that Briggs was the author.

<sup>4</sup>See the Evening Post [New York] 7 January 1899: 13. Many of the features in the supplement were accounts of travel.

was possibly Duncan's earliest acquaintance with the island of Newfoundland.<sup>5</sup>

The particular interests of a New York magazine, McClure's, gave Duncan the encouragement and impetus he needed. In a note that accompanied the first edition of The Way of the Sea (1903), Duncan made reference to McClure's as the journal that "encouraged the enterprise from the beginning." He had been working with the publishing house of McClure, Phillips and Co. during the spring preparing the text of The Soul of the Street, and had earlier had contacts with the magazine and its editors regarding periodical publication. It seems quite likely that the encouragement to go to Newfoundland to gather material for the magazine came from Ida Tarbell. Tarbell, a member of the magazine's editorial staff, had been impressed with Duncan's Syrian stories and probably wanted to use more of his material. She was to write him years later praising his success, to which Duncan would reply: "it delights me to think that you believe your sympathy with my early work to have been justified."<sup>6</sup> It cannot be ascertained whether McClure's undertook the financing of the trip; the magazine certainly did not demand exclusive rights

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Moore suggests that Duncan may have read about Newfoundland while he was at the University of Toronto during 1895, when the island was very much in the news because of a debate about possible union with Canada.

<sup>6</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Ida Tarbell, n.d., Ida M. Tarbell Collection, Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa.; copy, EMP.



to the material to be gathered, as only five of Duncan's stories and one of his books were eventually published by that company.

Duncan's contacts with McClure's played a large part in launching his literary career. Formed in 1893, McClure's had by 1900 become one of America's leading periodicals, boasting a circulation of nearly 400,000 and attracting contributions from the leading writers of the day. It also demonstrated an interest in publishing material by new writers.<sup>7</sup> A leading authority on American magazines claims that McClure's "set the pattern for the golden age of the ten-cent illustrated magazines, and was marked by freshness, brilliance, and abundance of life."<sup>8</sup> Actually, McClure's had a specific assignment in mind for Duncan as he left New York in June, 1900: he was to travel to St. Anthony on the northern tip of the island of Newfoundland in order to interview the medical missionary, Wilfred Grenfell.<sup>9</sup> Grenfell's work among the fishermen of northern Newfoundland and coastal Labrador had already been attracting attention in the United States; his

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<sup>7</sup>For information on McClure's at this time, see Harold S. Wilson, "McClure's Magazine" and the Muckrakers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) and Ida M. Tarbell, All in the Day's Work (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

<sup>8</sup>Frank L. Mott, A History of American Magazines 1885-1905, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) 4: 607.

<sup>9</sup>The source of much of the information that follows is a set of notes from an interview by Thomas Moore with Josiah Manuel of Exploits. TMC.

first book, Vikings of Today, had been published in 1895, and Grenfell himself had engaged in a highly successful lecture tour of the eastern United States in 1896. An interview with Grenfell on his own territory would obviously have great appeal for the editors of McClure's who were, along with several other magazines of the day, displaying a keen interest in exploration and adventure in the continent's northern regions.

Before the trip to Newfoundland in 1900, Duncan had never been to sea; Briggs confirms that "Up to this time he had never spent a night on the ocean nor been at sea on a sailing vessel."<sup>10</sup> It is quite evident that he did not look forward to the prospect of a lengthy sea voyage. Indeed, rather than take the customary route and sail directly from New York to St. John's to connect with a boat for St. Anthony, Duncan chose the overland route, travelling by train through maritime Canada, crossing the Cabot Strait, and proceeding again by train to Lewisporte in Notre Dame Bay, there to connect with a boat for the northern port. This latter itinerary offered the least possible sea travel. Having reached Lewisporte, Duncan boarded a coastal steamer, the Clyde, with the intention of connecting at Exploits with another vessel which would take him to his final destination. However, a stormy passage from Lewisporte taught him the

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<sup>10</sup>Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Revell, 1918) 10.

hard truth that he was not a good sailor; he became quite seasick. Having reached Exploits to discover that he had missed his northern connection, Duncan was very easily persuaded to accept the suggestion of the ship's captain that he remain for a while in that community. Arrangements were made for him to stay with the Manuels, who were friends of the captain of the Clyde. Duncan did not continue the trip to St. Anthony that summer and was not to meet Grenfell for another three years. Instead, he spent the whole summer in Exploits, became a very close friend of the Manuels, and found the material for his writing which he was seeking.

Life in Newfoundland in 1900 was still very much the same as it had been since the early days of settlement. Scarcely a Newfoundlander lived out of sight and sound of the sea. Indeed, the sea was so much a part of the lives of the inhabitants that it, rather than the land, was central to their experience. A large portion of the population was scattered along a long, heavily indented coastline in hundreds of small settlements called "outports," all of which were dependent upon the fishery for their existence. With the exception of a few areas where men engaged in the Grand Bank or the migratory Labrador fishery, the inshore codfishery was the mainstay of the economy. The inshore fishery involved its workers in an almost continuous round of activity, marked not only by extremely hard work but by exposure to frequent danger at the hands of a capricious ocean. The

fishing season along the northeast coast, that part of the island with which Duncan was to become most familiar, was from late spring to early fall. But the men were not idle for the rest of the year: during the winter and early spring they worked at repairing nets, building boats and obtaining timber for flakes and stages, while in the early spring many of them supplemented their meager incomes by going "to the ice" to participate in the annual seal hunt. Life for these fishermen comprised hard work fraught with danger.

At the turn of the century, Exploits was a thriving fishing community in Notre Dame Bay on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. Actually it comprised two adjoining islands connected by a wooden bridge, forming an excellent harbor. The houses of the residents were scattered on both sides of the harbor in three roughly identifiable areas: Lower Harbor, East Side and West Side. In most places the beach was low and very rocky, while at the ends of the harbor the hills rose vertically behind the houses to a height of over 200 feet. There was very little tillable land and what did exist was fully utilized in the growing of the basic root crops and hay. Permanent settlement in Exploits dated from the development of the Labrador fishery, with all the families tracing their roots through other Newfoundland settlements to the West Country of England. By 1900 the population was

approximately 500.<sup>11</sup> The community had three churches, the largest congregation being the Methodist, followed by the Church of England and the Salvation Army. The economy was based solely on the fishery, with the mainstay being the Labrador fishery, though inshore operations were also important as were boat-building and sealing. By 1900 Exploits had reached the peak of its prosperity not only as a fishing community but also as a central distributing point for many of the surrounding settlements. "The fishery, both inshore and Labrador, was booming and the value of fish products was at its highest."<sup>12</sup> This is a significant point in light of the rather grim picture of hardship and poverty that dominates much of Duncan's portrayal of life near the sea; it seems that the community to which the New York writer came in 1900 was among the more prosperous on the island. After 1900, however, there was a steady decline in both the economy and the population of Exploits; finally in 1966 the community, like many other small outports in Newfoundland, became a victim of the provincial government's resettlement program.

The Manuels, with whom Duncan spent that first summer, were one of the two prominent merchant families in Exploits. At times, the relationship between the local merchant and

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<sup>11</sup>The Newfoundland Census of 1901 lists the population of Exploits as 517, distributed as follows: Lower Harbor, 118; East Side, 233; West Side, 166.

<sup>12</sup>Barry Butt, "Community History of Exploits," unpublished ms, n.d., Maritime History Group, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 15.

the fishermen in Newfoundland outports left much to be desired. Frequently the merchant took advantage of the fact that he gave the fisherman credit for the coming year, had a monopoly on the provision of supplies, and had the upper hand in setting fish prices. But the Manuels seem to have been an exception: "The merchants [in Exploits] were not removed from every-day society and interacted socially with the fishermen . . . the merchants were not considered an elite group."<sup>13</sup> The Manuel family business in 1900 was operated by Jabez and his brother Ches, although the father, Josiah, was still living. The enterprise involved primarily the buying of fish along the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts for resale in St. John's, and the selling of gear and supplies to fishermen in the same coastal areas. In addition, the company employed a number of schooners that took part in the Labrador fishery, leaving Exploits in the spring and returning with their catches in the fall.

Jabez Manuel was the person who offered to look after the stranded Duncan in Exploits; he made arrangements for the writer to stay at the home of his uncle, Tom Manuel, and his wife Phoebe. Duncan became attached to several of the Manuel family members, but especially to young Joe, Jabez's son, who at that time was just six years old. Next to members of his own family, this was perhaps the closest of Duncan's relationships. It is also another significant recurrence of

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<sup>13</sup>Butt, 27.

the attraction that Duncan felt for young boys. The friendship between Duncan and young Joe was to last for many years, and Joe was to be a model for several of the writer's fictional characters.

Duncan had apparently come to Newfoundland to find new inspiration for his stories. While he did not in that first visit achieve his objective of meeting Grenfell, he found that his sojourn in Exploits opened up a wealth of new subject matter. Much of his time in the community was spent talking with local fishermen as they met in stores and lofts after the completion of the day's work. At times Duncan put aside his fear of seasickness and accompanied the schooners and traders:

there was always one schooner of the yacht type which acted as a tender delivering supplies to the other schooners. Duncan made his trips on the yacht where he picked up information for his books.<sup>14</sup>

His keen powers of observation enabled him to absorb much during these ventures. In addition, he was fascinated by the natural environment around Exploits and spent much time just contemplating the scenery. Joe Manuel recalled in later years how he and Duncan spent many hours walking together and climbing the hills around the community. Another boy, Norman Manuel (born in 1903 and named after Duncan), remembered that on one of the writer's later visits the two of them

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<sup>14</sup>Reginald French, letter to the author, 29 August 1985. French, a former resident of Exploits, uses recollections heard from his mother.

went to the local breakwater where Duncan wanted to watch the waves beating against the structure. Another Manuel, the older Josiah, also undoubtedly provided Duncan with much material, for as an older man no longer actively engaged in fishing, he had much time on his hands for chatting with the visitor. It is little wonder, then, that Duncan, with so many sources available to him, went back to New York at the end of that first summer full of ideas for his pen.

That Duncan returned to Exploits on a number of occasions after 1900 is certain; however, the exact number of such visits is unclear. He returned in the summer of 1901, once again travelling through Nova Scotia by train and crossing the Cabot Strait to Port-aux-Basques on the Bruce.<sup>15</sup> This time, however, instead of leaving the train at Lewisporte and proceeding from there by boat to Exploits, he continued on to the capital city of St. John's. This detour was no doubt precipitated by the fact that on July 5 his brother Ernest had arrived in St. John's from New York on the Silvia.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that Duncan's dislike of sea travel was sufficiently strong to deter him from accompanying his brother on the more direct route. The two brothers spent a few days in the city together before Norman left for

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<sup>15</sup>The journey was made on July 5. See Daily News [St. John's, Nfld.] 6 July 1901.

<sup>16</sup>Evening Telegram [St. John's, Nfld.] 5 July 1901: n. pag. Ernest is also listed as staying at a local hotel where Norman also stayed on the following night.



Exploits with Josiah Manuel.<sup>17</sup> Whether Ernest accompanied his brother to Exploits or remained in the city is uncertain. Norman returned to St. John's himself in August, accompanied by young Joe who was to spend the winter with the writer in New York.<sup>18</sup>

According to Duncan, by the fall of 1903 he had spent four summers in Newfoundland and Labrador;<sup>19</sup> as his trip to Labrador did not take place until 1903, it seems quite certain that he spent the summer of 1902 in Exploits as well. No doubt he returned in the early summer of that year with young Joe Manuel who had spent the winter with him in New York. In 1902, Duncan's brother Robert came to Newfoundland, travelling, as Ernest had done the previous summer, from New York by steamer.<sup>20</sup> Once again Norman retained his preference for the overland route. He obviously shared his enthusiasm for Newfoundland with his brothers, as both were encouraged to visit the island for themselves. Ernest must have been favorably impressed, as he apparently returned in 1908, this time spending the summer in Exploits. Another visitor to the area recorded his presence:

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<sup>17</sup>Probably on July 10, the date on which the Evening Telegram notes Manuel's departure by train.

<sup>18</sup>Evening Telegram 26 August 1901: n.pag.

<sup>19</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to E.J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

<sup>20</sup>Evening Telegram 11 July 1902: n.pag. The issue of 2 September 1902 lists his departure.

Norman Duncan's brother, a dentist, was at Exploits at the same time I passed through, and was able to meet his expenses and more at his profession while he was there.<sup>21</sup>

Duncan himself spent the summer of 1905 at Exploits. Another visitor to the Labrador coast noted that one of the Grenfell Mission doctors "had met Norman Duncan at Exploits on his way up . . . and got off to spend a few days with him."<sup>22</sup> This was after Duncan's Labrador visit, by which time he would have been well known to many of the Mission workers. One more visit to Exploits can be confirmed: he returned in the summer of 1912 for what seems to have been the last time.<sup>23</sup> This time he was accompanied by George Harding, one of his illustrators, who had already been to Newfoundland and had published articles based on his experiences.<sup>24</sup> Harding had already provided illustrations

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<sup>21</sup>Letter from E.E. [?] to Mrs. Keese 16 July 1914, Little Family Papers, Boston, Mass. Susan Duncan, daughter of Ernest, suggests that the visit took place not long after the death of Ernest's first wife and may very well have been taken for therapeutic reasons.

<sup>22</sup>Dorothea Moore, unpublished transcripts of letters received from her father Dr. Edward Moore, 113. Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

<sup>23</sup>It is possible that he spent the summer of either 1910 or 1911 there. Thomas Moore gives details of a possible visit in 1910 in "A Biography of Norman Duncan," 42-3. Josiah Manuel, in an interview with Moore, mentioned that the writer's last visit was in 1911, though he may very well have been referring to 1912. The 1912 visit is confirmed in that Duncan and his companion on the trip are listed as passengers on the Bruce (Evening Telegram 10 July 1912).

<sup>24</sup>See the following: "When Our Ship Went Down," Harper's 118 (April 1909): 659-72 and "The Menace of Cape Race," Harper's 124 (April 1912): 674-84.

for several of Duncan's earlier Newfoundland articles and was to be his chief illustrator in the period 1912-14.

Duncan's failure to return to Newfoundland after 1912 was due to several factors. The death of Jabez Manuel in 1913, combined with the problems confronted by the family business as a result of a severe drop in the price of fish, led Joe Manuel to leave Newfoundland and settle with the family in Alberta. In the meantime, Duncan became involved in new adventures, notably a trip to Australia. However, he was not to lose contact with the friends he had made in Exploits. The boy, Joe, spent a second winter with Duncan; Duncan corresponded with Joe and his father frequently;<sup>25</sup> Duncan and Jabez met briefly in Toronto in June, 1908; and Duncan, Joe and Jabez spent time together during the winter of 1911 when Jabez travelled to Florida for relief from a respiratory ailment.

The attachment that Duncan felt for the Manuels is also evident in the fact that he dedicated his book The Best of a Bad Job (1912) to young Joe, and sent him the first copy off the press with the following note inscribed:

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<sup>25</sup>Only two letters from Duncan to Joe Manuel survive. One, written from Cairo on 12 January [1908], is in the Norman Duncan Collection. The other, of uncertain date but probably written in 1912, is in the possession of Duncan Manuel, Innisfail, Alberta. In it, Duncan made reference to having enclosed money for Joe's passage back to Newfoundland. Joe Manuel noted in an interview with Moore (TMC) that his father had received several letters from Duncan, but they had all been destroyed when his desk was cleared out after his death in 1913.

Dear Joe,

May this little book serve to recall to you the best of the happy days you and I passed in good friendship together -- and indeed they were happy days which I shall not forget.

Your friend of long standing,  
Norman Duncan.<sup>26</sup>

The Manuel family returned the affection. In 1903 Jabez and his wife Mary named their new son Norman, and Joe himself later named his own son Norman Duncan Manuel "after my very dear friend."<sup>27</sup> Indications are that the people of Exploits were also very fond of Duncan. Writing of the community following a visit in 1914, one observer commented: "This is the place where Norman Duncan has spent several summers. People like him here very much."<sup>28</sup> Joe Manuel attributed Duncan's popularity to the fact that he was quiet, unassuming and always generous.

Duncan's visits to Newfoundland were without exception made during the summer months. It is quite remarkable that, although he never travelled along the Newfoundland coast during the stormy days of autumn nor ever experienced the harshness of a Newfoundland winter, he was able to describe these conditions so vividly in his stories. The impressions formed in his mind as a result of his conversations with

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<sup>26</sup>Note inscribed on inside front cover of The Best of a Bad Job, located in the Norman Duncan Manuel home in Innisfail, Alberta; quoted in Moore, 43.

<sup>27</sup>Josiah Manuel, notes written for Thomas Moore, n.d., TMC.

<sup>28</sup>Marion (Little) Keese, letter, [?] 1914, Little Family Papers, Boston, Mass.

local residents were indeed lasting and powerful. Another point worthy of note is that Duncan's visits to Newfoundland were probably not confined to Exploits. Excluding a trip to Labrador (to be discussed in the next chapter), he may also have visited some of the communities along the stretch of coastline between Cape St. John and Cape Bauld, an area frequented by the Manuel's traders. As noted earlier, he spent a brief time in the capital city of St. John's, though it was to have little effect on his writing. As he stated in one of his earliest articles:

to the writer there is no Newfoundland apart from that long strip of jagged rock against which the sea forever breaks: none that is not of punt, of wave, of fish, of low sky and of a stalwart, briny folk.<sup>29</sup>

When Duncan wrote of Newfoundland, he wrote of the outports that he had visited along the northeast coast.

Although Duncan is reported to have been a quiet and introspective man, his visits were not without their humorous side. A former resident of Exploits recalls an incident he heard related by his mother:

There was a woman in Exploits at the time who was quite an outspoken character. She owned a small garden in an isolated area and when she went there to work she had a habit of tucking her dress and petticoats inside the waistband of her drawers. . . . Duncan heard of this so he and his photographer decided to get a picture. They hid away in the woods outside the garden. Unfortunately they made a little noise and the woman heard them and suspected what they were up to. She dropped her hay fork,

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<sup>29</sup>Norman Duncan, "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," World's Work 6 (July 1903): 3617-8.

turned back on, bent over and patted her bottom with both hands. She said I know what you want so you can kiss me ass, kiss me ass, kiss me ass.<sup>30</sup>

Another humorous episode, though one which must have caused considerable embarrassment for the sensitive Duncan, was recorded in a New York newspaper:

Norman Duncan, the author of "The Way of the Sea," spends much of his spare time in Newfoundland and Labrador. Travel on that coast is difficult and unconventional, chiefly by little boats that go from port to port, picking up a passenger here and dropping one there. The passengers on these coastwise tugs are few and chiefly masculine, so when Mr. Duncan and a friend boarded a vessel for a short journey last Summer, they took it for granted that they would probably be sole occupants of the cabin which, however, contained two rows of bunks, one designed for men and the other for women. When Mr. Duncan and his companion turned in they did so leisurely, with a sense of full possession, sweeping curtains aside to give themselves ample air. Mr. Duncan was up early, stalking the cabin freely in a decided negligee. He had scarcely finished the disrobing part of his toilet before he saw his companion rise from his berth with a look of horror in his face. The companion said no word but pointed across the cabin at a bunk where the curtains were drawn. From beneath the bunk appeared a pair of very feminine high heeled shoes and a delicate female hand was seen holding the curtains securely closed. Mr. Duncan gathered his garments together with one swoop and dived for the engine room, emerging half an hour later apologetic, crimson and minus one sock, one shoe, collar and necktie.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Reginald French, letter to the author, 29 August 1985.

<sup>31</sup>News [New York] n.d., Scrapbook of reviews, NDC. [This Scrapbook contains newspaper clippings of reviews of The Way of the Sea, with the names of the newspapers (usually without date) handwritten above each item. Also included are a number of newspaper clippings (again reviews) supplied by a clipping service, with information on newspaper and date stamped on each item; these are reviews of a number of Duncan's books.]

It is not difficult to imagine the impact that life along the Newfoundland coast must have had on Duncan. Even if he had had a general knowledge of the island before his first visit, it is highly unlikely that he was in any way prepared for what he encountered. The best indication of his response to these experiences can be found in the writings they inspired. From the summer of 1901 to the end of 1903, Duncan wrote 25 periodical articles and published one book of short stories based on these early visits. Although he was to continue to write about Newfoundland until his death in 1916, these early writings capture the essence of what Newfoundland meant to him with a sincerity and an intensity not matched in the later material. The work of this period can be divided into three categories: a series of articles that are essentially nonfictional essays and narratives; several adventure stories written primarily for juveniles; and a group of more ambitious short stories, ten of which were eventually collected and published in The Way of the Sea.

During this period Duncan wrote five articles that take the form of documentary essays. In these he records directly, very much in the manner of a reporter, his experiences and impressions, thus providing a direct account of what the

visits to Newfoundland initially meant to him. Accordingly these provide a good starting point for a discussion of his response to Newfoundland and her people. The first two of these articles, "In Remote Newfoundland" and "Newfoundlanders of the Outports," both published in December 1901,<sup>32</sup> give an excellent overview of the characteristics of Newfoundland that made the greatest impression on Duncan. The tone that comes through most clearly is that of utter amazement, a sense that the writer never totally lost over the years. He never ceased to be amazed at so many aspects of Newfoundland life: the landscape, the dominance of the sea, the isolation of the settlements, and the qualities of warmth, hospitality, honesty and piety demonstrated by the people themselves.

The small Newfoundland outport must have seemed extremely primitive to a person accustomed to life in Toronto and New York. Even the small towns of rural Ontario where Duncan had spent his boyhood days would have seemed modern in comparison to these isolated northern villages. Unlike their small-town counterparts elsewhere in North America, these settlements were totally unplanned, having grown in a haphazard manner according to the dictates of both history and geography. The early settlers on the shores of Newfoundland had built their houses near good fishing grounds and in locations where the fish could be easily handled, and little or no

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<sup>32</sup>Norman Duncan, "In Remote Newfoundland," Ainslee's 8 (December 1901): 428-35 and "Newfoundlanders of the Outports," Outing 39 (December 1901): 271-8.



consideration was given to the availability of fertile soil or the prospects for future community development. Consequently the outport of 1900 gave no semblance of orderly arrangement, with houses frequently perched quite precariously on the sides of cliffs. Local government was nonexistent, as were many of the familiar landmarks of the small towns in Ontario to which Duncan had been accustomed:

there are no streets. . . . There are no stores, no hotels, no public buildings, unless, indeed, the church and school-house may be classed as such. There is no municipal government, no police protection, and there are no public works of any description.<sup>33</sup>

To a man who had grown up in the rich agricultural belt of Ontario and had spent a few years in a fertile section of New York state, the scarcity of good soil in the outports along Newfoundland's northeast coast must have been a striking feature. Duncan drew attention to it in his earliest essays:

The interior is a soggy, rock-strewn barren, an interminably vast waste, where not so much as a shrub is to be seen, and no man chooses to live. Stunted forests fringe the coast, a skinny growth of pine and spruce and birch. . . . The shore line is rock, in some places swept, by flood and fire, bare of all soil -- grim, naked rock.<sup>34</sup>

Having established this general geographic perspective, Duncan in the same article focused attention on the barrenness of Exploits itself:

Not only the graveyards but the gardens are made by hand. The soil is gathered here and there and

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<sup>33</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 432.

<sup>34</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 428.

everywhere, scraped from the rocks, and dumped, year by year, in some sheltered place, until the new land is ready for the seed. It took twenty years to make the little garden where Aunt Phoebe's black currant bushes and roses marvelously prolong a starved existence.<sup>35</sup>

These early images of the land as barren waste, stunted growth and rocky shoreline, marked here and there by man's heroic yet pathetic attempts at cultivation, persist through much of Duncan's work. Such images become symbols of the greater struggle that life in such places entails, the conflict between man and the powerful forces of nature. As if to reinforce the authenticity of his descriptions, Duncan included in the two early essays several photographs of scenes from the Exploits area, all of which depict quite graphically the barren landscape, the dominating sea, the precariously perched houses and the carefully tilled gardens. Perhaps Duncan decided to include pictures because he thought his American readers would have difficulty visualizing what he was describing.

One feature of Newfoundland life that astounded him was the utter isolation of most of the settlements he visited. Duncan had lived most of his life in larger towns and cities; even the smaller communities of his boyhood were easily accessible to the outside world. Consequently he had never experienced anything resembling the type of isolation common in coastal Newfoundland in 1900:

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<sup>35</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 428-9.

It is probable that no English-speaking people is at this time so utterly isolated from all the things of advanced civilization as the folk who fish the little harbors which lie along that stretch of the east coast between Cape John on the south and the Straits of Belle Isle on the north.<sup>36</sup>

The essay went on to point out the consequences of such geographical isolation, including lack of land transportation, infrequent mail service, lack of information about world events, and, most tragic of all, the almost complete absence of medical services. He returned to the latter, which he ranked as "one of the horrors of isolation," in two of his later works, Doctor Luke of the Labrador (1904) and Dr. Grenfell's Parish (1905), both of which will be examined in subsequent chapters. That his sensitive nature was touched by the tragedy that inadequate medical facilities can produce is evident in these early writings; nowhere is it given more poignant expression than in a brief episode included in "Newfoundlanders of the Outports" in which he tells how in one small community he was mistaken for a doctor by a desperate man whose small daughter lay dying.

An effect of isolation that especially fascinated Duncan was the limited perception that resulted from living far from the mainstream of life. This gave rise to several anecdotes that Duncan took a certain delight in recounting and provided the few glimpses of humor in an otherwise serious presentation. "In Remote Newfoundland" tells the

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<sup>36</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 430.

story of the boy in Englee who asked him what kind of bait was used to catch fish in New York harbor; the writer's attempt to help the boy visualize many aspects of life that many others take for granted results in frustration:

An attempt to describe a circus to this lad, a few moments later, had to be abandoned. It would have taken the whole afternoon to define the terms. What was sawdust? What was a tent? What did a horse look like? What was a uniform? What was a springboard? . . . Questions, politely put, interrupted every sentence. The lad was soon in a maze out of which he could not be led. The attempt, had, indeed, to be abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

A similarly humorous episode appears in the other early essay, "Newfoundlanders of the Outports":

He asked me riddles, thence he passed to other questions, for he was a boy who wondered, and wondered, what lay beyond those places which he could see from the highest hill. I described a street and a pavement, told him that the earth was round, defined a team of horses, corrected his impression that a church organ was played with the mouth, and denied the report that the flakes and stages of New York were the largest in the world.<sup>38</sup>

Duncan's fascination with the limited perceptions of local residents was displayed in several of his short stories, notably "The Chase of the Tide" which had already appeared in a periodical and would reappear in The Way of the Sea.

One final point of interest about these early commentaries was Duncan's response to the religious views of the people he met in Newfoundland. The first mention of this occurs in "In Remote Newfoundland" where Duncan referred to Newfoundlanders

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<sup>37</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 430-1.

<sup>38</sup>"Newfoundlanders of the Outports," 276.

as "pious folk"; but he quickly added the phrase "in an uncompromising, unreasoning way," and provided an illustration:

The desecration of the Sabbath is regarded as one of the most heinous of sins. . . . The writer heard a long and earnest argument on the question of whether or not it was wicked to make use of fish which had chanced to be meshed before twelve o'clock of a Sunday night. The prevailing opinion, during this "spurt of religion," was with the upholders of the affirmative.<sup>39</sup>

Duncan's use of other examples in a similar tone makes it quite clear that he found this strict adherence to religious beliefs as strange as the other limited perceptions he had observed.

Duncan wrote three similar pieces of nonfiction in 1901-3: "Of the Real Sea," "Hunting the Seal from the Outports" and "The Codfishers of Newfoundland."<sup>40</sup> One passage in the third of these articles deals with St. John's, one of the few times in all of his writing that Duncan made any reference to the capital city. The following comment conveys a disparaging tone and a note of cynicism about the city and its role in the lives of outport Newfoundlanders:

It is a curious fact that the out-harbor fishermen are governed wholly from the capital, St. John's, a city of 30,000 people. All authority is seated in the general government there; there is no municipal government in the outports, and very little of it at the capital. . . . St. John's lives by the fisheries; nothing worth while is

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<sup>39</sup>"In Remote Newfoundland," 432.

<sup>40</sup>"Of the Real Sea," Outing 40 (August 1902): 590-6; "Hunting the Seal from the Outports," Outing 41 (October 1902): 91-9; "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," World's Work 6 (July 1903): 3617-38.

produced there, but, according to the unsophisticated stranger, there is a noisy and vituperative wrangling over the wealth that comes down from the coasts. . . There is neither sympathy nor mercy for the fisherman here, though there is a most enthusiastic reception for what he takes from the sea; he is regarded as legitimate prey; is most marvelously lied to before election, and abused, ridiculed and reviled afterward. But through it all he preserves an humble faith in "all those set in authority over him."<sup>41</sup>

This, indeed, was Duncan's most sustained political statement. Although he alluded to it in some of his major works, political and economic exploitation was not for him a major concern.

The second major genre practised by Duncan after his early visits to Newfoundland was the adventure story. Between 1900 and 1903 he wrote ten such stories, all of which were published in Youth's Companion, a popular magazine for juvenile readers. Five of these used Newfoundland settings.<sup>42</sup> In each of these, Duncan relied on some of the elements of a good adventure narrative: a rapidly moving plot, a hero in crisis, and an eleventh-hour rescue. One of these stories, "A Dog of Ruddy Cove," had as its hero a boy destined to be the protagonist of much of Duncan's later fiction -- Billy Topsail. Billy, who was modelled possibly on young Joe Manuel of Exploits, represented the outport Newfoundland boy

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<sup>41</sup>"The Codfishers of Newfoundland," 3637.

<sup>42</sup>The five Newfoundland stories appearing in Youth's Companion are as follows: "A Dog of Ruddy Cove," 76 (16 January 1902): 29; "The Schooner and the Iceberg," 77 (22 January 1903): 37-8; "The Longest Way Home," 77 (19 February 1903): 89; "On the Face of the Cliff," 77 (2 April 1903): 161; "A Yarn of the Old 'Can't Help It'," 77 (29 October 1903): 541.

elevated to heroic status. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the stories was based on real episodes, although each plot was certainly within the realm of possibility: a boy struggling against the elements who is eventually saved by his dog; a "skipper" whose determination and endurance allow him and his schooner to survive a collision with an iceberg; and a doctor who risks his life to help a sick child. All the stories deal with some confrontation with elemental nature, and in each case it is the heroism of the human protagonist that makes survival possible. Thus, while the stories are essentially narratives of adventure, they demonstrate many of the qualities that Duncan identified in the "outport warriors" of the Newfoundland coast in their incessant struggle for survival. Several of them found their way into a book, The Adventures of Billy Topsail (1906), which will be discussed in a later chapter.

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In October, 1903, McClure, Phillips & Co. published The Way of the Sea, a collection of ten stories that was to establish Duncan's literary reputation in the United States. As with The Soul of the Street, all the stories in this volume had been written originally for publication in periodicals. By October, 1903, all but one had appeared in

print.<sup>43</sup> The collection had been planned as early as May 12, 1902, the date on which the contract for the book was signed, by which time McClure's had published two of the stories. Even after the contract was signed, several of the stories appeared in magazines other than McClure's. The contract with McClure, Phillips for The Way of the Sea was more generous than the one for The Soul of the Street; it provided Duncan with a 10% royalty on the first 5,000 copies, increased to 12.5% on all copies above that number.<sup>44</sup>

By September, 1902, Duncan had decided which stories he would use in the collection. He discarded the adventure stories for boys and the nonfictional documentaries in favor of a group of stories that demonstrated greater literary merit. One obvious criterion that he used was the common setting, all of the ten stories selected being placed in the fictitious Ragged Harbour; however, he omitted one such

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<sup>43</sup>The nine stories that had appeared are as follows: "The Chase of the Tide," McClure's 17 (August 1901): 307-16; "The Love of the Maid," Evening Post [New York] 3 August 1901: 3; "The Raging of the Sea," McClure's 18 (March 1902): 433-41; "The Fruits of Toil," McClure's 19 (July 1902): 257-62; "In the Fear of the Lord," Atlantic Monthly 90 (August 1902): 145-56; "Concerning Billy Luff and Master Goodchild," Ainslee's 10 (September 1902): 125-32; "The Healer from Far-Away Cove," Harper's 105 (October 1902): 669-76; "The Strength of Men," McClure's 21 (September 1903): 532-42; "A Beat t'Harbor," Harper's 107 (September 1903): 614-25. The tenth story, "Breath of the North," appeared in McClure's 22 (November 1903): 44-52.

<sup>44</sup>The contracts for the various books are in the Norman Duncan Collection.



story with this setting, "The Spell of the Desolation."<sup>45</sup> In the note "To the Reader" that accompanied the first edition of The Way of the Sea, Duncan paid tribute to the people of Newfoundland "who sheltered him, of whatever condition they were, and freely gave of the best they had." The book was dedicated to the memory of his father, the only reference to his father anywhere in his writing. The text also contained a frontispiece by Howard Pyle, a prominent illustrator who has been called "the father of American Illustration" and who has been credited with inspiring a whole generation of young artists.<sup>46</sup>

Ragged Harbour was not modelled entirely on Exploits. Rather it was selected as a composite of several outports along the coastline between Cape St. John and St. Anthony. A reference in "The Love of the Maid" to the fact that two men from Ragged Harbour "followed the coast thirty miles north to Englee" would place the location about half way up the eastern side of the Great Northern Peninsula. Many of the names used by Duncan for settlements and landmarks were actual geographical locations, while others were products of his own imagination, though he retained a semblance of verisimilitude. The same can be said for the names of his

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<sup>45</sup>"The Spell of the Desolation," Ainslee's 9 (June 1902): 413-20.

<sup>46</sup>Walt Reed, Great American Illustrators (New York: Abbeville, 1979) 120.

characters; while several are real, the imaginary names have an authentic ring.

In The Way of the Sea, Duncan was careful to convey a favorable impression of the people of Newfoundland whose hospitality he found as impressive as their strength and endurance. The admiration and awe in which he held these people had a significant effect on the way he interpreted them in his fiction. He explicitly stated in the preface to the 1904 edition that he "commits the folk of the book to the heart of the reader, wherein, as he hopes, they may find a place for a little while."<sup>47</sup> One can hardly be surprised, therefore, at the lack of objectivity displayed by Duncan as narrator of these stories. He was not aiming for a totally objective portrayal of these people and their way of life; he knew what kind of response he wished to elicit from his readers and he wrote accordingly.

The fact that Duncan depended so heavily in his fiction on direct experience and subjective response makes it possible to deduce much about the man himself from his writings. First and foremost, it is evident that Duncan believed strongly in the worth and dignity of the common man. The democratic impulse that led him to seek in the streets of New York fit subjects for imaginative literature operated again in the case of the Newfoundland stories. His elevation

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<sup>47</sup>Norman Duncan, The Way of the Sea (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904) x.

of ordinary people to the level of the heroic demonstrates his conviction that people who lived out of the mainstream of North American society had a dignity and inner strength that made them appropriate subjects for literary art. In raising these outport Newfoundlanders to levels far above the commonplace, Duncan was asserting his own belief in the worth of common humanity.

The one aspect of the lives of the Newfoundlanders of his fiction that perplexed Duncan was their religious beliefs and practices. While very little is known about the role that religion played in Duncan's personal life, one can detect distinct notes of skepticism about the fundamentalist approach that he detected in outport Newfoundland. Duncan perceived an adherence to strict fundamentalism as one of the consequences of isolation, and while he did not condemn it outright, he was careful to distance himself as narrator from it. By contrast, he identified readily with those of his characters who believed in a God of mercy and love.

The 1903 edition of The Way of the Sea was reviewed extensively throughout the United States. Many of the early reviews were favorable, acknowledging Duncan's familiarity with his subject matter and praising the sincerity of his treatment. The Commercial Advertiser observed that the book "evinces comprehension and feeling," while the Nation called

the stories "wonderful transcriptions of fearsome experiences."<sup>48</sup> Even more laudatory was the statement in the Independent that "No one today in America writes more subtle English than Mr. Duncan, and no one can reproduce more precisely the elusive impression of a complex situation which we call atmosphere."<sup>49</sup> The New York Times rated the collection "as instructive as it is interesting," while the New York Tribune drew attention to the sincerity and "the attractiveness of truth feelingly set forth."<sup>50</sup> Reviews of the book appeared in magazines and newspapers all over the United States. Not every review was favorable. The Literary Digest criticized Duncan's lack of conciseness as well as his "too close proximity . . . to his subject matter."<sup>51</sup> Other weaknesses were noted by various reviewers: the book displayed too much intensity, the stories were hard to read because of an excess of unpleasant dialect, and the view presented was cheerless and one-sided.<sup>52</sup> The fact that the book was so

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<sup>48</sup>Commercial Advertiser [New York] 3 October 1903, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC; Nation 78 (21 January 1904): 55.

<sup>49</sup>Independent 55 (29 October 1903): 2580-1.

<sup>50</sup>New York Times 24 October 1903: 751; and New York Tribune n.d., Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

<sup>51</sup>Literary Digest 24 October 1904, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

<sup>52</sup>See reviews in the Brooklyn Eagle, Philadelphia Inquirer, and the New York Sun, n.d., Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

widely reviewed, however, attests to an increasing recognition being given to its author.

In 1904, Hodder & Stoughton of London, England, published an edition of The Way of the Sea. J.E. Hodder Williams of the British publishing firm had visited Robert McClure of McClure, Phillips in his New York office and had made arrangements for the use of the plates in the English edition.<sup>53</sup> However, Hodder & Stoughton asked Duncan to make certain alterations to the original text for the British publication. Inside the front cover of Duncan's personal copy of the 1903 text of The Way of the Sea appears a brief pencilled set of notes by a representative of Hodder & Stoughton, asking that a page be added at the beginning explaining certain terms that might be unfamiliar to British readers.<sup>54</sup> In the 1904 edition Duncan replaced a section of "To the Reader" with the following explanatory note:

The reader of "The Way of the Sea" will not be puzzled by strange words if he remembers that a "tickle" is a narrow passage between two islands or to a harbour, that a "flake" is a broad platform upon which fish are sun-dried, that a "stage" is a small out-building, at the waterside, where the fish are split and salted. It may be well to inform him, too, perhaps, that "broose" is a toothsome dish resembling boiled hard-tack; that "caplin" are bait-fish, which are not by any means

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<sup>53</sup>Robert McClure, letter to J.E. Hodder Williams, 11 February 1904, Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP.

<sup>54</sup>This text was part of the Norman Duncan Collection purchased in 1986 by the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and now rests in the Centre.

despised as food, however, when there is nothing better to be had; and that, finally, the "lop" is the sea raised by the wind, as distinguished from the ground-swell.

This was not the only change requested and made. The frontispiece by Howard Pyle was replaced by an illustration by Albert Sterner, an artist for McClure's who had done the magazine illustrations for Duncan's "The Fruits of Toil." Duncan was also asked to make a number of textual alterations, as it was the opinion of editors at Hodder & Stoughton that certain remarks "might offend many readers." The most important of these changes are those made in the first story of the collection, "The Chase of the Tide." In the original text Duncan, while describing the barrenness of the coastal rocks, noted that "They deny, even, place for the dead to rot in decency," a line which is omitted in the British publication. Even more interesting an example of late Victorian sensibility was the editor's request for the expurgation from the same story of another passage which introduced the young protagonist with these words:

In that isolation, virtue is not a voluminous mantle, cut à la mode, capriciously varying from period to period; but is, in truth, the grace of the strong. It chanced that Jo was the issue of a springtime arrangement -- such as the gulls make -- which, happily, had endured to the coming of a parson of passage four years later. He had been brought forth like the young of the seal and the white bear, and he was nurtured into hardy childhood.

For the British readership, this passage was reduced to "He had been brought forth and nurtured into hardy childhood."<sup>55</sup>

Hodder & Stoughton obviously wanted the somewhat skeptical attitude towards religion toned down. For example, in his notes the editor took exception to the word "merely" in the phrase "it was merely the Lord God A'mighty," a word that Duncan had inserted to draw the contrast between the terrible god fashioned by the imaginations of these people and the more gentle "dear Lord" of New Testament vintage. According to the British editor, the word "might offend susceptible readers" and was removed. However, other changes that were requested were not made: for example, the many occurrences of the words "his god" in the story "In the Fear of the Lord" had been pencilled by the editor for removal but remain in the printed text.

The most significant addition to the new text was the inclusion of a Foreword written by the well-known contemporary English writer of sea-stories, Frank Bullen. The comments made by Bullen were rather excessive in their praise: "with the exception of Mr. Joseph Conrad and Mr. Rudyard Kipling," he wrote, "no writing about the sea has ever probed so deeply and so faithfully into its mysteries as his." Unfortunately, Bullen's overzealous response drew sharp criticism from several British reviewers of the volume. The

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<sup>55</sup>See The Way of the Sea (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903) 4, and The Way of the Sea (London: Hodder & Stoughton) 4.

Times Literary Supplement pointed out that "nothing could be better calculated to irritate a critic into antagonism to the work than that gentleman Bullen's enthusiasm for it."<sup>56</sup> While the same reviewer called the book "an interesting experiment," he expressed the hope that Duncan would in future "be spared prefatory appreciations." A somewhat similar sentiment appeared in the Athenaeum, which referred to the "hysterical character" of Bullen's foreword and its negative impact on the discriminating reader.<sup>57</sup> The Newcastle Chronicle added that such forewords are "dangerous because they raise expectations in the mind of the reader which are hardly fair to the author," though the same reviewer conceded that "Mr. Duncan succeeds in overhauling his handicap."<sup>58</sup> The Liverpool Mercury, on the other hand, was quick to praise Bullen's commendation and regarded his claims for Duncan's work as "by no means small or unjustified."<sup>59</sup> Much of the praise directed towards the collection in the American press was echoed in British reviews: for example, the Liverpool Courier considered the stories "finely conceived," while British Weekly called Duncan "an inspired poet." But several adverse criticisms also appeared, with reviewers pointing to

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<sup>56</sup>Times Literary Supplement 27 May 1904: 165.

<sup>57</sup>Athenaeum 14 May 1904: 624.

<sup>58</sup>Chronicle [Newcastle] 3 June 1904, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

<sup>59</sup>Liverpool Mercury 9 June 1904, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.



Duncan's "tendency to a sort of religious self-consciousness" and fondness for "purple passages." <sup>60</sup>

By early 1905, Hodder & Stoughton had entered into an agreement with the Toronto branch of Fleming H. Revell, an American company, to print a Canadian edition of The Way of the Sea. This text, which duplicated the British, was the first of several books by Duncan to be published simultaneously by these two publishing houses.<sup>61</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that sales of The Way of the Sea, in spite of the widespread attention it received through reviews, were not especially good. While no exact figures are available, S. Edgar Briggs once referred in a letter to Hodder & Stoughton to the "absolute failure in this market" of the collection.<sup>62</sup> Duncan himself probably had this failure in mind when he wrote to Hodder Williams in reference to a later contract that "it seems to me that you have already suffered enough."<sup>63</sup> Certainly The Way of the Sea was not Duncan's most popular book; that distinction would belong to a later work, Doctor

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<sup>60</sup>See Liverpool Courier n.d. and British Weekly n.d., Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

<sup>61</sup>After 1905, two more editions of the book appeared: one in 1970, published by Books for Libraries Press, retaining the text of the 1903 original; and one in 1981 by Tecumseh Press based on the 1904 text with Bullen's foreword replaced with an introduction by John Coldwell Adams.

<sup>62</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to J.E. Hodder Williams, 17 June 1904, Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP.

<sup>63</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to J.E. Hodder Williams, 18 July 1906, Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP.

Luke of the Labrador. However, The Way of the Sea stands as  
Duncan's finest literary achievement.

## CHAPTER 4

THE ART OF THE WAY OF THE SEA

## 1

Duncan's visits to Newfoundland provided him with the inspiration for what is certainly his best fiction, the short stories that comprise The Way of the Sea. As with the Syrian collection, these stories were written for magazine publication, a fact which gives rise to certain problems regarding unity and sequence. But the ten stories that make up The Way of the Sea reflect a greater sense of structure, more intricate patterns of resonance and symbolism, and generally a more conscious artistry than do those of the earlier volume. Taken together, these stories represent Duncan at his best.

Although the term "chapters" is used to designate the division of his book into ten parts, the individual stories can be read independently. Despite the common setting, the fictitious Newfoundland outpost of Ragged Harbour, there is no central character and no continuous plotline. Each story can stand on its own and is not dependent on a knowledge of the previous ones in the collection. Though the stories share certain features in common, each has an independent plot and its own main character. But closer study reveals

that the ten stories present to some extent a unified whole, suggesting that the selections were not only deliberately chosen but intentionally placed in the sequence that appears in the text.

While there is no central character in the ten stories, we are presented with a collective protagonist, the Newfoundland outporter, confronting a single antagonist, the sea. This conflict controls the theme in each story. Central to the book are three concepts: the sense of the perpetual conflict between man and nature, the view that man's destiny in this environment is determined by external forces beyond his control, and the realization of the heroism inherent in a people who not only survive but survive with determination and optimism. Often the forces of nature are presented as being indifferent to man's existence:

Within the knowledge of men, the off-shore gale has never concerned itself with the convenience of the Ragged Harbour fleet. Nor, when it swept Abram Lisson into those mysterious places which lie beyond the limit of vision, did it first pause to discover that a wife and eight children had need of him.<sup>1</sup>

But the more dominant impression is that of nature as a deliberately malignant power, the effect of which is achieved through the use of personification, as the sea appears to be forever reaching, clutching, thieving, and lying in ambush.

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Duncan, *The Way of the Sea* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903) 171. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

In order to survive, man has no choice but to accept this inevitability.

Many of the characters in The Way of the Sea appear in more than one story, though not always in narrative sequence. For example, the two boys who are lost at the end of the first story, "The Chase of the Tide," reappear in "The Raging of the Sea." However, Duncan is more conscious of this disruption of narrative sequence than he was in the Syrian stories: he notes that the latter story is set "In the days before the tide lured little Skipper Jo and Ezekiel Seviar into the maw of the sea" (74). The effect of this use of the time frame is thematic: in the case just quoted, the author enables the reader to feel a poignant sense of irony as Jo and Ezekiel share the excitement of watching Job Luff fight his way into the harbor through a raging sea. An even more significant manipulation of time occurs with Solomon Stride, probably the most important character in the book. While the final story, "The Fruits of Toil," covers the whole span of his life, we get brief glimpses of that life in some of the earlier stories, all of which are consistent with the characterization created in the final narrative.<sup>2</sup> For example, with characteristic optimism, Solomon Stride assures Ezra Westerly, a consumptive waiting for a miracle

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<sup>2</sup>There is one inconsistency, however, having to do with the name of Solomon's wife. In "The Fruits of Toil" her name is Priscilla, yet she appears as Ruth in "In the Fear of the Lord" (222).

cure, that "'twill turn out all right" (195); and he assures an anxious Nazareth Lute, waiting for the lean years to pass so that he can finish his schooner, that "'Twill be a gran' catch o' fish this year, I'm thinkin'" (243). Such evidence, especially the placing of "The Fruits of Toil" at the end of the volume, suggests a deliberate ordering of the stories.<sup>3</sup>

That there was a kind of master plan for the ten selections is further evident in the progression provided by the content. As a whole, the sequence moves in cyclical pattern from childhood in "The Chase of the Tide" to old age in "The Fruits of Toil," from Promethean challenge to wizened acceptance. The intervening stories are variations of the theme of physical and spiritual response to "the way of the sea." On closer examination, it is possible to observe a more intricate pattern, as each selection presents an aspect of the conflict and of man's response to it. The collective protagonist is thus delineated in ten phases, each illustrating one part of the total response.

Unity is also achieved through recurring image patterns, both within individual stories and throughout the volume as a whole. Most significant are the references to eyes, hands, and flowers, which function here not merely as decoration but as an integral part of characterization and theme. In "The Strength of Men," for example, Saul Nash, the courageous

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<sup>3</sup>There is no way to determine who did the ordering, though it would be reasonable to assume that it was Duncan.

protagonist, has "bold blue eyes," whereas his younger brother, "one of those poor, dreamful folk who fear the sea," has "dark eyes instead of blue ones" (44). In "The Love of the Maid," the female protagonist must choose between two suitors: Elihu Gale with his "unquiet, dry, hot eyes, rimmed with flaring red" (161), or Jim Rideout, the romantic, who is reluctant "to move his eyes from the depths of the sky where the stars winked at him" (168). In the story "In the Fear of the Lord," Nazareth Lute, before his conversion, had "blue eyes, which flashed fire in the dusk" (224), but afterwards "his eyes were blinded to all those beauties, both great and small, which the dear Lord has strewn in hearts and places" (232). Hands are used to personify the deceptive power of the sea in "The Chase of the Tide." The water is "swift and sly as a thief's hand," the tide is likened to "the hand of a woman on a victim's arm" (12), and the fog is "in the form of a gigantic hand, shaped like a claw" (18). Gestures involving hands are central in "The Fruits of Toil," as the toll taken by years of struggle and hardship is reflected in the change in Solomon Stride's gestures. Early in the story, Solomon expresses his optimism with "a slap of his great thigh" (311); as experience toughens him, he slaps "his iron thigh" (314); and as he approaches old age, after contending with years of failure, he rubs his hand "over his weazened thigh" (320). Duncan also employs images of seeds and flowers, usually as part of his commentary

as narrator. They are used to emphasize the stark contrast between the barren, rocky coastline of Newfoundland and the more fertile areas to which the readers are more accustomed. For example, as Saul Nash struggles for his life against wind and ice, "in temperate lands mellow winds were teasing the first shy blossoms in the woods and peopled places were all yellow and a-tinkle and lazy" (36). A more interesting example occurs at the conclusion of "The Love of the Maid," as Duncan shows how 'Melia Mary brings love to Elihu Gale:

whence it may appear that the seed which had fallen into a crevice of his craggy heart and there sprouted into living green was, after all, the seed of a plant with a flower -- a tiny, puny, lonely blossom; but yet a blossom, which is a grace the hearts of men may lack (183-4).

Here, Duncan discovers fertility in metaphorical rather than literal terms.

## 2

The method of narration and other literary techniques used by Duncan to project his themes can be best understood through detailed examination of three stories in the collection, namely "The Chase of the Tide," "In the Fear of the Lord," and "The Fruits of Toil." "The Chase of the Tide," the first story in the collection, is the tragic narrative of a child whose determination to solve the mysteries of the sea results in his and his friend's untimely death. Young Jo fails in his quest to discover where the tide goes because of his



innocence, because he knows the way of the sea only through second hand knowledge, because the fascination the sea has for him overshadows the respect he should have for its power, and because he is ill-equipped to meet the challenge when it comes. The story demonstrates the reality that Duncan was quick to perceive on the rugged Newfoundland coast: that the sea is indifferent to man's quest for knowledge, and that survival in such a harsh environment is at least partially contingent on acceptance of that fact.

The opening paragraph of the story illustrates a blending of the techniques of the reporter and the fiction writer. There is an element of the "lead" in the strong opening statement that serves the function of a prologue. Before introducing the protagonist, Duncan sets up the central conflict of the book: man versus Darwinian nature. Human beings must "snatch" from the sea, taking advantage of deceptive moments of relative calm to eke out a meager livelihood. The life of a boy born on this coast is determined from the outset by his environment:

From the beginning, he was committed to the toil of the sea; for he was a Newfoundlander of the upper shore -- the child of a grey, solemn wasteland: a land of artificial graveyards . . . hence, inevitably, from generation to generation, the people of that barren match their strength against the might of tempestuous waters, fighting with their bare hands -- great, knotty, sore, grimy hands; match, also, their spirit against the invisible terrors which the sea's space harbours, in sunshine and mist, by all the superstition of her children (3-4).

This passage sets the tone, not only for this story, but for the whole collection. The relationship between man and his environment echoes throughout the ten stories in the descriptions of the characters: the crew of the sealing vessel in "The Strength of Men" are described as "men of knotty oak, with that look of strength, from the ground up, which some gnarled old tree has" (38); Elihu Gale in "The Love of the Maid" is a man "fashioned through generations by those forces which stripped the headlands of Ragged Harbour of all graces" (161); and in his old age, Solomon Stride of "The Fruits of Toil" is described as "a worn-out hulk, aged and wrecked in the toil of the deep" (331-2). The setting itself has houses which "cling like barnacles" to the "lean rocks" on a jagged strip of land, surrounded on both sides by adversaries: the wilderness of scrawny shrubs, and the fretful expanse of the sea.

Duncan then proceeds to introduce his main character, Jo, against this general backdrop. He chooses to illuminate the character of his protagonist through contrast. Jo, on the threshold of life, is on Lookout Head with Sammy Arnold, one of the oldest inhabitants who has fished out of Ragged Harbour for 60 years. From this height, in itself symbolic of insight, Uncle Sammy "swept his staff over the land," an action which establishes him firmly as a patriarchal figure in the Old Testament tradition. He stands in direct contrast to the youthful innocence of the boy, and part of his duty

as patriarch is to instil in the youth an awareness that "The say do be hungry for lives." The recurrence of this comment provides an echo throughout the story as the inevitability of Uncle Sammy's prophecy takes root.

Jo, however, is not content with the conventional wisdom of his elders, and is determined to solve for himself the mystery of where the tide goes. The scene is thus set for the journey to be taken by Jo and his companion Ezekiel. The trip begins with one of Duncan's finest descriptive passages in which he captures the scene in realistic details of light and color:

the punt slipped, at the turn of the tide, from under the laden flake, where the shadows are deep and cold, into the fading sunshine of the open harbour. Her shadow wriggled to the dull, green depths where the star-fish and sea-eggs lay; and the wary dories darted, flashing, into the security of the black waters beyond (9).

But very quickly the reader is reminded of the illusory nature of the sea's beauty as "the sea was here restrained from treacherous violence by encircling rocks." The reminder is there for the benefit of the reader who, unlike the boy, must be fully aware of the inevitable peril that lies beyond the safety of the harbor. The juxtaposition of descriptions of natural beauty with signals of foreboding and gloom is a common device in Duncan's fiction. As the sun sets into the sea, Duncan captures the scene with the skill of a painter:

The sun was dropping swiftly, puffing himself up in his precipitate descent to the ragged black clouds that were mounting the sky, taking on a deepening, glowing crimson, the colour of flame in

dense smoke. The woolly clouds in the east were flushed pink, mottled like a salmon's belly (15).

But again the beauty is fleeting and the signs of foreboding are clear:

On either side, from the tip of Mad Mull to the limit of vision in the south, the coast rocks were like a wall, sheer, massive, scowling, with here and there, at the base, great shattered masses, over which the sea frothed (16).

This shift is also reflected in the boys' activities, as their singing gives way to a silence so oppressive that even the riddles they ask each other cannot dispel the gloom. As the mood becomes more ominous, the metaphors become Darwinian, as the fog, "the sea's ally," is "shaped like a claw." But Jo still insists on solving the mystery of the tide.

Just as Jo solves the mystery -- "When 'tis ebb in Ragged Harbour, 'tis the flood in . . . other pairts" -- the boat runs on the rocks, and a giant wave "fell with a crash and a long, thick hiss." In the face of impending death, the boys react in contrasting ways. Jo acknowledges his enemy in "a quiet admission of defeat," while Ezekiel calls on his mother. The story is essentially over. But Duncan, in a fashion that is typical of most of the stories in this volume, adds a powerful concluding paragraph that serves as an epilogue of direct authorial commentary. The sea is condemned for its alluring attraction, for the deliberate malevolence it has shown in defeating man's highest aspirations. Then follows a passage of passionate rhetoric, as powerful as it is explicit:

Was there honour in this triumph? In the wreckage and little bodies that the waves flung against the rocks for a day and a night, lifting them, tossing them? In the choked lungs? In the bruised faces? In the broken spine? In the ripped cheek? In the torn scalp? In the glazed blue eyes? (30)

This is the type of passage that has been the object of criticism from those who consider Duncan's style excessively melodramatic and rhetorical. One is tempted to argue that the facts of the narrative are sufficiently explicit to make the point without the closing paragraph. But one must keep in mind Duncan's desire to communicate to the reader the powerful response that he himself, as an outsider, felt to the tragic realities of life in coastal Newfoundland. Duncan indulges in another type of commentary, with the intention of directly addressing his readers. At his very first mention of the boy in "The Chase of the Tide," Duncan makes the following comment: "he had never heard of a pirate or a clown or a motorman." Here we see the author narrating as an outsider, ever mindful of his readers who will be completely unfamiliar with the subject matter. As narrator, he takes a position between the characters of his stories and his American readers, conscious of both, and no matter how engrossed he becomes in the former, he never completely loses sight of the latter. For example, early in the same story, the narrator creates the sense of the alluring and deceptive nature of the tide by employing a metaphor with which his urban readers can readily identify:

And the tide as it ran may here be likened to the hand of a woman on a victim's arm: to her winks and empty chatter as she leads him from a broad thoroughfare to an alley that is dark, whence a darker stair leads to a place where thieves and murderers wait (12-3).

The author here is very conscious of the process of leading his readers to the insight that he wishes them to achieve.

Duncan's narrative voice in all of the stories in this volume is invariably that of an outsider. In spite of (or maybe because of) his awe, he was unable to identify totally with the people who were the prototypes for his fictional characters. In the stories themselves, he frequently draws contrasts between the setting of his narrative and the world that he and his readers inhabit. For example, in "The Love of the Maid," in contrast to the crags of Newfoundland, he notes that "we live in a land where the perfume and splendour of flowers are a commonplace" (162). His narrative distancing can also be observed in the fact that he occasionally uses images that are not indigenous to the actual setting of his stories. In "The Raging of the Sea," Job Luff's punt is described as "full of caprice as a high-bred racing yacht" (71); Saul Nash's schooner, in "The Strength of Men," is likened to "an egg-shell thrown by chance into the feeding-shute of a crusher" (42); and in "The Love of the Maid," reference is made to the "village street" (164). It is clear that Duncan is not writing from the local perspective, but rather is conscious of speaking to an American readership.

Nowhere is the question of the narrative stance more crucial than in the story "In the Fear of the Lord," in which Duncan tells of a religious fanatic who, convinced that he is obeying the voice of God, scuttles the schooner that has taken him years to build. What we find in this story is a contrast between the attitudes of the characters and the skepticism of the narrator. This deliberate distancing is evident in the opening paragraph, as Duncan presents the correspondence between the immediate natural environment and the local perception of God:

Let it be made plain, in the beginning, that the dear Lord had nothing to do with it, for the doors of that poor heart were fast closed against Him. . . . It was not the dear Lord: it was the Lord God A'mighty -- a fantastic misconception, the work of the blind minds of men, which has small part with mercy and the high leading of love. Men's imaginations, being untutored and unconfined, fashion queer gods of the stuff the Infinite contains. . . . In Ragged Harbour, some men have fashioned a god of rock and tempest and the sea's rage -- a gigantic, frowning shape, throned in a mist, whereunder black waters curl and hiss, and are cold and without end (219-20).

Again we see Duncan the writer, determined that his readers will not misunderstand what his own religious attitudes are as they explore the more primitive ones of his characters. The narrator leaves no doubt where he stands in this matter. These deities are "terrible gods," products of a land "where no yellow fields, no broad, waving acres, yielding bounteously, make love manifest to the children of men."

The distancing is sustained through the introduction of the main character of the story, Nazareth Luce, son of a

father who "died mad" because he "dwelt overmuch on those things which are eternal" and a mother who was renowned for her "glory fits." Before his conversion, young Lute is perceived by the community as a man of wickedness, the most pronounced form of which is "the sin of jollity in which he was steeped." But the narrator is more sympathetic, stating that "only the unrighteous, who are wise in a way, and the children, who are all-wise, loved him." The deliberate overstatement in the following passage is one technique used by Duncan to distance the narrator (and, by implication, the reader) from the locally held opinion of the sinful Lute:

In boyhood his ambitions were all wicked: for he longed to live where he could go to the theatre, of the glittering delights of which he had read in a tract, and to win money at cards, of which he had read in another. Later, his long absences and riotous returns were wicked: his hip-pocket bulged with wickedness for a week after he came ashore from the mail-boat, and for the same week his legs wickedly wobbled and the air was tainted with wickedness where he breathed. The deeds he did on his cruises were wicked, in truth -- ever more deeply wicked: wicked past conception (224-5).

But Nazareth Lute is converted, following a long testimony in which he declares his sinfulness, a conversion seen by the author (though certainly not by the congregation) as amusing. The narrator is careful to separate himself from this emotional outburst, making frequent references to Nazareth's deity as "his god," and qualifying the newly acquired righteousness with these comments:

Thereafter he lived righteously; but his eyes were blinded to all those beauties, both great and small, which the dear Lord has strewn in hearts



and places, in love withholding not; and his ears were stopped against the tender whisperings which twilight winds waft with them . . . for it was as though the cloud and flame of the wrath of his god, following after, cast a shadow before him and filled the whole earth with the thunder and roar and crackling of their pursuit (232).

Nazareth Lute shakes off the sin of sloth by building a model for a schooner, and is so fascinated by this process of creation that he undertakes the construction of the vessel itself, a feat that is to take several years. It is interesting to note how Duncan handles the passing of time. Time is not only measured by the progress of the construction, (as in lines such as "in three years he had the keel laid"), but is also rooted in the reality of life in the community. Simon Luff's grandson becomes the yardstick: the schooner was started "in that spring when old Simon Luff's last grandson was born"; was still on the stocks twelve years later "when Uncle Simon's last grandson was made a hand in the trap-skiff"; was launched five years later "when Uncle Simon Luff's last grandson had learned to loiter at Needle Rock to make eyes at the maids as they passed"; and was destroyed in the night "when Uncle Simon Luff's last grandson's first child was born." This technique reflects a realistic feature of rural life, that of dating with reference to some local event. But it also allows Duncan to find in the cycle of local life a common denominator on which develop a rhythmic structure for his narrative, a technique that he employs

with perfection in the last story of the volume, "The Fruits of Toil."

The frequent references to Simon Luff serve another function. Simon is ever present, hovering in the background, first encouraging Nazareth and then berating him for making the schooner his "golden calf." Nazareth's pride in his marvelous creation is dispelled as Simon warns him of the "cloud and flame of the wrath of the Lord God A'mighty." It is at this point that Nazareth Lute has a vision in which his God orders him to destroy his schooner. Once again, the narrator is careful to dissociate himself from the events that he relates, treating the whole episode (which is reported second-hand) with facetious flippancy. The narrator makes it abundantly clear that it is fear rather than faith that prompts Lute's obedience, as he scuttles the schooner "even as he believed the Lord God A'mighty, his god, had commanded him to do." It is on this note of skepticism that the story ends. This time, Duncan seems to have felt no need for an epilogue.

The use of biblical names in several of the stories contributes further to the religious tension. Many of the characters have Old Testament names -- Samuel, Solomon, Ishmael, Eli, Ezra -- reinforcing the central image of the God of Wrath; by contrast, New Testament names are few. While the use of biblical names is an example of Duncan's realism (it was common practice in rural Newfoundland as

elsewhere to give children names of scriptural origin), the practice contributes to the sense of Old Testament morality that dominates the pious members of the community. Duncan also shows a fondness for biblical images, the most powerful being the apocalyptic landscape in the following passage which once again reinforces the fundamentalist concept of God:

a gigantic, frowning shape, throned in a mist, whereunder black waters curl and hiss, and are cold and without end; and in the right hand of the shape is a flaming rod of chastisement, and on either side of the throne sit grim angels, with inkpots and pens, who jot down the sins of men . . . and behind the mist, far back in the night, the flames of pain, which are forked and writhing and lurid, light up the clouds and form an aureole for the shape and provide him with his halo (220).

In terms of structural unity and narrative technique, "The Fruits of Toil" is one of the most effective stories in the collection. Symmetrically constructed, it opens with a prologue, follows with the alternation of narrative action, dialogue, description and authorial commentary, and concludes with a powerful yet controlled epilogue. The prologue comprises a single long paragraph which, unlike the openings of both "The Chase of the Tide" and "In the Fear of the Lord," is totally separate from the narrative itself. It draws attention to the contrast between land and sea:

Now the wilderness, savage and remote, yields to the strength of men. A generation strips it of tree and rock, a generation tames it and tills it, a generation passes into the evening shadows as into rest in a garden, and thereafter the children of that place possess it in peace and plenty, through succeeding generations, without end, and

shall to the end of the world. But the sea is tameless; as it was in the beginning, it is now, and shall ever be -- mighty, savage, dread, infinitely treacherous and hateful, yielding only that which is wrested from it, snarling, raging, snatching lives, spoiling souls of their graces (309).

Therefore, the man of the Newfoundland shore must be not a pioneer but a warrior:

the toiler of the sea -- the Newfoundlander of the upper shore -- is born to conflict, ceaseless and deadly, and, in the dawn of all the days, he puts forth anew to wage it (309-10).

The story that follows is dominated by the images of this opening paragraph: the endless struggle, the tameless sea, and the evening shadows.

The cyclical pattern which forms the narrative structure of this story is provided by a series of dialogues between the protagonist, Solomon Stride, and his wife Priscilla. The first of these occurs early in the story as the man and wife sit on a spring evening near the door, looking ahead to the summer fishery. Solomon is enthusiastic and optimistic, exclaiming as he slaps his thigh that "'twill be a gran' season for fish this year." Priscilla concurs, but in the background nature suggests otherwise as the "gloomy shadows" gather and hang "sullenly between the great rocks." As the two continue discussing future prospects, the glory is chased from the hills by "dusk and a clammy mist" and night closes in. In the following year, after a season of dismal failure, Solomon continues to express his optimism, while the setting echoes again the harsh reality: "Dusk and the

mist touched the hills . . . the rocks turned black, and the wind from the wilderness ruffled the water beyond the flake." Duncan continues this pattern and achieves the effect of conveying the passing of time. But the recurring images do more than this. They present the constant, unalterable fact that malevolent nature will not be moved by man's courage, strength or optimism. The power of the story is that Solomon Stride does score a victory: he lives a long life, and mere survival in this setting is in itself a heroic accomplishment. "The Fruits of Toil" closes with an epilogue that is an appropriate ending for the whole volume. Drawing back from the narrative, Duncan strives once again for the epic statement and succeeds:

Eternal in might and malignance is the sea! It groweth not old with the men who toil from its coasts. Generation upon the heels of generation, infinitely arising, go forth in hope against it, continuing for a space, and returning spent to the dust. . . . As it is written, the life of a man is a shadow, swiftly passing, and the days of his strength are less; but the sea shall endure in the might of youth to the wreck of the world (332).

In all of the stories in The Way of the Sea, the reader can sense the tension between the perception of the narrator and that of his protagonists. The amazement, awe, and indignation are Duncan's, and in no way depict the state of mind of the major characters or the people on whom these characters were modelled. Saul Nash did not think of himself as an "outport warrior," and Solomon Stride would not have philosophized about the eternal malignance of the sea. Furthermore, the

perception of life as a continuous struggle is Duncan's more than it is the view of the people themselves. The narrator acts as storyteller, commentator, visitor and outsider. The reader is both drawn into the narrative and pulled back, made to feel one with these people and their tragedies yet reminded that he is quite separate from them. What we are really seeing here is the tension between Duncan's sensitivity and his sense of realism. The impressions of terror and treachery are only partially those of the actual toilers of Newfoundland who struggle with the elements; they are even more the expressions of a sensitive onlooker, unfamiliar with this mode of existence yet inexorably drawn to it.

Much of Duncan's method, then, cannot be termed "realistic," yet there is much realism in the material that he presents. The use of geographical place-names, the frequent references to local customs and pieces of folklore, the imitation of the local dialect, the descriptions of wind, ice and fog -- all these show a writer successfully striving for a realistic effect. But Duncan recasts reality in heroic and even mythopoetic terms. Consider, for example, how the actions of Saul Nash on an ice-pan in a storm are presented in the following passage:

Soon, he stood up: for the waves were rising higher. In the words of the Newfoundlander, he stood up to face the seas. . . . It was night: the man's world was then no more than a frozen shadow, pitching in a space all black and writhing; and from the depths of this darkness great waves ran at him to sweep him off -- increasing in might, innumerable, extending infinitely into the night. . . . Wave came upon the heels of wave, each, as it were, with livelier hate and a harder blow -- a

massive shadow, rushing forth; a blow, a lifting, a tug, and a hiss behind: but none overcame him (62).

The rendering of this scene, rather than give the reader the illusion of actual experience, expands the experience into the realm of the heroic.

What, then, are we left with in The Way of the Sea? The stories show evidence of a writer concerned with design and structure, with recurring patterns, with strong characterization, and with vividly described settings. But above all we perceive a writer whose intense and sincere feelings about his subject matter take precedence over all else. One is left with the powerful impression of a people in constant conflict with a relentless and unyielding sea. But in spite of the emphasis on nature's malignance, one never loses sight in these stories of the people who meet the challenge of survival with courage and endurance. Collectively, the stories stand as a monument to the indomitable spirit of the outport Newfoundlander

## CHAPTER 5

## THE LURE OF LABRADOR

## 1

Duncan finally met Wilfred Grenfell in 1903. Having spent three summers on the coast of Newfoundland, he was undoubtedly familiar with the work of the Grenfell Mission, which served not only coastal Labrador but the northeast coast of Newfoundland from Cape St. John to Cape Bauld. As a result of his brief visits to communities along this coast as well as his conversations with local inhabitants, Duncan was certainly aware of the desperate lack of medical facilities; indeed, the situation had been the subject of some of his earliest writing about Newfoundland. In the article "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," for instance, he related how a government-appointed doctor allowed one of three children suffering from diphtheria to die because the father had enough money to pay for the treatment of only two of them.<sup>1</sup> Such experiences, even though for Duncan they were vicarious, must have impressed upon him the importance of Grenfell's work and must have

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<sup>1</sup>See "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," 3637-8. The episode is used again in Dr. Grenfell's Parish (New York: Revell, 1905) at which time the narrator insists on its authenticity.



made him all the more anxious to meet the medical missionary in person.

Duncan's first meeting with Grenfell actually took place in the city of New York. The two were introduced by S. Edgar Briggs:

It so happened that Mr. Norman Duncan was in New York at that time, and it was my pleasure to introduce to each other these fellow champions of the fisher folk. The memory of that all too short afternoon will ever be fragrant. Doctor Grenfell would hear of nothing short of our visiting him.<sup>2</sup>

Duncan and Briggs accepted Grenfell's invitation and travelled to Labrador in early July, 1903. Duncan no doubt was anxious to use the opportunity to gather new material for his books and articles. Indeed, he planned from the outset to write a novel for Revell based on Grenfell and his work, and had signed a contract for such a book before the trip even began.<sup>3</sup> While on the Labrador coast, Duncan and Briggs made stops in Red Bay, Battle Harbour and Cartwright; in addition, Duncan was a guest aboard the Mission's hospital ship Strathcona as it travelled along the coast on its mission of mercy. The writer spent most of the summer in Labrador, returning to Newfoundland in late August and stopping off for a short visit with the Manuels in Exploits before returning home.

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<sup>2</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, "Dr. Grenville [sic], Premier of the Labrador," Among the Deep Sea Fishers July 1904: 4.

<sup>3</sup>Contract between Fleming H. Revell and Norman Duncan, 4 June 1903, NDC.

Duncan found in Labrador a coastline even more rugged and desolate than what he had seen on the island of Newfoundland. The section that he travelled -- from Red Bay in the south as far north as Cartwright -- was a bleak and barren treeless coast, featuring numerous fiords and offshore islands. Duncan would later write of the Labrador coast as follows:

The coast of Labrador . . . is forbidding, indeed -- naked, rugged, desolate, lying sombre in a mist. It is of weatherworn gray rock, broken at intervals by long ribs of black. In part it is low and ragged, slowly rising, by way of bare slopes and starved forest, to broken mountain ranges. . . There is no inviting stretch of shore the length of it -- no sandy beach, no line of shingle, no grassy bank; the sea washes a thousand miles of jagged rock.<sup>4</sup>

The population of the coastline was sparse and scattered, and the permanent residents lived in conditions of extreme isolation and severe deprivation. During the summer, the population of these coastal communities increased dramatically, as fishermen from the island of Newfoundland, accompanied in many cases by their families, set up temporary abode as they prosecuted the summer fishery.

Just as he had done in Exploits in the previous summers, Duncan made a favorable impression on the people he met in Labrador. Grenfell himself was to refer to him as a "high-souled, generous idealist" with "love and affection for the

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<sup>4</sup>Norman Duncan, Dr. Grenfell's Parish (New York: Revell, 1905) 18.

people."<sup>5</sup> A writer in Among the Deep Sea Fishers, a periodical publication of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, acknowledged Duncan as "the fisher folk's friend and welcomed guest."<sup>6</sup> George F. Durgin, who was also travelling in Labrador in the summer of 1903 and who wrote his own impressions for an American publication, gave the following account of his meeting with Duncan in Battle Harbour:

I found Mr. Duncan's personality as delightful as his work. He is the same dreamer I had pictured when I finished his first story. His face is an open page to his sensitive, highly strung nature, and it was easy to understand his ability actually to feel the sad and futile strivings, the disappointments, the pathos of the Newfoundland life.<sup>7</sup>

Durgin's account continued with one of the few available physical descriptions of Duncan to have appeared in print. According to Durgin, Duncan was

A slender man slightly over medium height, with regular features, a pallid complexion, dark, expressive eyes, and a mass of wavy dark hair heavily banded with white.<sup>8</sup>

The sojourn in Battle Harbour seems to have been most enjoyable for Duncan, providing him with an opportunity to share the company of local residents. But even on such occasions his

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<sup>5</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "Norman Duncan: An Appreciation," Battles Royal Down North by Norman Duncan (New York: Revell, 1918) 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>"Acknowledgements," Among the Deep Sea Fishers July 1904: 28.

<sup>7</sup>George F. Durgin, Letters from Labrador (Concord: Rumford, 1908) 47-8.

<sup>8</sup>Durgin, 48.

work was foremost in his mind. One evening he entertained the other guests at the home of a local businessman by reading one of his stories:

Following the concert the guests assembled in the large, wainscoted living-room of Mr. and Mrs. Croutcher's dwelling, and Mr. Duncan with his manuscript on the table before him, his elbow resting on the table and one hand buried in his clustering hair, began to read "A Beat t' Harbor." At that time the story was unpublished; it appeared subsequently in Harper's Magazine for September. The reading was a revelation to me, for while I thought my own reading had given me the scope of his powers, I found that I had not grasped the full force and strength of his text. His inflections imitating the Newfoundland manner of speech were perfect; you heard their soft drawl and the peculiar clipping of words. It was easy to see he felt every line he had written.<sup>9</sup>

On his return to the United States, Duncan wasted no time in getting started on his new novel. In November he informed Ernest J. Hathaway that his "First novel is in preparation -- a story of a physician's life in Newfoundland and Labrador."<sup>10</sup> An article in the Canadian Magazine in May noted that Duncan's third book "to be issued next fall, is to be his first long story, and it will bear the title, 'The Champion'."<sup>11</sup> By June, however, Duncan had changed his mind about the title, settling instead on Doctor Luke of the Labrador. As Briggs commented:

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<sup>9</sup>Durgin, 54-5.

<sup>10</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Ernest J. Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

<sup>11</sup>"A New Novelist," Canadian Magazine 23 (May 1904): 89. The title is noted as "The Coming of the Champion" in "Norman Duncan," Bookman [London] 26 (June 1904): 81.

As to the title. You will see from the sheets now sent you that this is definitely settled as "Doctor Luke of the Labrador". It is Mr. Duncan's final choice, and I am sure he would not willingly consent to any change.<sup>12</sup>

Another reference to the manuscript is made in correspondence between Briggs and Grenfell:

Mr. Duncan is still working on the MS. of his book which we have called DOCTOR LUKE OF THE LABRADOR. I am sending you a set of sheets of the first ten chapters, and I hope you will be as pleased with them as "The Outlook" editors and all of our friends who have read them. The real hero of the story does not enter until the eleventh chapter. I have seen some of the MS. succeeding Chapter X, and I can safely promise you that the hero will captivate the reader. Duncan does not expect to finish the MS. until August.<sup>13</sup>

These comments make it clear that Grenfell saw at least part of the manuscript before the book went into print. He was possibly anxious about the portrayal of his work that the novel would present, a concern that was to be the cause of a major disagreement with Duncan after the book was published. By June, 1904, then, plans for the publication of Duncan's first novel were well underway. Not only had Revell signed a contract with Duncan for the book, the first of 11 of Duncan's books that it would publish, but the firm had also been negotiating with Hodder & Stoughton for simultaneous

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<sup>12</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to J.E. Hodder Williams, 17 June 1904, Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP.

<sup>13</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to Wilfred Grenfell, 7 July 1904, Yale University Library Archive; copy, EMP.

release in Britain.<sup>14</sup> In his correspondence with the British publishers, Briggs was optimistic about potential sales of the book, feeling sure that it would be more successful than its predecessor:

I should not for one moment expect you to take up our novel if I did not believe that this would outsell "The Way of the Sea" by long odds, the one being, no matter how you may disguise it, a book of short stories and the other a novel.<sup>15</sup>

While Duncan was working on the manuscript of Doctor Luke of the Labrador, an event occurred in his personal life that had a significant impact on the course of the novel. His mother, Susan Hawley Duncan, died on May 20, 1904, at her home in Washington, Pa. The cause of her death was "La Grippe, complicated with organic disease of the heart from which she had suffered many years."<sup>16</sup> She had been confined to her bed for several weeks before her death. The time that Duncan, who was also living in Washington, spent with his mother before her death, along with the trip to Brantford for her funeral, must have been very trying for him. That these events affected the progress of his novel is evident

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<sup>14</sup>The letter from Briggs to J.E. Hodder Williams dated 17 June 1904 (Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP) makes reference to the enclosure of printed sheets for about one-third of the novel. The eventual Hodder & Stoughton edition follows the Revell with only minor changes, notably the use of British spelling.

<sup>15</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to J.E. Hodder Williams, 17 June 1904, Hodder & Stoughton, London; copy, EMP.

<sup>16</sup>Reported in the Courier [Brantford, Ont.] 23 May 1904: n.pag.

in the following comments made by Briggs in a letter to Grenfell: "The continued sickness of his mother and her death last month have upset his plans very considerably, but the book itself has not thus far suffered any."<sup>17</sup> Duncan had been very close to his mother, as had his two brothers. The mother and sons had never been apart for any long period of time, and the moving of one family member invariably prompted the moving of the others. In 1904, at the time of Susan Duncan's death, they were all living in Washington, Pa. Robert, Ernest and Mrs. Duncan had moved there in 1901, while Norman had followed them the next year.

The influence of the mother on Duncan's new book is seen in many ways. The book is dedicated "To My Own Mother and to her granddaughter Elspeth my niece." In the note to the reader Duncan made these comments:

And the glory of the coast -- and the glory of the whole world -- is mother-love: which began in the beginning and has continued unchanged to this present time -- the conspicuous beauty of the fabric of life: the great constant of the problem.

According to Mackenzie King, the death of Duncan's mother affected his attitude towards the book he was writing:

he was so passionately attached to his mother and felt so keenly his inability to do all that he would like to have done for her during her illness, that, as he once told me, when money came to him from the sale of the book after it was printed, he felt as though he would like to throw it all into the sea, as being something which would have meant

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<sup>17</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to Wilfred Grenfell, 7 July 1904, Yale University Library Archive; copy, EMP.

so much to him while his mother was still alive, but meant so little once she was gone.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that his mother's illness and death occurred while he was working on this manuscript may also account for the emotional intensity of the relationship between the protagonist of the novel, Davy Roth, and his mother. This subplot fills about one third of the book and is strongly sentimental in tone. It is clear that Duncan transplanted many of the positive features of his own mother into his creation of Mrs. Roth. The strong bond between the fictional mother and son, expressed in images of holding and caressing, may indeed have been an attempt on Duncan's part to come to terms with the loss of his own mother.

With its large proportion of previously unpublished material, Doctor Luke of the Labrador represents Duncan's first effort at a sustained literary work. However, four pieces that had previously appeared in periodicals were used again in the text of the novel. The entire article "Our Harbor" reappears as the first of three chapters in the novel that serve to establish the physical and emotional setting for the whole work; one brief episode from "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," namely, the story of the maid from Punch Bowl Harbour, is incorporated into the narrative of Dr. Luke's rounds; the story "Santa Claus at Lonely Cove" reappears in slightly altered form; and a single episode,

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<sup>18</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to S. Edgar Briggs, 10 June 1918, MKC; copy, EMP.



originally told as "The Yarn of the 'Sink or Swim'," becomes one of the novel's subplots.<sup>19</sup> This weaving together of episodes and excerpts from earlier writings is a characteristic of Duncan's technique that was to be even more pronounced in some of his later books. While it can be argued that Duncan's enthusiasm for his subject matter is the reason for this practice, it is certainly not a sufficient explanation. Even at this early stage in his career, Duncan was too fond of overusing his material.

The central relationship of Doctor Luke of the Labrador is between young Davy Roth, son of the local trader, and Doctor Luke, whose arrival at the Labrador coastal community as a result of a shipwreck comes, tragically, only days too late to save the life of Davy's ailing mother. The loss of his mother and the feeling of emptiness that it evoked in the lad are major factors in drawing him close to the stranger; but Davy is also drawn by a mysterious quality in the doctor, whose sad face and melancholy moods are masks for a tortured soul. Woven into this main fabric of plot are other threads: a shipwreck, a villainous trader, a sentimental love story, and a variety of medical emergencies. In writing the novel, Duncan drew generously on many of the stories he had heard while he was travelling in Labrador, some of which appear in

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<sup>19</sup>Norman Duncan, "Our Harbor," Outlook 77 (6 August 1904): 846-53; "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," World's Work 6 (July 1903): 3617-38; "Santa Claus at Lonely Cove," Atlantic Monthly 92 (December 1903): 742-9; and "The Yarn of the 'Sink or Swim'," Harper's 108 (February 1904): 444-52.

other forms elsewhere, strongly suggesting their authenticity. This combination of fact and fiction applies chiefly to Doctor Luke himself, who in many respects is a thinly veiled portrait of Grenfell and whose exploits are distinctly reminiscent of many of the episodes related by Grenfell in his own books. But the doctor of Duncan's novel has an added dimension: he carries the burden of a sinful past, the truth of which he is able to reveal to Davy and his sister only after a process of spiritual healing for his troubled soul has started in Labrador.

Duncan's portrayal of Doctor Luke as a man with a sinful past gave rise to a serious disagreement between the writer and Grenfell, the man he admired so greatly. Within two months of the publication of Doctor Luke of the Labrador, the following comments appeared in the mission publication:

The title of the book naturally suggests that "Dr. Luke" is a fictitious counterpart of Dr. Grenfell. This almost nothing in the book supports. "Dr. Luke's" early life has been so vile that the girl he loves shrinks in horror from his story; to this there is nothing in Dr. Grenfell's career to correspond. The only parallel with Dr. Grenfell is "Dr. Luke's" interest in the fisher folk, and the devotion of his life to aid them by his skill; both the fictitious hero and the real man are strong, hearty, self-sacrificing; and in these aspects of his career "Dr. Luke" is apparently modelled upon Dr. Grenfell.<sup>20</sup>

As if to reinforce the distinction, the magazine editor followed this article with one entitled "The Real Doctor

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<sup>20</sup>"Dr. Luke of the Labrador," Among the Deep Sea Fishers January 1905: 19.

Grenfell," in which Grenfell's achievements were outlined with extensive illustration from Duncan's essay "Grenfell of the Medical Mission" which had recently appeared in Harper's.

Grenfell himself spoke about the matter to Duncan, possibly when they met during the medical missionary's American tour in the winter of 1904-5. As Grenfell commented many years later, "I once spoke to him about it," giving as his reason that "The close proximation of the facts in the life of his hero . . . to those of my own, led so many of our unsophisticated friends to suppose that every word of it was literal truth about my own life."<sup>21</sup> At that point, however, Grenfell seems to have regretted not so much that he had raised the point with Duncan but that Duncan had taken it so much to heart:

I was terribly chagrined to see he took it very deeply. It seemed to hit him like a sledge hammer, and I found that he had at once set about trying to make the matter right.

Indeed, Duncan took every opportunity to deny the intention of a parallel between Doctor Luke and Grenfell. On January 25, 1905, immediately after the appearance of the article in Among the Deep Sea Fishers, Duncan included the following comment in the note to the reader that was to accompany his new book on Labrador, Dr. Grenfell's Parish:

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<sup>21</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "Dr. Grenfell's Appreciation of Norman Duncan," Among the Deep Sea Fishers 14 (January 1917): 152. Grenfell, of course, had seen advance proofs of the first ten chapters of the novel, but Doctor Luke does not make an appearance until the eleventh chapter.

He [the author] wishes also to protest that Dr. Grenfell is not the hero of a certain work of fiction dealing with life on the Labrador coast. Some unhappy misunderstanding has arisen on this point. The author wishes to make it plain that "Doctor Luke" was not drawn from Dr. Grenfell.<sup>22</sup>

This disclaimer seems to have drawn attention to a matter that might otherwise have gone virtually unnoticed. While the reviews of Doctor Luke of the Labrador made no mention of such an unflattering parallel, at least two reviews of Dr. Grenfell's Parish saw fit to reiterate Duncan's point.<sup>23</sup> Duncan was not content to let the matter rest there; rather, at every opportunity he denied the connection. The following note, for example, appears at the beginning of The Measure of a Man (1911), a novel based on life in the Minnesota lumber camps:

When some years ago the author published "Doctor Luke of the Labrador," it was mistakenly inferred by many thousands of readers that the tale was a literal description of the life of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell; and a great confusion resulted. It is hoped that the reader will not confuse the hero of The Measure of a Man with the Rev. Francis E. Higgins of Minnesota.<sup>24</sup>

Again, just months before his death, Duncan wrote the following note in his preface to Billy Topsail, M.D.

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<sup>22</sup>Norman Duncan, "To the Reader," Dr. Grenfell's Parish (New York: Revell, 1905).

<sup>23</sup>See Public Opinion 38 (1 April 1905): 508, and Spectator 94 (22 April 1905): 598.

<sup>24</sup>Norman Duncan, The Measure of a Man (New York: Revell, 1911) 8.

(1916):

Doctor Luke has often been mistaken for Doctor Wilfred Grenfell. . . . That should not be. No incident in this book is a transcript from Doctor Grenfell's long and heroic service.<sup>25</sup>

There is no doubt, then, that Duncan was hurt by Grenfell's complaint. At one point he told Grenfell "I shan't write of Labrador again," though he did not adhere to that determination.<sup>26</sup> Duncan's repeated denials of what was an obvious parallel indicate the extent to which he felt hurt by the criticisms of the man who for him had taken on the dimensions of a hero. It would appear that Grenfell represented for Duncan the epitome of manliness, courage and physical stamina, qualities that he may have perceived as somewhat lacking in his own nature. He would have been appalled at the possibility that he might have inadvertently damaged Grenfell's reputation in the eyes of the public.

In spite of Duncan's statements, it is obvious that the prototype for Doctor Luke was indeed Wilfred Grenfell. Duncan had gone to Labrador with the intention of gathering material for a novel based on the work of the Grenfell Mission, and it was more than coincidental that his protagonist was a doctor who also contributed much to the well-being of

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<sup>25</sup>Norman Duncan, "To the Reader," Billy Topsail, M.D. (New York: Revell, 1916) 5. Ironically, one printing of this text contains an advertisement for the three Billy Topsail books, claiming that "The doctor is Doctor Luke of the Labrador whose prototype as everyone knows is Doctor Grenfell."

<sup>26</sup>Quoted by Grenfell in a letter to Norman Duncan, 8 December [1906], NDC.

the coastal residents. Indeed, there are too many definite parallels between the fictitious Doctor Luke and Grenfell to make the repeated denials credible.<sup>27</sup> Doctor Luke even experiences an adventure adrift on an ice-pan which is very similar to Grenfell's famous account.<sup>28</sup> It is little wonder, then, that many readers drew a parallel between Luke and Grenfell. But Doctor Luke was, of course, never intended as a literal portrait of Grenfell. That Grenfell took exception to the comparison suggests the medical missionary's concern about his own image and points to a marked contrast between his personality and that of Duncan. In retrospect, one can conclude that Grenfell seems to have been worried about a trifle; no unfavorable deductions about Grenfell seem to have been made as a result of Duncan's portrayal, while the admirable characteristics of the fictitious doctor certainly worked to Grenfell's advantage. Most commentaries on the novel made since Duncan's death have concluded that Grenfell was indeed the model for Doctor Luke.

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<sup>27</sup>For example, the original model for Jagger, the villainous trader of Doctor Luke of the Labrador, was the father of Jarrett, a trader at Indian Harbour of whom a visitor to the Mission noted there was no "love lost between him and Grenfell" (Dorothea Moore, unpublished letters, 94). Another of these letters notes that the ship's doctor in Doctor Luke had its original in a doctor who actually visited settlements along the Labrador coast and who ended "by falling down the companion-way and breaking his neck" (108).

<sup>28</sup>See Wilfred Grenfell, Adrift on an Ice Pan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909).

In spite of this misunderstanding, Grenfell and Duncan remained friends. Grenfell had regarded Duncan highly since their first meeting in 1903; indeed, he had in the following year recommended Duncan as a member of an American committee being formed to promote the work of the Mission.<sup>29</sup> During the winter of 1905, Duncan was one of two speakers selected to address a dinner given in New York in honor of Grenfell, who later acknowledged that "the evening was a very helpful one to the cause of Labrador."<sup>30</sup> On one occasion, possibly during the same winter, Grenfell was a guest of Duncan's at Washington, Pa., during which visit Grenfell "got a new glimpse of the deep sympathy of the man's nature and those traits of character that made him so much beloved of those who knew him."<sup>31</sup> Later, on his arrival for another American tour in December, 1906, Grenfell wrote to Duncan, expressing the hope of meeting him again and acknowledging that his books had helped the Labrador cause considerably. They corresponded frequently. In 1908 Grenfell sent Duncan an autographed copy of his book, A Man's Faith (1908). The

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<sup>29</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, "Dr. Grenville [sic], Premier of the Labrador," Among the Deep Sea Fishers July 1904: 7. Duncan apparently did not serve on the committee, though Briggs, who had accompanied him on the Labrador trip, was a member.

<sup>30</sup>"Dr. Grenfell's American Tour," Among the Deep Sea Fishers April 1905: 5. The other speaker was Dillon Wallace, author of The Lure of the Labrador Wild (1905).

<sup>31</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "Dr. Grenfell's Appreciation of Norman Duncan," Among the Deep Sea Fishers 14 (January 1917): 152.

Grenfell Association of America advertised and distributed Duncan's books on Labrador. Following Duncan's death in 1916, Grenfell wrote his "Appreciation" in which he made reference to Duncan's affection for Labrador and its people. Ironically, the same tribute was reprinted in a 1917 issue of Book News Monthly with the subtitle "A Tribute from Doctor Luke."<sup>32</sup> Grenfell's last comments about Duncan were made in an essay published as an introduction to two posthumous collections of Duncan's stories, Battles Royal Down North (1918) and Harbor Tales Down North (1918). In that article, he emphasized once again those qualities in Duncan he most admired: his love and affection for the people, sincerity, generosity and idealism.

While several reviewers of Doctor Luke of the Labrador concentrated on what the book said of the work of the Grenfell Mission, other features of Duncan's novel also received attention. The Critic declared that Fleming H. Revell had discovered a new novelist "who promises to run a close second to their earlier discovery, Ralph Connor." The review continued by commending the book for the "beauty of its treatment of a series of related episodes," calling it "the production of a literary artist whose touch is as light as it is sure."<sup>33</sup> The Independent called the novel "one of the

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<sup>32</sup>"Dr. Grenfell's Appreciation of Norman Duncan," reprinted as "Norman Duncan," Book News Monthly 35 (1917): 228.

<sup>33</sup>Critic 45 (September 1904): 198.



truly fine literary productions of the year"; this sentiment was echoed in the Canadian Magazine, which added with a touch of pride that Duncan had not renounced his Canadian citizenship, and concluded, "For this magnificent story we thank him, and are proud."<sup>34</sup> Neither did Doctor Luke of the Labrador go unnoticed in Newfoundland: Sir Robert Bond, the Prime Minister, remarked: "I shall prize the book. It is charmingly written, and faithfully portrays the simple lives of the noble-hearted fisher folk."<sup>35</sup>

Certain characteristics of the book, notably the episodic nature of the plot, were the object of considerable adverse criticism. The Reader called the book a "novel that might have been," attributing its failure to its "cohering scraps and sympathetic fragments."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the New York Times found fault with the construction of the plot:

[the plot] is of a character so fragile and the events of the successive chapters are so little dependent upon one another that, even though one title covers them all, the reader still gets the impression of a series of sketches, involving the same characters rather than of such a compact and indivisible whole as properly constitutes a novel.<sup>37</sup>

The London Bookman expressed similar reservations about the episodic nature of the plot, attributing it to the fact that

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<sup>34</sup>Independent 58 (26 January 1905): 210, and Canadian Magazine 24 (December 1904): 192.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in an advertisement on back leaf of Doctor Luke of the Labrador (Toronto: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.).

<sup>36</sup>Reader 5 (May 1905): 789.

<sup>37</sup>New York Times 26 November 1904: 820.

Duncan "has not yet completely escaped from the influence of the short story," but adding that "he shows conclusively that he has it in him to do so."<sup>38</sup> Some reviewers rated Duncan's novel more highly than The Way of the Sea. For example, the Nation noted an improvement in the language, commenting specifically that the "epithets are here kept well under control, and are naturally the stronger for it."<sup>39</sup> Another article stated:

Mr. Duncan's short stories, good as they were, hardly perhaps gave promise of the strength and beauty and pathos of this, his first longer effort.<sup>40</sup>

Doctor Luke of the Labrador was by far the more popular book: a reprint of the novel by Grosset & Dunlap of New York noted that the book was in its "26th 1000."<sup>41</sup> The popularity of the novel was possibly due to the fact that it had romance, adventure, and a strong sense of conventional morality. Unlike The Way of the Sea, this book found a place for the happier side of life in the harsh northland, with the people rather than the environment dominating the action. Contemporary readers may also have been pleased with the happy ending in which the villains are punished and the good rewarded.

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<sup>38</sup>Bookman [London] 27 (December 1904): 129.

<sup>39</sup>Nation 80 (2 February 1905): 97.

<sup>40</sup>American Monthly Review of Reviews 31 (January 1905): 118.

<sup>41</sup>Norman Duncan, Doctor Luke of the Labrador (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.).

After the appearance of The Way of the Sea, the Manchester Guardian had referred to Duncan as a writer with "a fine talent, from which we may expect many fine things in the future." The London Daily News stated that Duncan's "future work will be eagerly awaited."<sup>42</sup> From his native Canada came the assertion that "There is no Canadian writing fiction today who gives greater promise than Norman Duncan."<sup>43</sup> To what extent, then, did Doctor Luke of the Labrador live up to these expectations? As stated earlier, it was a far more popular work than The Way of the Sea, but a strong argument can be made that it fails to match the artistic achievement of the collection of short stories.

Doctor Luke of the Labrador is characterized by both strengths and weaknesses. In this novel, for the first time in his fiction, Duncan adopts a local persona, allowing the story to be narrated from the vantage point of the young son of a Labrador trader. This identification with the local perspective is a shift from the deliberate distancing found in the narrative voice of The Way of the Sea. It can no doubt be partially accounted for by Duncan's admiration for Grenfell. The reader is permitted to view the exploits of

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<sup>42</sup>Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

<sup>43</sup>"A New Novelist," Canadian Magazine 23 (May 1904): 89.

Doctor Luke (and, by implication, of Grenfell himself) through the eyes of a resident of the coast who directly benefits from the presence of this benefactor. The sense of awe and admiration created by the tone of the narrative voice in The Way of the Sea is now conveyed entirely through incident and characterization. The presence of the author "from away" is far less intrusive, and references to the local inhabitants as "them" and "those people" are nonexistent. Instead of injecting his personal commentary into the narrative, Duncan integrates his own impressions more completely into the fabric of the novel, using two characters, Davy Roth and Doctor Luke, to present the inside and outside perspective respectively. With the exception of occasional comments directed at the reader, such as "you may be interested to learn it" (218) and "as you shall know" (222), the author moves into the background and leaves the narration to his persona.

But Davy Roth, the narrator, is hardly a typical Labrador boy. His father is a trader, his mother was originally from Boston, and the family employs two domestic servants. Davy himself tells the story in retrospect, having since travelled beyond his coastal community and acquired an education. Duncan is well aware of the advantage that such narration allows, as he provides the reader with a double vision, using Davy as participant and retrospective narrator. This dual perspective is reinforced by a sharp contrast in the

use of dialect: the young Davy who participates in the narrative speaks with the accent and idiom common to all the local characters of the book, while the mature, retrospective Davy narrates in standard English. The method of narration gives the reader the opportunity to share the experiences of the child through the eyes of the wiser and more mature adult. For example, in relating his mother's death Davy allows the broader view to prevail, as the immediate participant is replaced by the mature narrative voice:

Then the child that was I knew that his mother was dead. He leaped from his knees with a broken cry, and stood expectant, but yet in awe, searching the dim, breathless room for a beatified figure, white-robed, winged, radiant, like the angel of the picture by his bed, for he believed that souls thus took their flight; but he saw only shadows (104).

This deliberate distancing from the pain of the occasion has the added advantage of preventing the account from becoming intolerably sentimental.

Much of the strength of Doctor Luke of the Labrador lies in the delineation of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy. He is the village theologian whose concept of God is in sharp contrast to that of the "Lord God A'mighty" which dominates many of the stories in The Way of the Sea. He views God as a kind and benevolent Maker, whose ultimate concern is with the objects of His creation. For example, in response to young Navy's complaint that God had not seen fit to allow flowers to grow on the desolate coastline near his home, Tommy has this reply:

"Don't you go thinkin' you could make better worlds than the Lard. . . . He done wonderful well with this one. When you're so old as me, lad, you'll know that though the Lard made few flowers He put a deal o' time an' labour on the harbours; an' when you're beatin' up t' the Gate, lad, in a gale o' wind -- an' when you thinks o' the quiet place t'other side o' Frothy Point -- you'll know the Lard done well by all the folk o' this world when He made safe harbours instead o' wastin' His time on flowers" (25-6).

This passage gains added significance when one realizes that Duncan expands the literal harbor into a symbol for the security that comes with friendship and love. While there is in much of Skipper Tommy's comments a strong note of fatalistic acceptance ("'Tis better to let Him steer His own course an' ask no questions"), the dominant impression is that of a God of love whose benevolence assures man that all will be well. Tommy convinces Davy that good will ultimately come out of tragedy (131), and urges the boy to adopt a more forgiving attitude towards Doctor Luke's sinful past (252). This optimism, characteristically absent from many of the stories in The Way of the Sea, is dominant throughout this novel.

Optimism is also evident in several humorous passages. Again, much of the humor is found in the character of Tommy Lovejoy. Unlike the religious fanatics of The Way of the Sea who viewed jollity as a sin against God, Tommy combines religious faith with a healthy sense of fun. Consider the brief lesson that he gives Davy on women:

"The Lard knowed what He was about. He made them with His own hands, an' if He was willin' t' take the responsibility, us men can do no less than stand by an' weather it out. 'Tis my own idea that

He was more sot on fine lines than sailin' qualities when He whittled His model. 'I'll make a craft,' says He, 'for looks, an' I'll pay no heed,' says He, 't' the cranks she may have, hopin' for the best.' An' He done it! That He did! They're tidy craft -- oh, ay, they're wonderful tidy craft -- but 'tis Lard help un in a gale o' wind!" (188)

Tommy Lovejoy has the stature of Solomon Stride in The Way of the Sea. Indeed, Duncan may have had a parallel in mind, since he associates Tommy with the same physical gesture of slapping his thigh that characterized the earlier Solomon.

One can argue that some of the other secondary characters in Doctor Luke of the Labrador are one-dimensional. There is old Tom Tot, for example, "who had searched the Bible for seven years to discover therein a good man of whom it was said that he laughed, and, failing utterly, had thereupon vowed never again to commit the sin of levity" (42). There is the Woman from Wolf Cove, "dressed somewhat in the fashion of men, with a cloth cap, rusty pea-jacket and sea-boots" (75), whose persistent pursuit of Tommy Lovejoy supplies the humorous subplot of the novel. Finally, there is the villain, the trader Jagger, a heartless man with no redeeming features, who is eventually eaten by the dogs that he has mercilessly mistreated.

There is, however, a fundamental weakness in the portrayal of one of the major characters, Doctor Luke. The doctor, we are told, has a sordid past, but Duncan never allows the reader to learn the details of that past. Hence it is difficult to understand some of the doctor's excessive reactions to

recollections of it. For example, Davy's account of hearing Luke in his room sighing aloud and sobbing can have little effect on the reader other than to increase his sense of incredulity. Even more puzzling are the doctor's occasional outbursts of delight, as the Labrador coast begins working its miraculous cure:

The great, grave fellow appeared of a sudden to my startled vision in midair -- his arms and legs at sixes and sevens -- his coat-tails flapping like a loose sail -- his mouth wide open in a demoniacal whoop -- and I dropped to the floor but in the bare nick of time to elude him. Uproarious pursuit ensued . . . it tumbled the furniture about with rollicking disregard, led the doctor a staggering, scrambling, leaping course in the midst of upturned tables and chairs, and, at last, ran the gasping quarry to earth under the sofa (152).

The reader might forgive this outburst, were the full explanation about the doctor's obsession forthcoming. But it is not. We are never informed about the nature of the "sin," even though we are invited to share Davy's rather exaggerated reaction (246-7) when he learns of it.

The relationship between Davy Roth and his mother, which dominates the first ten chapters of the novel, is strongly sentimental. Motherly love and Christian virtues abound. Not that these in themselves are objectionable. The problem is Duncan's excess, as in the following passage describing how Davy finds comfort in his mother's arms:

blessed memory has given me once again the vision of myself, a little child, lying on my mother's dear breast, gathered close in her arms, while she rocked and softly sang of the tempestuous sea and a Pilot for the sons of men (33).



Or again,

More often, now, at twilight, she lured me to her lap, where I was never loath to go, great lad of nine years though I was; and she sat silent with me . . . and she kissed me so often that I wondered she did not tire of it -- and she stroked my brow and cheeks, and touched my eyes, and ran her finger-tips over my eyebrows and nose and lips, ay, and softly played with my lips -- and at time she strained me so hard to her breast that I near complained of the embrace (38-9).

The whole book is concerned with idealization: of the love between mother and son in the first ten chapters; and of the work of the Labrador doctor in the remainder of the book. This motive controls the tone of the book, and, while it provides the narrative with its driving force, it also is responsible for an element of overstatement.

The division of the novel into these two distinct segments is part of the major structural flaw in the work. The plot is essentially episodic, with the only unifying thread provided by the presence of the narrator himself. While the first ten chapters form an integral unit in terms of development of plot, they have very little connection with the rest of the book other than to show the need in Davy's life for a friend. While most of the rest of the novel concerns itself with the relationship between Davy and the doctor, there are several subplots which result in fragmentation of the main story. Many of the events related in the later chapters of the novel have little or no bearing on one another. Consequently, some chapters become no more than a series of loosely connected sketches, the only common

denominator being that each event happens to either Davy, Doctor Luke, or someone known to them. Two things are happening here. First of all, Duncan is allowing his desire to glorify the work of Grenfell overshadow the need for a conscious artistic unity in the novel as a whole; thus he includes episodes that are very similar to ones used in his nonfictional accounts of Grenfell's works or to incidents recorded in publications of Grenfell himself or his Mission. Secondly, we are seeing here a writer who has not escaped the influence of the short story. The weaving together of numerous episodes -- often previously published in shorter works -- with bits and pieces of new material is a characteristic found in all of Duncan's longer novels. It is a method of plot construction that, in spite of criticisms levelled against it in certain contemporary reviews, Duncan never chose to abandon.

## 3

What impressed Duncan most during his visit to Labrador was the work of the Grenfell Mission, the focus of what is undoubtedly his best piece of nonfiction, Dr. Grenfell's Parish. There was certainly no need for Duncan to worry about any unfavorable impressions on the part of Grenfell as a result of this work. Immediately after its publication in March, 1905, a writer in Among the Deep Sea Fishers praised

Duncan as one "who knows Dr. Grenfell's work thoroughly,"<sup>44</sup> even though Duncan had spent only a few weeks in Labrador. But his experience as a reporter and his acute powers of observation made it possible for him to produce a work that both described the desperate plight of the local inhabitants and provided considerable detail about Grenfell -- the man, the missionary and the doctor. Grenfell obviously had this book in mind when he commented in a letter to Duncan that "your books have helped Labrador thru the increased interest turned to it."<sup>45</sup>

Duncan made it quite clear from the outset that Dr. Grenfell's Parish had an explicitly didactic function:

Its purpose is to spread the knowledge of the work of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell, of the Royal National Mission to Deep-Sea Fishermen, at work on the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador; and to describe the character and condition of the folk whom he seeks to help. . . . Frankly, the author believes that the reader would do a good deed by contributing to the maintenance and development of the doctor's beneficent undertakings.<sup>46</sup>

In the same preface, Duncan also noted that various previously published papers "in some part" made up the volume. This was indeed an understatement, as just about the entire book comprised material that had already appeared in print. Duncan used virtually in their entirety three articles that

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<sup>44</sup>Among the Deep Sea Fishers April 1905: 22.

<sup>45</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, letter to Norman Duncan, 8 December [1906], NDC.

<sup>46</sup>Norman Duncan, "To the Reader," Dr. Grenfell's Parish: The Deep Sea Fishermen (New York: Revell, 1905).

had appeared in Harper's in 1904.<sup>47</sup> But he also reached further back into his store of published material, using both narrative and descriptive excerpts from three of the early essays written after the first visits to Newfoundland, namely "Newfoundlanders of the Outports," "Of the Real Sea" and "The Codfishers of Newfoundland." The finished product, then, was essentially a combination of various sections of these six articles; the only new material, excluding a few opening and closing paragraphs added to chapters to establish continuity, comprised a few letters received by Grenfell from various patients (51-3) and a series of episodes involving Grenfell recorded in a chapter entitled "Winter Practice" (136-45). Once again, Duncan gained considerable mileage from some of his earlier material. Not only did he duplicate whole sections of articles and stories already printed; there were incidents and descriptions that had appeared three and even four times in previous publications.<sup>48</sup> Dr. Grenfell's Parish also contains many echoes of The Way of the Sea.

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<sup>47</sup>The articles are as follows: "The Labrador Liveyere," 108 (March 1904): 514-23; "The Fleet on 'The Labrador'," 108 (May 1904): 856-67; and "Grenfell of the Medical Mission," 110 (December 1904): 28-37.

<sup>48</sup>One example is the story of the use of a bull's heart as a medical cure. It first appeared in "The Healer from Far-Away Cove," Harper's 105 (October 1902): 669-76; it was part of that same story when it was published in The Way of the Sea; it occurred as a brief episode in "Grenfell of the Medical Mission," Harper's 110 (December 1904): 28-37; and as part of that article, it found its way into Dr. Grenfell's Parish.

Duncan seems to have begun the task of collecting the material for this book only after Doctor Luke of the Labrador was completed and published. The appearance of the new book so soon after the novel may have been provoked in part by Grenfell's concerns about the impressions formed in readers' minds about Doctor Luke; Duncan may very well have seen a ready-made opportunity to prepare with minimum effort a book that would offset any negative parallels and undo any harm to Grenfell that might have been caused by the novel. Such a motivation would have been consistent with Duncan's sensitive nature. S. Edgar Briggs was certain that Grenfell would be impressed by the new material on the Labrador Mission. In a letter to Grenfell, enclosing copies of "The Labrador Liveyere" and "The Fleet on 'The Labrador'," two of the periodical articles that were to be incorporated into Dr. Grenfell's Parish, Briggs made reference to a third, "Grenfell of the Medical Mission," as follows:

I have seen copy of the MS., and think I can safely promise you that when published it will do more good for your Mission than any one single literary effort that has thus far been made.<sup>49</sup>

The highlight of Dr. Grenfell's Parish for Duncan was the portrayal of Grenfell himself. Duncan was never one to record his impressions in an understated manner. His enthusiasm for the doctor and his work is abundantly clear on every

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<sup>49</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to Wilfred Grenfell, 7 July 1904, Yale University Library Archive; copy, EMP. "Grenfell of the Medical Mission" was to appear in Harper's in December 1904.

page, leading at least one critic to accuse Grenfell's "enthusiastic Boswell" of chronicling the doctor with "lavish and more than merited praise."<sup>50</sup> But to Duncan, Grenfell was a hero, a man whose dedication had helped thousands of people who would otherwise have been helpless; consequently, no praise was too great for such a champion.

Grenfell's work among the residents of northern Newfoundland and Labrador was not the only attraction that the medical man had for Duncan. As a man of slight physique who at this point may still have held a fear of the sea, Duncan possibly saw in Grenfell the masculine hero who demonstrated in his everyday life the antithesis of his own weaknesses. The contrast between the two men was one that Grenfell himself was not hesitant to note.<sup>51</sup> Duncan must have seen in Grenfell a manifestation of a strenuous life that he could share only vicariously. Commenting at one point about Grenfell's total lack of fear, Duncan noted "that [it] is in part because he has a blessed lack of imagination, in part, perhaps, because he has a body as sound as ever God gave to a man."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Public Opinion 38 (1 April 1905): 508.

<sup>51</sup>Grenfell noted that Duncan was physically "never a fighter or an athlete" ("Norman Duncan: An Appreciation," in Battles Royal Down North, 7); later in the same article he mentioned that the writer was "slight in physique" (8). The same points were made in the tribute written by Grenfell for Among the Deep Sea Fishers in 1917.

<sup>52</sup>Dr. Grenfell's Parish, 65.

The clear intent of Dr. Grenfell's Parish, then, was to magnify for the world at large the heroism and devotion of Duncan's idealized Grenfell. As is the case with all such literature, the weakness lies in the tendency to overstatement; indeed, the theme of praise that dominates the book becomes tiresome. The very nature of promotional literature raises another vital question: the extent to which the information recorded in the book is accurate. Especially open to question is the authenticity of those incidents related specifically to gain sympathy for the people and hence support for Grenfell's efforts. The fact that Duncan chose to present the account directly with no attempt to use a persona suggests that everything he wrote was from either firsthand experience or reported accounts. While he related a few incidents in which he had been personally involved, these are in the minority. Most of the stories had been gleaned from Grenfell himself and were thus subject to embellishment because of the doctor's own zeal to publicize his work. Even those episodes described to Duncan by patients and others during his own visits may well have suffered from the process of retelling, and it is possible to cast doubt on some of his firsthand accounts. For example, he once reported seeing wheat growing in a Newfoundland outport.<sup>53</sup> Again, in Dr. Grenfell's Parish he categorically

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<sup>53</sup>See "In Remote Newfoundland," 428. By contrast, in the article "Newfoundlanders of the Outports," 274, he notes that the word "wheat" would be meaningless to a Newfoundlander. But wheat is mentioned again as a Newfoundland crop in "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," 3616,

stated that he had first heard of Grenfell in a Newfoundland harbor, even though the evidence is clear that he had initially come to Newfoundland to seek an interview with the doctor. One is led to the conclusion that the rhetorical purpose of the episode rather than its accuracy was foremost in Duncan's mind, and that he was not at all reluctant to alter the facts in order to serve that purpose.

One incident that has received much attention is the story of the man whose three children lay desperately ill, suffering from diphtheria. The doctor, as the story goes, was a government appointed physician who required of the man a payment of two dollars per injection for his children. The distraught man, able to pay for only two injections, was forced to allow the doctor to select the "handiest" of the children for survival.<sup>54</sup> Duncan followed this narrative with the statement, "This is not a work of fiction. These incidents are true." Indeed, the story was widely known along the coast. One reference to it claims that the incident took place in Twillingate and was followed by a town meeting, protests and much publicity.<sup>55</sup> Duncan had used the story as part of an earlier article, "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," though without the accompanying statement about its veracity. Its earlier use served to illustrate the writer's generalization

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and Dr. Grenfell's Parish, 104.

<sup>54</sup>The story is told in Dr. Grenfell's Parish, 45-6.

<sup>55</sup>Dorothea Moore, unpublished letters, 109.



about St. John's merchants and politicians and their attitude towards coastal fishermen. In Dr. Grenfell's Parish, the incident is part of the emphasis on the need for a doctor of Grenfell's skill and compassion. Some critics have questioned the authenticity of this story. A reviewer in the Athenaeum commented with skepticism:

Needless to say, Dr. Grenfell has changed all this. Since Mr. Duncan specifically insists upon the actual truth of his instances, their probability is not open to discussion, as is the case of incidents in a story. The reviewer would only say that, in the course of an experience which has brought him into contact with medical men at sea and in the remotest parts of four continents, he has hitherto been preserved from meeting a doctor of this sort.<sup>56</sup>

Even the writer of a review in Among the Deep Sea Fishers steered clear of supporting the story, claiming simply that it must be true if Duncan said so.<sup>57</sup> Several years later, Canadian critic Andrew Macphail commented on the same incident, claiming that the story had "too patent a purpose" and was "ill-calculated to win for Dr. Grenfell the cooperation he deserved from the government or people of Newfoundland, or sympathy from the medical profession at large."<sup>58</sup>

Many other incidents used by Duncan, however, are recorded elsewhere. For example, the story of the man who

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<sup>56</sup>Athenaeum 13 May 1905: 591.

<sup>57</sup>Among the Deep Sea Fishers April 1905: 22.

<sup>58</sup>Andrew Macphail, "Norman Duncan: An Estimate," Unpublished ms, [1924], 17. This manuscript is part of the Macphail Papers, Manuscript Group 30 D 150, vol 5, file 9, PAC.

was forced to use a hatchet to cut off the two frozen feet of his child is recorded in Among the Deep Sea Fishers.<sup>59</sup> At least one of the letters to Grenfell from patients which are quoted by Duncan is an actual transcript.<sup>60</sup> The stories of shipwrecks that comprise all of Chapter 3 can be similarly verified. Other stories were so widely known and recorded that one can suppose a certain element of truth in them.<sup>61</sup> But there is no question that Duncan, in his enthusiasm to capture in his writing the awe that he personally felt for Grenfell, occasionally fell victim to overstatement.

Dr. Grenfell's Parish received several favorable reviews. The writer in the Athenaeum who had expressed doubts about the story of the diphtheria cases called the book nonetheless "a better and a more interesting piece of work than either of its predecessors from the same pen" and praised its freedom from those "various irritating mannerisms which marred the first book that reached us."<sup>62</sup> "It reaches the heart with the force of veracity," claimed the Reader, while

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<sup>59</sup>"Dr. Grenfell's Heroic Work," Among the Deep Sea Fishers April 1903: 6.

<sup>60</sup>The letter beginning "Reverance dr..." is included in "Letters Received from Dr. Grenfell," Among the Deep Sea Fishers October 1903: 23.

<sup>61</sup>For example, the incident about the government doctor who refused to go ashore to tend a patient because he was drinking (used by Duncan in Doctor Luke of the Labrador) is mentioned in Dorothea Moore, unpublished letters, 108, as well as in P.W. Browne, Where the Fishers Go: The Story of Labrador (New York: Cochrane, 1909) 118-19.

<sup>62</sup>Athenaeum 13 May 1905: 591.

both the New York Times and the Bookman proclaimed its success in the presentation of Grenfell's accomplishments.<sup>63</sup> The reviews, while lauding the insights that the book provided into Grenfell's work, rarely included any discussion of the work's literary merits, well heeding Duncan's own statement in his Foreword that the book "pretends to no literary excellence."

In spite of the excessive praise that the book heaps on Grenfell, Dr. Grenfell's Parish is an impressive literary achievement. Three of its chapters are devoted to a description of life among the following groups of people that comprised Grenfell's "parish": the "liveyeres" or permanent settlers of the long stretch of Labrador coast; the fishermen and their families who came to coastal Labrador each summer to fish; and the inhabitants of that part of the Newfoundland coast known as the "French Shore" (from Cape St. John to Cape Ray). These chapters provide some of the best accounts available of life in that obscure part of the world at the turn of the century. With a style that incorporates factual reporting, vivid description, ample use of anecdote as well as a genuine human sensitivity, Duncan provided his readers with a valuable insight into the way of life of a virtually unknown people.

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<sup>63</sup>See Reader 6 (June 1905): 118; New York Times (25 March 1905): 182; and Bookman [New York] 21 (July 1905): 543.

At the beginning of the first of these chapters, "The Liveyere," Duncan explains that the detailed descriptions to follow are offered so "that the reader may understand the character and condition of the folk among whom Dr. Grenfell labours" (67). The key word here is "folk." Duncan steps aside from his hero worship, and concentrates on the ordinary people that he encountered on his journey to Labrador. The "liveyeres" are presented to the reader against the backdrop of one of the best descriptions of the barren coastal landscape to be found in all of Duncan's work:

The weather has scoured the coast -- a thousand miles of it -- as clean as an old bone: it is utterly sterile, save for a tuft or two of hardy grass and wide patches of crisp moss; bare gray rocks, low in the south, towering and craggy in the north, everywhere blasted by frost, lie in billowy hills between the froth and clammy mist of the sea and the starved forest at the edge of the inland wilderness (68).

The only redeeming feature of life in such an environment is that its inhabitants are unaware of any better:

no man knows, no man really **knows**, that elsewhere the earth is kinder to her children and fairer far than the wind-swept, barren coast to which he is used. They live content, bearing many children, in inclemency, in squalor, and, from time to time, in uttermost poverty -- such poverty as clothes a child in a trouser leg and feeds babies and strong men alike on nothing but flour and water. They were born there: that is where they came from; that is why they live there (69-70).

In such paragraphs we catch the resonant, exclamatory nature of Duncan's prose: his long sentences running into more and more phrases as he proceeds to show his discoveries; his repetitions, images, and insistent adjectives; and his

awareness of an audience that will need to be convinced of the accuracy of what he has seen. In his next chapter, "With the Fleet," Duncan describes the excitement of the return of the Labrador fishing fleet to Newfoundland in the fall:

It is an inspiring sight to see the doughty little craft beating into the wind on a gray day. The harvesting of a field of grain is good to look upon; but I think that there can be no more stirring sight in all the world, no sight more quickly to melt a man's heart, more deeply to move him to love men and bless God, than the sight of the Labrador fleet beating home loaded -- toil done, dangers past; the home port at the end of a run with a fair wind. The home-coming, I fancy, is much like the return of the viking ships to the old Norwegian harbours must have been. The lucky skippers strut the village roads with swelling chests, heroes in the sight of all; the old men, long past their labour, listen to new tales and spin old yarns; the maids and the lads renew their interrupted love-makings. There is great rejoicing -- feasting, merrymaking, hearty thanksgiving.

Thanks be to God, the fleet's home! (101-2)

Again, this is writing of a high order, the kind of joyous, personal celebration of ordinary living that Duncan excelled in. The third of these chapters, "The French Shore," is yet another example of engaging personal prose. The three pieces taken together leave one wondering whether Duncan's genius did not lie in this kind of personal essay rather than in more elaborate, lengthier fictions.

Dr. Grenfell's Parish, along with The Way of the Sea and Doctor Luke of the Labrador, had, by 1905, established Duncan's reputation as a rising literary star. And even though he was to write many more books, he is to this day best remembered for these three. In 1905 he was standing on

the threshold of what could have been an outstanding literary career, one that might well have ranked him with the major North American literary figures of the early twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 6

## PENNSYLVANIA AND KANSAS

## 1

At the time Duncan made his earliest trips to Newfoundland, he was still residing in New York. Even after he resigned his position with the Evening Post, he continued living and working in the city, supporting himself for the next two years entirely on his income as a writer. Until mid-1901, his brother Robert was also in New York. Norman and Robert, even though they had chosen different careers, continued to remain close. No doubt it was with Norman's encouragement and assistance that Robert published articles in several newspapers and periodicals of the day. In fact, McClure's, which had encouraged Duncan's Newfoundland venture, also sent Robert abroad so that he could observe the work being done at the Curie laboratories in Paris. Having returned from this assignment, Robert left New York and moved to Washington, Pa., where he had acquired a position as a professor of Chemistry at Washington and Jefferson College. Ernest, in the meantime, had established a dental practice in Washington, Pa. By the fall of 1901, then, Norman was the only one of the Duncan brothers still in New York.

These family moves might have been a factor in leading him to invite young Joe Manuel of Exploits to spend a winter with him in New York. Even though his mother was still living with him, Duncan might well have felt the need to have other companionship. When he discovered in 1901 that the boy was badly in need of surgery for tonsillitis, he suggested that Joe go back to New York with him and spend the winter there. That the boy's parents agreed to have their seven year old son accompany the writer back to the United States suggests the complete trust that they must have had in Duncan. Joe accompanied Duncan when he left Newfoundland at the end of the summer of 1901 and came back with him to Exploits the following year.

By mid-1902 Duncan prepared to leave New York himself. He had never been apart from his brothers for a lengthy period, and once again it appears that he changed his place of residence in order to be near them. In 1902 he was successful in acquiring a position in the English Department of Washington and Jefferson College -- probably on the strength of Robert's recommendation, as his own academic record was poor and his literary reputation had not yet been established. Duncan was hired as an Assistant Professor of English and in 1903 was named "Wallace Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory."<sup>1</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup>This Chair had been set up earlier in the year from funds set aside by John H. Wallace; it would appear that Duncan was the first appointee to this Chair.



duties at the College were by his own admission "very light."<sup>2</sup> For example, in the academic year 1905-6 his duties consisted of teaching one course in Freshman Rhetoric, described as follows:

Bi-weekly exercises in English Composition are required. These exercises are carefully examined by the professor, who makes and suggests corrections and other changes in the way of improvement, and sees to it that these changes are duly made.<sup>3</sup>

The class schedule for that year indicates that his classroom teaching amounted to only two hours per week. He thus had plenty of time for writing in the four years that he spent at the College. Besides preparing most of the material for Doctor Luke of the Labrador and Dr. Grenfell's Parish, he wrote several juvenile stories for the Youth's Companion and a number of Newfoundland stories for Harper's. Most of what is known of Duncan's private life during the years he lived in Washington comes from Joe Manuel, who spent a second winter with the writer "sometime between 1902 and 1906."<sup>4</sup> Duncan seems to have kept very much to himself. His close friend, S. Edgar Briggs, was a frequent visitor. Other than these visits, and a casual acquaintance with a teaching

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<sup>2</sup>Duncan, letter to Hathaway, 24 November 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Catalogue of Washington and Jefferson College, 1905-6, 35.

<sup>4</sup>Joe Manuel, interview with Thomas Moore, 1976. This interview, along with a page of notes sent by Manuel to Moore (TMC) is the source of most of what follows in this paragraph.

colleague named Weyer, Duncan's social contacts were limited to his family, especially his brother Robert and Robert's wife Charlotte. He spent long periods of time alone working on his manuscripts. He had an apartment on campus, complete with a black houseboy who prepared his meals and kept the place in order. The boy, however, had a fondness for raiding Duncan's well-stocked liquor cabinet, for which he was eventually dismissed. Duncan seems to have been reasonably successful financially at this point in his life, even though he was in the habit of spending large sums of money on others. Not only did he support his mother, but it seems likely that he had earlier helped Ernest set up his dental practice. He also frequently gave handouts to the needy, especially in the form of food hampers to the poor. His generosity, even if it meant an occasional shortage of money for himself, was one of the qualities that most impressed Joe Manuel and remained in his memory 70 years later.

While living in Washington, Duncan made frequent trips to New York to see his publishers. Joe Manuel recalled making several such visits with Duncan, one of which stood out in his memory as one of the few occasions on which he saw Duncan angry:

It occurred in a newly opened hotel, which was much celebrated in New York at the time. Joe and Duncan had explored the modern structure when they repaired to the bar in order that Duncan might purchase a drink. The custom in most bars of those days was that upon payment for a drink, the bartender would pass a bottle of the desired beverage to the customer who would then mix his own drink. This

custom was being modernized, and in the new hotel a bartender carefully measured out a regular one ounce drink for Duncan, who flew into a rage at what he interpreted to be an insult.<sup>5</sup>

Duncan had a number of acquaintances in the city. There is evidence of his having spent time at the Aldine Club, a group which had as its stated objective the encouragement of literature and art. He was also a member of New York's City Club, an organization devoted to improvements in civic government. This club was popular among editors and reporters, and Duncan probably joined it while he was still with the Evening Post; indeed, the publisher of the Post, Garrison Villard, was one of the club's most influential members.<sup>6</sup> The club provided its members with not only social facilities but temporary living quarters, and it is possible that Duncan stayed there during his visits to the city. However, he may have maintained his own apartment at least for part of the time. There is no evidence linking Duncan with any of the City Club's political activities.

Duncan maintained his links with his native Canada during his years in Washington. He still had relatives in Ontario and occasionally visited them. Canadian literary figures were beginning to pay attention to him. In the late winter or early spring of 1904, Duncan addressed the Canadian

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan," 57-8.

<sup>6</sup>For details on this club, see David I. Aronson, "The City Club of New York 1892-1912," PhD diss., New York University, 1975.

Club in Toronto and obviously impressed at least one person present:

He [Duncan] recently visited Toronto at the invitation of the Canadian Club, and made a decided impression. Of medium stature, Mr. Duncan is not one to impress one on sight, but the face and the voice soon indicate the gentle, earnest spirit which animates the man and which stamps him as one of earth's noblemen.<sup>7</sup>

In the following year, Duncan had four of his stories published in the Canadian Magazine, a leading literary journal in Canada at the time. His two books on Labrador were highly successful in his native land, both being listed as best sellers in bookstores in Toronto and Montreal in 1905.<sup>8</sup> In that same year Duncan was listed as one of the vice-presidents of the Canadian Society of Authors, a group formed in 1899 "to promote the production of literature in Canada, and the interests of Canadian authors."<sup>9</sup> Early in 1905 he visited Ottawa and spoke to that city's Canadian Club, no doubt as a guest of Mackenzie King, who was president of the club that

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<sup>7</sup>"A New Novelist," Canadian Magazine 23 (May 1904): 89-90. Duncan's visit to the Canadian Club was probably prompted by E.J. Hathaway who was Secretary of the club in 1903-4 and who had been in correspondence with Duncan.

<sup>8</sup>See "Sales of Books during the Month," in the Bookman (New York) from February 1905 to August 1905. Mary Vipond in "Best Sellers in English Canada, 1899-1918," Journal of Canadian Fiction Number 24, n.d. [1979?] also includes both Doctor Luke of the Labrador and Dr. Grenfell's Parish in her lists.

<sup>9</sup>Canadian Society of Authors: Bibliography and General Report, March 1902, 5. Metro Toronto Library. Duncan is listed as a vice-president in the Report for 1905.

year.<sup>10</sup> Duncan and King had not met since their days at the University of Toronto, but during 1905 they were in frequent contact. Duncan, who was living in Washington at the time, was most eager to renew this acquaintance:

I want to see you -- much want to see you again. It is so long since we met -- not since that great year of '95, I fancy. And I want to know all about the old fellows, with whom you must have kept in touch. So I shall be your guest with the very greatest of pleasure -- and we must have a hearty smoke and talk about old times. I remember that it was our habit in those riotous days to pause and exclaim: "Won't we laugh at this ten years hence!" Well, the ten years have passed -- but I'm not laughing yet. Are you? Perhaps we may laugh together.<sup>11</sup>

The time spent in Ottawa with King was obviously very pleasant for Duncan, and prompted these comments in another letter:

I really can't begin to thank you for your goodness to me; it was so great and so constant. How can I tell you with what delight I found in you the same old fellow and friend. The gap of ten years made me somewhat apprehensive that we might find each other changed -- and, I'm sure, I did not want my conception of the old Rex changed.<sup>12</sup>

Duncan spent some time with other friends of King's, some of whom were prominent writers themselves, notably William Wilfred Campbell and William Henry Drummond. The latter was

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<sup>10</sup>Addresses Delivered Before the Canadian Club of Ottawa (1903-9) (Ottawa: Mortimer Press, 1910) lists Duncan as a guest but does not include his speech.

<sup>11</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Mackenzie King, n.d. [1905], MKC; copy, EMP.

<sup>12</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Mackenzie King, n.d. [1905?], MKC; copy, EMP.

especially impressed with Duncan, noting in correspondence with King how much he enjoyed meeting this writer of sea stories:

I enjoyed so much meeting Norman Duncan -- Some time ago reading those sea stories, I said to myself "Who is this man Duncan who gives us so much of the mysterious voices of the sea . . ." and delighted I was to find that Duncan is one of us: a Canadian. Duncan is a great writer, no doubt about it, and we'll hear more from him by and bye.<sup>13</sup>

In the same letter, Drummond made a reference to Duncan's physical appearance that suggests his uncertain state of health. Expressing the hope that Duncan would accept an invitation to spend a holiday with him in the spring, Drummond added, "the boy looks a bit as if a holiday among the hills and lakes wouldn't do him any harm." The reference to Duncan as a "boy" suggests that at least some of his acquaintances viewed him as a person who depended on others and needed protection.

King had great confidence in his former university classmate, so much so that he had invited Duncan to join him in the Department of Labour after he became deputy minister; however, Duncan had refused as he wished to devote his full

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<sup>13</sup>W.H. Drummond, letter to Mackenzie King, 2 February 1905, MKC; copy, EMP. The contacts with Campbell can be confirmed by two facts: Duncan appears in a photograph with Campbell, King and a fourth person (PAC; copy, NDC); and Campbell sent Duncan a personally autographed copy of Beyond the Hills of Dream containing the note "With appreciation and esteem from his friend." EMP.

time to his writing.<sup>14</sup> In 1905, when Duncan's name came up in connection with the appointment of a new secretary for the office of the Canadian High Commission in London, King heartily supported the notion:

I agree with you that living in London would certainly help his [Duncan's] literary work and that he would be a good man for the position. The first opportunity of doing so I will sound him in the matter and if a change [sic] comes of suggesting his name to any of the Ministers in this connection, I will certainly do so.<sup>15</sup>

But by 1905 Duncan had decided that writing would be his permanent career. It is possible that there were other meetings between King and Duncan in 1905, but these cannot be verified: there was a reunion of the Class of '95 sometime early in the year; and in November, many former university classmates met in Ottawa to attend the dedication of a monument to Henry Harpor, who had drowned in Ottawa in 1901.<sup>16</sup> In 1906 King sent Duncan an autographed copy of his eulogy to Harper, The Secret of Heroism (1906), with the following inscription: "To Norman Duncan, one of the noblest and best of men, with the affectionate regard of his old friend Billy K."<sup>17</sup> That King read Duncan's work is evident

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<sup>14</sup>See Mackenzie King, letter to Harry P. Biggar, 4 August 1905, MKC; copy, EMP.

<sup>15</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to Harry P. Biggar, 4 August 1905, MKC; copy, EMP.

<sup>16</sup>The reunion is mentioned in a letter from Harry P. Biggar to King, 25 June 1905, MKC; copy, EMP.

<sup>17</sup>This book is now owned by Elizabeth Miller.

from this diary entry: "While on the train spent the most of the time reading Norman Duncan's 'The Cruise of the Shining Light'."18

By 1906 there is evidence that Duncan's health was deteriorating. The main cause of this was doubtless his excessive drinking, a problem that apparently had plagued him for many years. While no evidence exists to indicate the degree of his dependence on alcohol during the period 1895-1902, there is no doubt that it was a major problem while he was living in Washington. Joe Manuel recalled that Duncan had several bouts of heavy drinking during the winter he spent with him in Pennsylvania. It seems that Duncan did most of his drinking at home rather than at bars or at social functions.<sup>19</sup> On one occasion, Joe came home from school to find Duncan "unconscious on the couch," while at other times the houseboy would take the writer to a cabin in the woods just outside of town to help him recover from heavy bouts of drinking. In addition to, or maybe because of, his drinking problem, Duncan suffered from attacks of acute indigestion. An intense and nervous person by nature, he was also a chain smoker. In spite of these problems, however, he continued to have success with his writing, though the process was often fraught with frustration. Joe

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<sup>18</sup>Mackenzie King, Diaries, 23 April 1907.

<sup>19</sup>Again the source for this material is the interview with Joe Manuel by Thomas Moore.



Manuel recalled that sometimes he would do no writing whatsoever "for a month or two," during which time he would be drinking very heavily. By contrast, at other times he would work for long hours at his typewriter, sometimes right through the night. There is no doubt, said Manuel, that Duncan was "happiest when his writing was going well."

The relationship between Duncan and his mother has already been noted in the previous chapter. Susan Duncan relied on her son quite heavily for economic support; in a letter to Ernest, written while she was visiting relatives in Brantford, she mentioned a monetary problem, adding that "dear old Norm has never failed to provide the needful so it will be all right I am sure."<sup>20</sup> With that letter she enclosed a note for Norman, again making reference to her need for financial assistance. The letters also reveal a strong bond between mother and sons: "I am so grateful for such loving messages on my birthday from all my good boys," she wrote; adding "They are my very life." Referring to Norman, she exclaimed, "Oh how glad I will be to see him."

It has already been noted that her death, which occurred while Duncan was working on the manuscript of Doctor Luke of the Labrador, probably influenced the intensity of the mother-son relationship depicted in the early chapters of that novel. Her death had a greater impact on his second

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<sup>20</sup>Susan (Mrs. R.A.) Duncan, letter (transcript) to Ernest Duncan, 15 June 1903, NDC.

novel, The Mother (1905). Unlike his earlier books, this novel contained no segments that had previously been published in magazines. All of its parts were written with a single book in mind, and consequently the novel does not suffer from the lack of cohesion evident in Doctor Luke of the Labrador. For this story, Duncan left his fund of Newfoundland material and returned to a scene closer to home, the streets of New York. Drawing no doubt on his experience as a reporter with the Evening Post, he set the poignant tale of a mother and her son in one of the poorer sections of lower Manhattan. Fleming H. Revell published the book in two editions, one of which was "a limited edition printed and bound with exceptional taste."<sup>21</sup> For this edition, the Reader had very high praise:

Two hundred and fifty copies of the book are printed in an edition 'de luxe' of charming taste, on beautiful paper with wide margins, tasteful decorations in the matter of head and tail pieces for the chapters, and a soothing cover of soft gray paper.<sup>22</sup>

The Mother dealt with a subject very dear to Duncan's heart, the relationship between a young boy and his mother. This was not the first time he had handled this theme. His very first short story, "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," had explored the world of a little boy whose mother's absence created in him a need that was at least partially filled by the companionship of an older man. In "Billy Luff and Master

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<sup>21</sup>See Outlook 81 (18 November 1905): 683.

<sup>22</sup>Reader 6 (November 1905): 719.

Goodchild," one of the stories in The Way of the Sea, Duncan had created a poignant deathbed scene in which a boy found his final solace in his mother's love. Again, the mother-son relationship was central to the early chapters of Doctor Luke of the Labrador. In each of the foregoing there had been a tragic note: the absence of the mother in "The Absence of Mrs. Halloran," the death of the boy in "Billy Luff and Master Goodchild," and the fatal illness of the mother in Doctor Luke of the Labrador. But each in its own way had attempted to affirm the central importance of mother-love.

In The Mother, Duncan's emphasis was different. Mother-love did indeed become the "glory of the whole world," the "conspicuous beauty of the fabric of life."<sup>23</sup> In this book it takes on a redemptive dimension. It is the strength of Millie Slade's love for her son that draws her back from the brink of a life of abject immorality. Her salvation lies in her realization that her son loves her, not for her fancy clothes or because he believes her lies about her aristocratic suitors, but because she is his mother. The book, as one reviewer commented, is "the story of a coarse, immoral woman lifted by her passionate love for her son."<sup>24</sup> It is the story of both a woman's sacrifice and a son's devotion, and while the actual incidents were entirely fictitious, the

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<sup>23</sup>Norman Duncan, "To the Reader," Doctor Luke of the Labrador.

<sup>24</sup>Outlook 81 (25 November 1905): 711.

powerful and profuse emotions were undoubtedly drawn from Duncan's perceptions of his own relationship with his mother, now dead. While the book described at length the intimacy between mother and son, the portrayal was probably an attempt on the part of a heartbroken man to come to terms with the death of his mother. Even though the theme of mother-love never totally disappeared from Duncan's fiction, it was never again explored with such intimacy and intensity as it was in this novel.

Some reviewers quickly drew attention to what they perceived as the excessive sentimentality of the novel. For example, the Independent noted that Duncan wrote "with his light turned a trifle too high and with his keynote of pathos taken an octave above where the reader's sympathies reach comfortably."<sup>25</sup> The Critic claimed "an excess of sentiment in the portrayal of the boy," though it conceded that the mother was "wholly human."<sup>26</sup> In a more balanced appraisal, the Reader commented that while the treatment was by no means always realistic, "it is sympathetic and likely to touch the emotions of the public."<sup>27</sup> Harper's Weekly was more laudatory, declaring that Duncan "has touched the springs of a tragedy that is of universal significance."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Independent 59 (26 October 1905): 986.

<sup>26</sup>Critic 47 (December 1905): 577-8.

<sup>27</sup>Reader 6 (November 1905): 719.

<sup>28</sup>Harper's Weekly 49 (4 November 1905): 1598.

Duncan himself seems to have realized that the book was flawed, as he was later to make the following comment:

"The book was possibly a mistake, but I am not regretting its publication. It stands for something - however small and sentimental that something may be." <sup>29</sup>

Duncan, however, did not explain what that "something" was.

After completing The Mother, Duncan returned once again to his Newfoundland material. Over the next 30 months (from the beginning of 1906 through the summer of 1908), his magazine articles were based exclusively on Newfoundland subject matter. During that period, he published 19 stories for periodicals as well as three Newfoundland books: The Adventures of Billy Topsail, The Cruise of the Shining Light (1907), and Every Man for Himself (1908).

The Adventures of Billy Topsail, published by Fleming H. Revell in September, 1906, is a series of loosely connected episodes about Billy Topsail, a young Newfoundland boy in the fictitious outport of Ruddy Cove. The book was the first of three that Duncan wrote using this central character, books that were to establish firmly his reputation as a writer of adventure stories for boys.<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this first book, Duncan selected 12 of the stories that had

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<sup>29</sup>Quoted in E.J. Hathaway, "Norman Duncan," Ontario Library Review 13 (August 1928): 9. The location of the original of this comment has not been found.

<sup>30</sup>The other volumes are Billy Topsail and Company (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), and Billy Topsail M.D. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1916).

already appeared in Youth's Companion, a magazine that specialized in juvenile fiction. In addition he incorporated into the volume portions of two other stories, "The Chase of the Finback Whale" and "Cast Away on Feather's Folly," both of which had appeared in print elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Duncan's main task in the preparation of this volume, then, was to rework these former tales, along with a few new episodes, into a unified story with a single protagonist and a common setting. This involved chiefly the changing of the names of characters and locations to conform to an overall design which had not existed in the original stories. The Adventures of Billy Topsail was hailed as a successful book of stories for boys. The Review of Reviews called the stories "out of the ordinary, and not of the cooked-up narration type that fills the pages of the usual 'Story for Boys'."<sup>32</sup> Writing of it many years later, the critic Sheila Egoff asserted that it was "the best and most enduring [children's] book of this period [1900-1925]."<sup>33</sup>

The Adventures of Billy Topsail represents the best of Duncan's adventure fiction. With its multitude of exciting

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<sup>31</sup>"The Chase of the Finback Whale," Outing 44 (September 1904): 679-85 and "Cast Away on Feather's Folly," Cosmopolitan 41 (August 1906): 353-60.

<sup>32</sup>Review of Reviews 34 (December 1906): 767.

<sup>33</sup>Sheila Egoff, "Children's Literature to 1960," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl Klinck, 3 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 2: 138.

episodes, the book must certainly have appealed to its youthful readers. The hero of the book is Billy Topsail, the son of a fisherman at Ruddy Cove. His life is full of adventures: he is saved from drowning by his Newfoundland dog; he becomes lost on the face of a cliff and is rescued at the last possible moment; he succeeds in delivering a bag of mail through a perilous journey; he participates in the activities of a whaling ship out of Snook's Arm; and he engages in the migratory fishery on the coast of Labrador. In some of his adventures, Billy is joined by his outport friend, Bobby Lot; the most exciting of these is an encounter with a giant squid that attacks their punt. Two of the book's adventures do not happen to Billy at all, but are related to him by others: these are the stories of the fur trader from New York who drifted to sea on a pan of ice and the doctor who took a short cut across the ice only to discover that "the longest way round is the shortest way home." Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most unified section of the book is the latter part, in which Duncan narrates the adventures of Billy and a new friend, Archie Armstrong, as they take a voyage to the icefields on a sealing ship. Archie, the son of a St. John's merchant, comes from a background very different from Billy's, but the common love of adventure creates a strong bond of friendship between them.

The Adventures of Billy Topsail comprises some 18 separate episodes, most of which are further subdivided into

short chapters to maintain the exciting pace of the narrative and to cater to the more limited attention span of younger readers. Also included are many of the illustrations found in the original articles, drawings that add to the vitality of the narrative. A preface not only asserts the authenticity of the types of stories being narrated, but also draws a clear distinction between the boys on whom this fiction was modelled and the potential readership:

At any rate, [the Newfoundland boys] have adventures, every one of them; and that is not surprising -- for the conditions of life are such that every Newfoundland lad intimately knows hardship and peril at an age when the boys of the cities still grasp a hand when they cross the street.

In spite of the chapter format used by Duncan, the book is not a novel, even though there is an attempt made to produce continuity through common characters, setting and point of view. A number of changes were made to the original magazine stories to produce this consistency. The book, along with its two sequels, was very popular in the early part of the century, appealing as it did to a youthful readership eager for stories of the northern frontiers. The simplicity of the narrative carries instant conviction in spite of the fact that some of the adventures are rather exaggerated. Unlike the stories in The Way of the Sea, these do not rely much for their effect on setting, characterization and development of theme, but are largely dependent on an exciting plot.

In style the Billy Topsail stories are very different from the ten published in The Way of the Sea. However, this



is not indicative of any development in Duncan's technique, as many of the stories included in The Adventures of Billy Topsail were being written during the same period as those in The Way of the Sea. The Billy Topsail stories were written with young boys in mind. The narratives are simple and direct, there are no long descriptive paragraphs, philosophizing by the author (or the characters) is absent, and the sentences are shorter. For example, the book opens with these lines:

From the very beginning it was inevitable that Billy Topsail should have adventures. He was a fisherman's son, born at Ruddy Cove, which is a fishing harbour on the bleak northeast coast of Newfoundland; and there was nothing else for it. All Newfoundland boys have adventures; but not all Newfoundland boys survive them (11).

In these stories Duncan is again very conscious of his readers, as he was in The Way of the Sea. At times he injects explanations of terms that may be unfamiliar to American youth, while occasionally he pauses as narrator to prepare his readers for understanding the significance of an event that is to follow. Before telling the tale of Billy's treacherous experience in scaling the face of a cliff, the narrator speaks to his readers:

If you have ever climbed about a rocky sea-cost [sic], you will know that an ascent may be comparatively simple where a descent is quite impracticable; you will know that the unwary may of a sudden reach a point where to continue the climb is a nauseating necessity (49).

Duncan also ensures that his readers will be well informed on the various activities that form the focus of particular adventures: for example, the seal fishery, the whaling

industry, the migratory fishery in Labrador, and the sightings of giant squid. This tendency on the part of Duncan to explain to the readers what he felt they needed to know is a marked feature of his narrative style. Along with the freshness and vitality of the stories themselves, it contributed to the success of The Adventures of Billy Topsail.

## 2

In April, 1907, Harper & Brothers published the first of several of Duncan's books that would appear under that company's name, The Cruise of the Shining Light. This novel received considerable attention from American reviewers. It was listed in the American Library Association Booklist as "one of the best novels of recent years."<sup>34</sup> The Literary Digest referred to it as a "delightful love-story," while the Canadian Magazine praised it for its "charming style."<sup>35</sup> In a more detailed commentary, the Independent noted the similarities between this work and Doctor Luke of the Labrador, particularly insofar as both used as themes "the heart of childhood and youth and the passion of maternal love." But the same reviewer criticized the work for what he considered its "unmodern style," a remnant of the "English of a long-

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<sup>34</sup>Booklist 3 (May 1907): 134.

<sup>35</sup>Literary Digest 34 (15 June 1907): 961, and Canadian Magazine 29 (June 1907): 193.

gone age."<sup>36</sup> The characterization of Nicholas Top was the object of high praise from the New York Times, which claimed that the novel marked Duncan's arrival "among the masters in his calling."<sup>37</sup> A British reviewer called the novel "the most ambitious, and, we think, the best, book that Mr. Duncan has written."<sup>38</sup>

The Cruise of the Shining Light is Duncan's most successful novel. Even though the work is again partially dependent on material already used, the result is a much more unified work than Doctor Luke of the Labrador. This may be due to the fact that, instead of weaving together several previously published short stories, Duncan concentrated on one, "The Wreck of the Will-o'-the-Wisp,"<sup>39</sup> and expanded its narrative into a novel, adding a couple of well integrated subplots. Another reason for the superiority of this novel over Doctor Luke of the Labrador is that this time Duncan is not modelling his fictitious hero on a real person whose virtues he wishes to extol. The central character is once again a boy, an orphan named Dannie Calloway who, following the death of his father in a shipwreck, was "adopted" by an old seafaring man, Nicholas Top, a colorful character who is a bit of a

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<sup>36</sup>Independent 63 (11 July 1907): 101-2.

<sup>37</sup>New York Times 11 May 1907: 302.

<sup>38</sup>Athenaeum 2 November 1907: 547.

<sup>39</sup>This story was originally published in Canadian Magazine 25 (August 1905): 330-8.

rogue. The main thread of the narrative is the relationship that develops between the man and the boy, a relationship shrouded in mystery and suspense.

In spite of the title, the narrative has very little to do with the sea. Nature forms a backdrop, but is not essential to either the action or the development of character; the intense response to the sea that characterized The Way of the Sea is conspicuously absent. There are still elements of the adventure story, with plenty of action. There is also a greater variety of scene, as the story moves between outport and capital city, allowing for an expansion of the usual rural setting of Duncan's Newfoundland and Labrador stories. Unlike the slowly developing narrative of the earlier novel, this plot moves quickly. The reader is introduced from the outset to elements of mystery and suspense that create the essential tension of the book. As with Doctor Luke, the central character, Nicholas Top, has a secret past which threatens his relationship with the protagonist, Dannie Calloway. But this time, the secret is a more integral part of the narrative, and its eventual revelation allows the novel to move to its conclusion. The fact that Dannie's natural father was a murderer and that his guardian has raised him with the help of blackmail money serves to draw the two closer together. The reader is drawn more completely into a sympathetic relationship with Nicholas Top, an identification that was not entirely possible in Doctor Luke of the Labrador because

of the author's decision to keep the doctor's shady past a secret.

The Cruise of the Shining Light does, however, share some of the weaknesses of Doctor Luke of the Labrador. Again, the narrative is somewhat episodic, though the subplots have a more substantial link with the main events of the novel than is the case with the earlier work. Duncan was able to consider the episodes in terms of their merit for the book as a whole rather than concern himself with including tenuously related incidents for propagandist purposes. The most important subplot is the story of the Fool of Twist Tickle and his search for a wife. While on the surface this story seems unrelated to the main narrative, the Fool joins forces with Dannie and Nicholas Top as they undertake the "cruise of the Shining Light," resurrecting Top's derelict vessel to find Dannie's runaway sweetheart.

## 3

The third book from Duncan's Pennsylvania period was Every Man for Himself, another Newfoundland collection comprising ten short stories, all of which had previously appeared in periodical magazines.<sup>40</sup> The book appears to have

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<sup>40</sup>The stories are as follows, in order of original publication: "The Fool of Skeleton Tickle," Outlook 81 (23 September 1905): 229-33; "They Who Lose at Love," Harper's 112 (February 1906): 338-46; "Every Man for Himself," Harper's 113 (July 1906): 255-63; "The Wayfarer," Atlantic

been a collection of convenience. No attempt was made to create continuity from story to story: there are no common characters, no common settings, no consistent narrative point of view, and no progression from selection to selection. The stories appear exactly as originally published in the magazines. There are three categories of stories in the group. Four employ the technique of a "story within a story," framed at the beginning and end by the narrator who tells the rest of the story in the first person. This method has the disadvantage of cluttering most of the story with dialogue within dialogue, a feature that can create confusion for the reader. Three more stories use Syrian characters, while the remaining three are miscellaneous stories of adventure.

The three Syrian stories pose an interesting problem.<sup>41</sup> Duncan may have included these unusual narratives, in which he introduces to his Newfoundland setting some of the characters of the New York Syrian Quarter, in an effort to inject freshness into his fiction. In a rather artificial way, he brings to the shores of Newfoundland a Syrian peddler who had been a victim of lost love in one of the stories in The

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Monthly 98 (August 1906): 145-56; "A Comedy of Candlestick Cove," Harper's 114 (May 1907): 954-64; "The Revolution at Satan's Trap," Century 74 (June 1907): 185-97; "The Surplus," Harper's 116 (April 1908): 749-59; "The Squall," Harper's 116 (May 1908): 826-36; "The Minstrel," Harper's 117 (June 1908): 29-37; "'By-an'-By' Brown of Blunder Cove," Harper's 117 (September 1908): 526-34.

<sup>41</sup>The stories in question are "The Fool of Skeleton Tickle," "They Who Lose at Love," and "The Minstrel."

Soul of the Street, and actually continues the Newfoundland story at the point where the earlier one had left off. In doing so he presents his readers with a peculiar mixture of personalities and cultural backgrounds. While the experiment is interesting, it does not work. The Syrians are connected to events in the narratives of the earlier stories to which many of Duncan's readers may not have had access. Furthermore, the problems of dialect that result from a combination of the two disparate groups are almost insurmountable. One can only conclude that the experiment was little more than an attempt on the part of Duncan, the former reporter, to find a new "angle."

One of the stories in Every Man for Himself is worth examining in some detail, as it compares favorably with those in The Way of the Sea. "The Wayfarer," hailed by many reviewers as the best in the volume,<sup>42</sup> reflects what must have been Duncan's worries over the challenges to faith provided by a Darwinian concept of nature. He explores this theme in this story through the meditations of a ragged old fisherman who comes up with a "survival of the fittest" explanation for existence along the barren Newfoundland coast. Duncan's continued exposure to the harshness of life and the savagery of nature in Newfoundland seems to have

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<sup>42</sup>The following reviews single out this particular story: Baltimore News 23 November 1908; Post [Chicago] 13 November 1908; Sentinel [Milwaukee] 18 October 1908. Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

temporarily called into question his concept of a caring, loving God.

In "The Wayfarer," the narrator, though more willing to identify with the local environment as a first person participant, maintains a certain distance as he sets up a frame in which the main narrative is related by a local storyteller. The story is introduced, as were the best stories of The Way of the Sea, through setting:

The harbor lights were out; all the world of sea and sky and barren rock was black. It was Saturday -- long after night, the first snow flying in the dark. Half a gale from the north ran whimpering through the rigging, by turns wrathful and plaintive -- a restless wind (1).

Though Duncan again strives for realism in the use of geographical place-names, we find in this story the beginning of a tendency that becomes more pronounced in later works: the rather enthusiastic creation of ingenious place-names to the extent that the names begin to sound contrived rather than authentic. Consider, for example, the following passage:

"'tis is a mean place t' the westward o' Fog Island, a bit below the Black Gravestones, where the Soldier o' the Cross was picked up by Satan's Tail in the nor'easter o' last fall. You opens the Cove when you rounds Greedy Head o' the Hen-an'-Chickens an' lays a course for Gentleman Tickle t'other side o' the Bay" (3-4).

Duncan seems here to be quite overanxious as he strives for authenticity.

The main focus of the story is on Abraham Botch, a "lean an' ragged" man of whom the narrator states that "aloft he carried more sail 'n the law allows . . . mostly



head, an' a sight more forehead than face" (6). Botch is a philosopher. What is interesting about the portrayal of his character is not so much the Darwinian philosophy he presents as the fact that the local storyteller makes it clear that the rugged Newfoundland coast is no fit place for a philosopher: "it ain't nice t' see any man thinkin': for a real man ain't got no call t'think, an' can't afford the time on the coast o'Newf'un'land, where they's too much fog an' wind an' rock t' 'low it" (8). The most significant event in the story is the narrative of the night that Abraham Botch spent frozen to a pan of ice. He is the antithesis of Saul Nash, the "outport warrior" of "The Strength of Men." Rather than face the elements with heroic determination to survive, Botch spends the night thinking about "the law o'life," and in the morning has reached the conclusion that he has "gone t'waste on this here coast." The story demonstrates Duncan's attempt at a theme more profound than anything he had written in his short stories since The Way of the Sea.

In 1906 Duncan again changed his place of residence, following Robert to Kansas. Robert, having accepted a position on the faculty of the University of Kansas, seems to have suggested his brother for employment of some type with the English department. Chancellor Frank Strong wrote

Norman with an invitation to join the faculty in a somewhat limited capacity:

I do not remember whether I have ever met you or not. I met your brother Robert several times in Auburn. As you probably know, he is to come here next year and he said when I was in correspondence with him that you would doubtless follow him as to your place of residence. I hope very much that you may do so and in case you do I should like to have you give a few lectures in connection with the University -- a sufficient number to give you an official connection with us. The pay would have to be nominal. . . . My idea was for from six to ten lectures during the year.<sup>43</sup>

By January, 1907, Duncan was living in Lawrence, Kansas, and was listed among the faculty at the university as "Adjunct Professor of English Language and Rhetoric." However, it is not known whether the lectures referred to on the chancellor's letter were ever given. Certainly Duncan had not appeared on campus several months later when the chancellor wrote him again:

When can you give us a few lectures upon some topic connected with our department of English? We shall be glad indeed to have you do this. Will you kindly indicate to me what your terms would be? We would like to connect you officially with the University; at the same time we do not wish it to be in any way a burden to you.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that Duncan's name does not appear on any of the course descriptions for the university indicates that his

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<sup>43</sup>Frank Strong, letter to Norman Duncan, 9 June 1906, Kenneth Spencer Library, University of Kansas; copy, EMP.

<sup>44</sup>Frank Strong, letter to Norman Duncan, 24 January 1907, Kenneth Spencer Library, University of Kansas; copy, EMP.

academic contacts with the University of Kansas were at best minimal.

While Duncan's main living quarters from 1906 to 1908 were in Lawrence, probably with Robert and his family, he also spent much of his time in North East, Pa., where Ernest was living with his first wife. The summer vacations of 1906 and 1907 were spent in Ontario at the summer home of the Fosters, the family of Robert's wife, Charlotte. One person who was present as a child during these visits by Duncan was Marjorie Slemin, who many years later recalled how much the children were impressed by Norman's generosity.<sup>45</sup> While he did not return to Newfoundland during this period, he spent some time with Jabez Manuel, Joe's father, in Toronto in the summer of 1908.<sup>46</sup>

While he was in Lawrence, Duncan took as a ward a young boy named Marcellus Gray. While very little is known of this boy, he seems to have been sent by Duncan to the Hill School in Pottstown, Pa., for his education. Duncan was obviously very fond of him; Marjorie Slemin recollected that when the boy accompanied Duncan on one of the trips to Muskoka, the other children were jealous "of all the attention given [by

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<sup>45</sup>See Thomas Moore, 74.

<sup>46</sup>Postcard from Jabez Manuel to Mrs. Archibald Manuel, dated Toronto 3 June 1908, mentions meeting with Duncan. TMC.

Duncan] to young Marcellus Gray."<sup>47</sup> Later, Duncan was to dedicate Going Down from Jerusalem (1909) to Gray.

Although he was to visit the town from time to time until Robert left for Pittsburgh in 1910, Duncan himself had left Lawrence, Kansas, by 1909. During the next five years, he was constantly on the move, spending periods of time with friends or relatives in North East, Pittsburgh, New York City, Florida, Maine, Brantford, and Willoughby, Ohio. In addition, there were his travels undertaken in connection with his writing: to the lumberwoods of northern Minnesota, to Australia, and at least one more visit to Newfoundland. This constant changing of location is indicative of a restlessness which seems to have pervaded Duncan's life at this stage. With no wife and family of his own, he seems to have had no desire to settle in any one location.

After Robert Duncan moved to Pittsburgh in 1910, Norman frequently visited him. Robert by this time had achieved a national reputation as a chemist, having published widely in the field and having been invited to become director of the new Mellon Institute for Chemical Research established in Pittsburgh. Possibly as a result of his brother's influence, and no doubt partly because of his own reputation as a writer, Norman Duncan was the recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 1912. It was the 125th anniversary of the university and several honorary

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<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Moore, 73.

degrees were awarded to "Representatives of Various Institutions and Individuals who have rendered Distinguished Services to the Cause of Learning and to Humanity."<sup>48</sup> Significantly, both Norman and Robert were honored on that day. It must have been a proud day for Norman to be accorded such an honor in the company of the older brother he so greatly admired. The full text of the oration for Norman Duncan reads as follows:

DR. HOLLAND: Mr. Chancellor, permit me to present for the degree of Doctor of Letters, Norman McLean Duncan, Professor of Rhetoric in Washington and Jefferson College, well known everywhere as a journalist and an author who breathes the air of the salt seas, though strangely enough he is now making his home in Kansas, which as we all know some time ago went dry. Though as a palaeontologist I can inform you that we are able to resurrect a great many marine fossils in Kansas. There is no reference to Dr. Duncan in that. He is a live man.<sup>49</sup>

During this period, Duncan continued to make occasional visits to New York to see his publishers. According to records of the Manuel family, Duncan maintained an apartment in the city for at least part of this period.<sup>50</sup> Jabez Manuel came to the United States early in 1911 and spent some time in New York with Duncan at his apartment. Accompanied by his son Joe, Jabez was on his way to Florida to find relief from

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<sup>48</sup>University of Pittsburgh, "Exercises in Commemoration of the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," February 1912, n.pag.

<sup>49</sup>"Exercises in Commemoration," 56.

<sup>50</sup>Much of the information in this paragraph comes from the diary of Jabez Manuel, taped by Thomas Moore, TMC.

a persistent respiratory ailment. On their arrival in the city, the two were met by Duncan, whose intention was to travel south with them. But for some reason Duncan did not travel with them on the appointed day; the Manuels waited for him in vain for two days before leaving on their own with Duncan's assurances that he would follow. That was on January 19, but Duncan did not turn up in Florida until the middle of February. His stay was short-lived, and on February 16, only three days after his arrival, he ended his visit and returned to New York. Jabez Manuel gave no explanation for Duncan's erratic behavior, but the pattern suggests that Duncan may have been going through a severe bout of alcoholism. This is supported by Joe Manuel's recollections of the events many years later:

Joe recalls that Duncan had been drinking heavily during these weeks, which perhaps explains his erratic behavior. When Joe arrived in New York he discovered that the vessel which was to take him to Newfoundland had been lost at sea, and another delay was occasioned. Duncan suggested that Joe accompany him to Maine, where Duncan had a cabin at a fishing resort. They went to Maine where Duncan spent the days recuperating from his drinking, after which time Joe proceeded to Newfoundland.<sup>51</sup>

This retreat in the woods of northern Maine is mentioned in other places as well. Susan Duncan, the writer's niece, notes that her father Ernest and his wife spent time there with Norman, as did S. Edgar Briggs.

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<sup>51</sup>Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan," 89.

During his periods of residence in Pennsylvania and Kansas, Duncan's work centered on his writing. His affiliation with both Washington and Jefferson College and the University of Kansas was minimal and his academic commitment was not significant. He seems to have devoted himself entirely to his writing. It was this devotion, along with his desire to find new material, that led him back to travel.

## CHAPTER 7

## MORE TRAVELS

## 1

Between 1907 and 1913, Duncan undertook three trips that were to provide him with material for numerous articles and four books. The first of these undertakings, a trip to the Middle East, occurred during the winter of 1907-8 while he was still residing in Kansas. He probably had several reasons for taking this journey. He must have been starting to weary somewhat of his continuous use of Newfoundland subject matter, and the possible discovery of new material drawn from a totally different part of the world must have had a great attraction. Furthermore, he had no strong ties with the university and very little personal life outside his family and a few close friends. The apparent deterioration of his health, combined with his increasing dependence on alcohol, may have sharpened his desire to get away from his normal haunts and undertake a completely new experience. His interest in the Middle East was no doubt partly rooted in his earlier investigations into the Syrians of New York; but it is possible that the appeal of the Holy Lands was to some extent related to an increasing loss of self-worth that



seemed to be afflicting Duncan around this time. This can be seen in a letter he wrote to Joe Manuel from Cairo, in which he stated, "I am growing more lonely and melancholy all the time -- not worth liking, any more."<sup>1</sup> The trip, probably financed by Harper's, began in November, 1907, and essentially comprised a journey from Damascus to Jerusalem followed by a trip of two weeks' duration along the old caravan route from Jerusalem to Cairo. This latter segment provided Duncan with most of the material for several articles written for Harper's and later the book, Going Down from Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Duncan set out from Jerusalem on horseback early in January as part of a caravan that comprised "men and boys to the number of twenty, and horses, mules, donkeys, and camels to the number of twenty-four."<sup>3</sup> In spite of the many hardships that the group would encounter, Duncan wrote Joe Manuel that "We did it in style, with three good tents and quite an outfit."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Joe Manuel, 12 January [1908], NDC.

<sup>2</sup>The articles, all published in Harper's, are as follows: "Riding Down to Egypt," 117 (July 1908): 165-74; "In Camp at Bir El-Abd," 117 (October 1908): 651-61; "The Camel Trader from Ain El Kaum," 117 (November 1908): 918-28; "One Day's Adventures," 118 (December 1908): 133-44; "The Diwan of Ahmed Ased-Ullah," 118 (January 1909): 198-209; "A Sheikh of et-Tih," 118 (February 1909): 449-58; "Breaking Camp at Kantara," 118 (March 1909): 516-29; "Beyond Beersheba," 118 (April 1909): 782-94. The book, Going Down from Jerusalem was published by Harper & Brothers in 1909.

<sup>3</sup>Going Down From Jerusalem, 52.

<sup>4</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Joe Manuel, 12 January [1908], NDC.

The entourage included an interpreter, a group of muleteers, a guard, several camel drivers, and a cook. The only "westerners" on the trip were Duncan and his companion, a young Canadian artist. The journey followed a route south of Jerusalem to Hebron and Beersheba, on to El Arish on the shores of the Mediterranean, and thence across the desert to Kantara on the Suez Canal. The final stage of the journey, from Kantara to Cairo, was undertaken by train.

The young artist who accompanied Duncan on this trip was Lawren Harris, who in time was to achieve a fame far greater than Duncan's own. Just embarking on what would be a remarkable career, Harris had been asked by Duncan to provide the illustrations for his articles. Duncan may have known Harris in Brantford, where Harris had also been born and raised. This invitation would certainly have presented an exciting prospect to the aspiring artist. "Few art students would have had such a professional opportunity offered to them so early in their careers and Harris welcomed the chance," a critic has noted.<sup>5</sup> Not only did he share the excitement of an exotic adventure, but his subsequent illustrations in Harper's reached a very wide audience, giving a significant boost to his career.

Harris had his own share of adventures along the trail. As Duncan wrote to Joe Manuel:

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<sup>5</sup>Jeremy Adamson, Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes 1906-1930 (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1978) 23.

[One] time we were in danger was when Harris, the artist, who had fallen behind our caravan with a soldier and the head camel-driver and one of the dragomen, got into a fight with about twenty Bedouin Arabs. It was touch-and-go for a while, but it ended all right. More than that, they got one of the Arabs and hauled him along to the Suez Canal, where there is a village. He was put in jail. No shots were fired in the scrap; but there came mighty near being a dead Arab.<sup>6</sup>

Harris provided the illustrations for the eight articles that resulted from the trip, several of which were also used in the later book. This early work was not at all typical of Harris's mature style; indeed, the artist was to say of them later in his life that they were the "world's worst."<sup>7</sup> However, a recent assessment of Harris's life and works contains a different evaluation of these drawings:

in the limited context of his student work, they are attractively designed compositions. From those reproduced in full page colour, it is evident that they were all small oil sketches and therefore are his earliest datable paintings. . . . The colours used are generally warm and pale and are contrasted with light blue tones.<sup>8</sup>

The first of the eight articles that Duncan wrote as a result of his trip to the Middle East began to appear in Harper's in July, 1908, with subsequent episodes appearing almost monthly through April of the following year. In October, 1909, Harper & Brothers released Going Down from

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<sup>6</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Joe Manuel, 12 January [1908], NDC.

<sup>7</sup>Lawren Harris, letter to Sydney Key, 3 June [1948], Art Gallery of Ontario; copy, EMP.

<sup>8</sup>Adamson, 23.

Jerusalem, a book that was essentially a reworking, with some pieces of new material, of the original periodical articles. Many of its reviewers drew attention to the creation of atmosphere and the delineation of character in the book.

For example, one noted that

in his rendering of the talk over the camp-fire, the parables and tricks and ways of looking at life of the men he encountered and employed, he has caught the spirit of the East far better than many more pretentious writers.<sup>9</sup>

Another reviewer commented that Duncan recorded not only external nature but human nature in a book "that has all the charm of a first visit paid by an observant, highly impressionable traveler."<sup>10</sup> Again, the book was hailed as "the narrative of a traveler who can see and feel and appreciate the spirit of the land in which he travels and the spirit of the people who live there."<sup>11</sup>

Going Down from Jerusalem is a sensitive piece of travel literature. One of its most successful attributes lies in the extent to which Duncan allows the reader to be drawn into the scenes and the incidents being related. For example, Duncan recalls with vivid detail the scene as the caravan moves away from Jerusalem:

I remember the rosy morning air, the sunlight, the blue distances and greening fields of our departure

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<sup>9</sup>Outlook 93 (13 November 1909): 600-1.

<sup>10</sup>Independent 67 (4 November 1909): 1044.

<sup>11</sup>Express [sic 'falo'] 31 October 1909, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

from Jerusalem -- the olive-trees and stony barrens, the blithe patter of hoofs, the bells of the baggage mules, and dust of our small company on the white road beyond, the dwindling towers and walls of the sacred hills (2-3).

At the first stop, Hebron, the reader is presented with "a city of gentle situation, lying in a sunlit valley," but a place which is "an abiding menace to all travellers not of Islam" (4). After leaving Beersheba which, Duncan takes delight in reminding the reader, is "the very frontier of the hardest tourist wanderings" (22), the caravan crosses the border into Egypt and enters the forbidding desert. Duncan recaptures his initial impressions of the desert, and is reminded of his first sight of the ocean:

It seemed (I recall) that at some other time, having come to the crest of a little hill, I had stood unexpectedly confronting an infinite distance of hot sand; and then I remembered -- the impression of that other moment vividly returning -- that I had never looked upon a desert before, but had once first seen the sea (42).

On the way across the desert, the caravan was temporarily lost in a sandstorm. Duncan's description of this event once again echoes his earlier encounters with the sea:

The noise of the gale -- a swish and shrieking, as at sea -- was a confusing commotion, and the flying sand choked and stung and blinded us. There was nothing to be seen in the fog of dust but the nearer hills -- smoking like crested seas in a hurricane -- which the wind was shaping anew (148-9).

Newfoundland never seems to have been far from Duncan's thoughts.<sup>12</sup>

But Going Down from Jerusalem is much more than a descriptive travelogue. As he did with his earlier work on Newfoundland, Duncan places emphasis on the people he encountered. The reader meets a fascinating collection of interesting characters: Mustafa the camel driver, who entertains the group with his endless repertoire of stories; Rachid, the romantic poet, who yearns to see the lights of Cairo but, having seen them, determines to return home; and Aboosh, the guide and interpreter, who is also the source of many stories. Then there are the many people who are met along the journey, each with his own interesting story to tell. Indeed, about half of the book is devoted to the stories that are told along the route to occupy the time of the travellers. With a lively style, Duncan succeeds in capturing for the reader his own excitement as a visitor to this strange land.

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Much of Duncan's writing between 1909 and 1911 was the product of his trip to the Middle East. In addition, there were seven magazine stories and a lengthy essay that were

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<sup>12</sup>In his letter to Joe Manuel, Duncan made the comment that "The sand was as thick as a fog in Newfoundland -- and a thick fog, too!"

the consequence of two visits to Minnesota in 1909. According to one account, the first of these trips took place in a two-week period in January and February of that year.<sup>13</sup> Accompanied once again by Lawren Harris, Duncan visited the lumber camps of northern Minnesota, where he gained an insight into a way of life that was totally different from anything he had hitherto experienced. The following description suggests what Duncan and Harris might have encountered in this remote area:

The place he [Harris] visited was one of the most primitive of its kind on the continent. He saw life as it is lived in the raw with women, bar-rooms and shanties. The lumberjacks were put to sleep with a shot of dope in their whisky and piled like cordwood in the shed after their pay had been extracted from their pockets.<sup>14</sup>

Duncan returned to Minnesota for a second visit in the company of the man who was to provide the inspiration for his stories of the lumber camps, Francis Higgins. These two visits, made at the key points in the seasonal operation of the lumber industry, gave Duncan a complete view of the life and work of these northern laborers.

The man whose acquaintance Duncan made on this second visit was Rev. Francis E. Higgins, an itinerant minister for the Presbyterian Church who conducted religious services in

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<sup>13</sup>Adamson, 23.

<sup>14</sup>p.B. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement (1926; Toronto: Macmillan, 1974) 35.

the logging camps of northern Minnesota.<sup>15</sup> Born in Toronto of Irish-Canadian parentage, Higgins was widely known in his day as a dedicated missionary who devoted his entire working life to bringing the Christian gospel to the lumberjacks. A man of powerful physique who was himself a competent woodsman, Higgins exemplified a "muscular Christianity," at times maintaining discipline at his meetings "by forcibly ejecting unruly lumberjacks."<sup>16</sup> By 1909, the year that Duncan visited Minnesota, Higgins's reputation had been well established in the logging camps and the missionary had already been the subject of a biography by Thomas Whittles, whose book provided Duncan with much of the material on which he based his own writing on the subject.

How Duncan heard of Higgins is uncertain. As a member of the Presbyterian church, he may have heard of him through readings of accounts of church missions; he may have read the biography by Whittles; or the assignment to go to Minnesota may have come directly from Harper's. But there is no doubt about the appeal that Higgins had for Duncan, an attraction quite similar to the one presented earlier by Grenfell. Indeed, the similarities are numerous: both men were strong

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<sup>15</sup>The best sources of information on Higgins, other than Duncan's articles, are as follows: Thomas D. Whittles, The Lumberjacks' Sky Pilot (Chicago: Winona, 1908); Whittles, The Parish of the Pines (New York: Revell, 1912); and Harold T. Hagg, "The Lumberjacks' Sky Pilot," Minnesota History 31 (June 1950): 65-78.

<sup>16</sup>Hagg, 73.



in physique, both were dedicated to their work, and both worked in hinterland regions to improve the lives of forgotten people. Grenfell himself was to comment later on Duncan's interest in Higgins:

Many a good, kind action this man [Duncan] did for those who will never know how much they owe him. His visit to the lumber woods, and his generous tribute to the beautiful work of Mr. Higgins was undoubtedly of very great value to that excellent effort.<sup>17</sup>

Duncan was quite aware of the parallel as well. After the publication of his book on Higgins, he wrote to his friend, Wilfred Campbell, as follows:

"Higgins is a man like Grenfell, whose work in the Minnesota woods I am seeking to establish, with fair success. He is a Canadian, too -- a wonderful fellow; a 'Sky Pilot' man, with heart and muscles."<sup>18</sup>

The first product of Duncan's sojourn with Frank Higgins was a lengthy article that appeared in Harper's in July, 1909.<sup>19</sup> This article was essentially a documentary of firsthand observations by Duncan himself, combined with several anecdotes that had obviously been gleaned directly or indirectly from Whittles. Most of these anecdotes centred on the missionary's attempts to curb the drinking habits of the lumbermen, to

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<sup>17</sup>"Dr. Grenfell's Appreciation of Norman Duncan," Among the Deep Sea Fishers 14 (January 1917): 152.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Carl F. Klinck, Wilfred Campbell (Toronto: Ryerson, 1942) 102. A search of Campbell's correspondence at the Queens University Library has failed to uncover the original letter.

<sup>19</sup>Norman Duncan, "Higgins: A Man's Christian," Harper's 119 (July 1909): 165-179.

encourage them to keep in touch with their families, and to help them overcome the temptation to spend all their money at the local taverns. When the article was expanded into book form later in the year, Duncan noted in his preface the extent of his reliance on Whittles, who was "good enough to permit the writer to draw whatever information might seem necessary from . . . The Lumberjacks' Sky Pilot."<sup>20</sup> The combination of personal observation and anecdote gives the reader a comprehensive picture of the personality and work of the missionary.

The reactions of the numerous reviewers of Higgins: A Man's Christian (1909) attest to its popularity. However, most of the reviews said more of Higgins than they did of Duncan, calling Higgins "a stirring pioneer of Christ" and "one of the most remarkable personalities of today or any other day."<sup>21</sup> As was the case with Duncan's work on Grenfell, the book resulted in at least as much publicity for its subject as for its author. A few critics, however, commented on the literary quality of the book, though opinion was divided on its aesthetic value. On the one hand, Duncan was enthusiastically hailed as the only author "fitted" to tell of the life of such a man of God, while on the other he was

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<sup>20</sup>Norman Duncan, Higgins: A Man's Christian (New York: Harper, 1909) v-vi.

<sup>21</sup>See Union-Advertiser [Rochester] 20 November 1909, and Observer [New York] 2 December 1909, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

criticized for his tendency to overstate his case with "rather indiscriminate laudation."<sup>22</sup> But as with Dr Grenfell's Parish, Duncan was either unwilling or unable to restrain his enthusiasm for the works of his heroes. It was just not in his nature to take a detached view of such men.

There may have been an additional reason for the lack of restraint displayed by Duncan in his description of Higgins. Much of the book concerned itself with the drinking habits of the lumberjacks and the harmful effects that such drinking had on their lives. Many of Higgins's efforts were spent in counteracting the destructive consequences of alcohol. While Duncan's treatment of this subject was obviously part of his depiction of the reality of life in the camps, one cannot help but sense a note of urgency, springing perhaps from his realization of his own increasingly hopeless situation as a habitual drinker. Alcoholism was as yet not understood as a disease; it was still viewed as a problem caused by lack of restraint, and solutions were seen in moral and religious terms. Duncan may have felt the need of a savior such as Higgins in his own life, and his glowing tribute to the man was possibly an expression of this personal reality.

Duncan's interest in Higgins did not end with the publication of Higgins : A Man's Christian. Over the next

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<sup>22</sup>For these two views see the Union-Advertiser 20 November 1909, and the Sun [New York] 11 December 1909, Scrapbook of reviews, NDC.

two years he worked on a novel, The Measure of a Man, which allowed him a more expansive and symbolic treatment of the earlier documentary material. The protagonist of this novel, John Fairmeadow, was as thinly disguised a portrait of Higgins as Doctor Luke had been of Grenfell. Indeed, perhaps recalling the bad feelings that had been generated by that earlier episode, Duncan included at the beginning of The Measure of a Man a disclaimer stating categorically that the reader should not confuse the hero of this novel with Francis Higgins.<sup>23</sup> The parallel, however, was doubtless intended, as many of the incidents that were used in the documentary essay as well as several episodes from Whittles's true account found their way into the novel.

Duncan's note to the reader at the beginning of the book is of special interest for what it may project of the state of mind of the author at the time of writing. We can perhaps hear in his words echoes of his own personal struggle with alcohol:

It is known that the way back is hard trudging and a long path. . . . Love is much on these harsh trails, they say; but love is no sure guide and helper. It is maintained that such as have been helped return neither with reasonable tales of their black wanderings nor reasonable descriptions of the way (7).

Duncan seems to have been aware that love alone, which he had through the support of his family, was an insufficient

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<sup>23</sup>"To the Reader," The Measure of a Man (New York: Revell, 1911) 8. See above, 127.

antidote for the enormity of his problem. He was also aware of the stories of "black wanderings" and the failure of standard solutions. The note in the text hints that he was probably exploring other sources of help, sources "incoherent and obscure" provided by a "mystical Hand" (7). But the picture that we get of Duncan as he wrote this preface is of a man who was yearning for the solution that others had found, was prepared to acknowledge the reality of this spiritual comfort, but saw it as beyond his own reach. The novel must have provided for Duncan a form of cathartic relief as he experienced vicariously the release that real life did not afford him.

The Measure of a Man received praise from the New York Times:

All of Mr. Duncan's work is sincere, but his latest seems to make a better appeal to cultivated taste in literature. . . . His artistry seems sounder and has that poise which pleases the critic.<sup>24</sup>

According to the Outlook, the book presented "an interesting and intensely human, dramatic story. . . . There is abundance of humor, and there are characters that live."<sup>25</sup> It was the human element of the novel that provided its greatest appeal. Not concerned to any great extent with either the Minnesota countryside or the lumbering industry itself, the book concentrated on the "floundering and groveling humanity of

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<sup>24</sup>New York Times 3 December 1911: 794.

<sup>25</sup>Outlook 99 (7 October 1911): 341.

the region"<sup>26</sup> and emphasized the potential for redemption from a life of sin. Several of its reviewers were quick to single out the characterization of John Fairmeadow as the major accomplishment of the novel: "Mr. Duncan makes him seem a very real man," noted the Times, while another prominent publication called the character "the product of a vigorous but sentimental pen."<sup>27</sup> This latter review, while praising the kind of work done by men like Fairmeadow, who "gains his end by service," was highly critical of Duncan's method:

And in general, Mr. Duncan's way of staging and conducting his action is as far as possible from that of the man who takes a bit of real life and projects it on the printed page.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most balanced view was provided by Margaret Sherwood, writing for the Atlantic Monthly:

[It is] a book which makes a special plea in behalf of the inner life. . . . It is a rough and ready tale of one valiant man, fighting single-handed the battle of the spirit among men who have sunk below the level of the brute. It is perhaps over-didactic, and it lacks the depth and the tragic sense of ironic values that some of the author's short stories possess . . . but it is wholesome, and full of masculine energy.<sup>29</sup>

The Measure of a Man is Duncan's most didactic work.

The reader cannot avoid being conscious of the strong appeal for temperance that underlines the narrative. The rough men

<sup>26</sup>New York Times 24 September 1911: 571.

<sup>27</sup>Nation 93 (17 August 1911): 144.

<sup>28</sup>Nation 93 (17 August 1911): 144.

<sup>29</sup>Atlantic Monthly 109 (May 1912): 676.

of the lumbering town of Swamp's End have abandoned themselves to drink and debauchery, to such an extent that their only salvation, according to Duncan, lies in the Christian message of the visiting missionary, John Fairmeadow. The missionary's persistence and determination eventually bear fruit; goodness and decency prevail. And amid the rowdiness and turmoil of this environment, a love story develops, and, once again, love is victorious.

The Measure of a Man is far more dependent on previously published stories than either Doctor Luke of the Labrador or The Cruise of the Shining Light.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the novel is even more episodic in design. But it is not merely the piecing together of the earlier stories. The construction of the plot shows evidence of considerable rearranging and reworking of the material. There is no long preamble to the main story such as occurs in Doctor Luke of the Labrador. Instead, the novel opens with three events that at first glance seem unrelated, but which are woven together to form

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<sup>30</sup>For the composition of The Measure of a Man, Duncan drew on seven stories of the Minnesota lumberwoods previously published in magazines, as follows: "With That Measure of Love," Harper's 121 (September 1910): 579-89; "The Judgment of John Fairmeadow," Harper's 121 (October 1910): 717-25; "John Fairmeadow's Foundling," Harper's 122 (January 1911): 298-308; "A Stitch in Time," Harper's 122 (February 1911): 463-70; "The Ordination of John Fairmeadow," Outlook 97 (25 March 1911): 649-59; "A Father for the Baby," Harper's 122 (May 1911): 933-42; "The Miracle at Pale Peter's," Harper's 123 (July 1911): 239-47.

the main fabric of the book: a dog fight, the death of the father of the heroine, and the arrival in town of a stranger looking for a parish in which to preach the Christian gospel. The dog fight symbolizes the rough-and-ready world of the lumberjacks where violence and drunkenness abound; the heroine, Pattie Batch, represents the gentler attributes of love and sensitivity that ultimately triumph in Swamp's End; and the stranger, John Fairmeadow, is the catalyst that makes this victory possible. A comparison of the text of the novel with that of the original stories shows a deliberate attempt on the part of Duncan to rework the material in order to achieve a more integrated design. For example, the story "A Stitch in Time," which forms the nucleus of the first six chapters of the novel, is considerably altered in order to maintain a balance among the three threads of narrative chosen to set the plot in motion.

As was the case with Doctor Luke of the earlier novel, Duncan introduces a feature of characterization not present in the living model. John Fairmeadow also has a sordid past, though this time the details are revealed to the reader through an appeal that Fairmeadow presents to his church superiors. The story of his earlier life as a destitute alcoholic on the streets of the Bowery is drawn from a feature article written by Duncan entitled "The Regenerate," of which its author says: "It comes as near to accurate



reporting as I can attain."<sup>31</sup> Again we see Duncan drawing from firsthand experience, in this case an account that must have had special significance for him as a man with a drinking problem of his own, in order to "flesh out" the world of his fictional characters. Duncan was never far away from actual experience when he wrote.

## 3

By 1912 Duncan seems to have had no affiliation with any academic institution and was apparently making his living solely on the proceeds of his writing. His next journey, the most ambitious undertaking of all, culminated in a stay of several weeks in Australia. The result of this venture was the publication in Harper's of 12 articles as well as another book, Australian Byways (1915).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>"The Regenerate," Century 81 (January 1911): 439.

<sup>32</sup>The articles, all published in Harper's, were as follows: "All the Way to Fremantle," 127 (October 1913): 651-64; "Australian Bypaths: Neighbors of the Golden Mile," 127 (November 1913): 849-61; "Australian Bypaths: The Heart of the Jarrah Bush," 128 (December 1913): 123-36; "Australian Bypaths: A Day or Two in the Dry-Lands," 128 (January 1914): 209-22; "A Trooper of the Outlands," 128 (February 1914): 421-33; "A Night in the Open," 128 (March 1914): 591-603; "Booked Through," 129 (September 1914): 508-21; "Forty Mile Inn," 129 (November 1914): 899-912; "Cannibal Country," 130 (January 1915): 279-91; "Shipmates of the Coral Sea," 130 (February 1915): 425-37; "Thursday's Island," 130 (April 1915): 748-61; "Sorcerer's Work," 130 (May 1915): 922-34. The book, Australian Byways, was published in 1915 by Harper & Brothers, New York.

The trip to Australia can be reconstructed not only from the accounts provided in the articles and the subsequent book, but also from numerous post cards and letters that Duncan sent back home to family members.<sup>33</sup> It appears that he left the United States in the fall of 1912, accompanied by the illustrator George Harding. Before sailing for Australia from Marseilles, Duncan and Harding visited several points in Europe and North Africa, including Grenada, Tangier and Madeira.<sup>34</sup> By January 4, 1913, they were well on their way to Australia, sailing on the S.S. Nuria. Duncan had obviously overcome his earlier aversion to sea travel and seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the voyage: "It has been the most splendid sort of voyage," he wrote home to Ernest, "cool, mild winds and all sorts of fun going [on] aboard." He was obviously looking forward with enthusiasm to the visit to Australia, hoping "to get a ripping good book out of it."<sup>35</sup> As is the case in all of his letters to his family, he made a special point of inquiring about young Bobbie, Ernest's son, to whom he had become attached.

On January 13, the ship reached the port of Fremantle, whence Duncan and Harding departed almost immediately for

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<sup>33</sup>These cards and letters are in the Norman Duncan Collection.

<sup>34</sup>It is possible that a visit to London was included; Duncan spent time in London at some point, as his possessions include a few souvenirs of that city.

<sup>35</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Ernest Duncan, 4 January [1913], NDC.

their first destination, the Jarrah Bush. From the outset, the writer showed no interest in the cities of the southern continent; his attention was drawn, as it had been in North America, to the out-of-the-way places with their unheralded peoples. "I'm having a real good time and am feeling perfectly fit," he assured Ernest, adding that "Before I am through I shall have quite an unusual series [of articles]."<sup>36</sup> Each letter echoed the same excitement. Following visits to the Jarrah Bush and to the goldmining towns of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie during which Duncan and his companion travelled by train, horse, and even camel, they returned to Fremantle, sailed to Adelaide and proceeded from there to Tasmania, Brisbane, and Sydney. Thence they travelled by coach north along the Queensland coast as far as the Great Barrier Reef, and then on by boat to New Guinea, Thursday Island and eventually Singapore. The proposed date of return to the United States was early July, 1913, after an absence of seven or eight months.

The most significant work to result from these extensive travels was the book, Australian Byways, essentially a reworking of the 12 magazine articles. Once again Duncan proved himself to be an observant and sensitive traveller. Not only did his accounts abound in specific descriptions of places; the book also contained numerous anecdotes about

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<sup>36</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Ernest Duncan, 20 January 1913, NDC.

life in the backwoods and outposts of the Australian continent. Duncan was primarily interested in the people. He related in the book very little about events involving himself other than the usual travel narrative. Rather, his writing concentrated on the people that he both met and heard about: the "old codger" in the Jarrah bush who objected strongly to government meddling in local affairs; the Scottish schoolmaster who had difficulty accepting that he was not immediately recognized by these visitors; the appealing romantic who, yearning for the visitor who never came, created his own; and the patient prospector who at the age of 81 was still looking for signs of yellow in his pans of dust. All of these portraits were presented not only with detail but with sensitivity. At every point in the journey, Duncan took note of the people, from the fellow passengers on the ship to the workers, prospectors, and natives. Mingled with these portrayals were numerous anecdotes that Duncan had heard, including stories of the murdering of aborigines, the practices of cannibalism and sorcery in Papua, and encounters with crocodiles and sharks on Thursday Island. The book, then, gave the reader a blend of detailed observation of real life and exotic adventure. It was praised as "a good book for the busy man to have on hand when he needs a five minutes' pause for diversion or amusement"; it was recommended because it took its readers "to the remote and out-of-the-way places accessible only by the slower, more primitive modes of conveyance"; and Duncan was

praised for allowing his reader to "see people and things, in his vein of vivid sentiment."<sup>37</sup>

Even though Duncan's main literary endeavors between 1908 and 1915 centered on his travels, he published five additional books in that period. Three of them -- The Suitable Child (1909), Finding His Soul (1913), and The Bird-Store Man (1914) -- are somewhat insignificant works. The first, The Suitable Child, is a rather sentimental Christmas story of an orphan who touches the heart of a grieving mother. Finding his Soul is a slightly more substantial story. Again strongly sentimental in tone, it tells a familiar story of a man who having lost someone dear to him, seriously questions his faith in God, only to have it restored by a visit to the Holy Land. Originally published as a magazine article entitled "A God in Israel,"<sup>38</sup> the story appears to have been motivated by Duncan's recent journey to the Middle East, though the sojourn in the Holy Land occupies only a few pages of the book. Again, little can be said of The Bird-Store Man, a whimsical tale of Mr. Twitter, the proprietor of a bird and animal store who delights in talking to his canaries, and who operates an Academy for the education of dogs.

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<sup>37</sup>See Nation 101 (2 December 1915): 664; Dial 59 (25 November 1915): 501; and Bookman [New York] 42 (December 1915): 434.

<sup>38</sup>"A God in Israel," Harper's 126 (January 1913): 165-75.

For his other two books of this period, Billy Topsail and Company (1910) and The Best of a Bad Job, Duncan returned to his Newfoundland subject matter. As had been the case with the earlier book The Adventures of Billy Topsail, in Billy Topsail and Company Duncan drew heavily on stories that he had already published in Youth's Companion. But this time there was a significant difference. Two of the stories he selected had nothing whatsoever to do with Newfoundland, but were set at a remote fort located in the wilderness three hundred miles north of Lake Superior.<sup>39</sup> The stories were forced somewhat artificially into the narrative of Billy Topsail and his friend Archie Armstrong. Here once again we see Duncan squeezing as much use as possible from his Newfoundland stories and bringing in other material that had no connection with the main subject. The other book, The Best of a Bad Job, is a moralistic tale of Tom Tulk, who learned to make the best of a grim existence by drawing on his inner resources. Blinded as a result of being lost on the ice, Tulk adopts as his motto, "Make the best of a bad job." His story is one of inner strength and endurance. But neither Billy Topsail and Company nor The Best of a Bad Job is a significant book. Duncan's main concentration during this period was on his travel literature, and one can only

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<sup>39</sup>The two stories are: "A Point of Honor," Youth's Companion 77 (22 October 1903): 489-90, and "A Bearer of Tidings," Youth's Companion 79 (13 July 1905): 333-4.

surmise that these other books were written primarily to ensure a steady income.

## CHAPTER 8

## THE FINAL YEARS

## 1

On February 18, 1914, Norman Duncan's brother Robert died. It seems that he had been ill for some time, though the nature of his illness cannot be determined. At least one source suggests that Norman spent much of his time at his brother's bedside during his illness, just as he had done in the case of his mother ten years earlier. Robert's body was taken to Brantford for burial in the family plot. As one family member was to observe, this was a trying time for Norman:

Among my vivid memories as a boy was the day in 1914 when they brought our beloved Uncle Bob Duncan [to Brantford] from Pittsburgh for burial. . . . It was a very sad occasion for all of his young friends and Norman Duncan's tenderness reached out and gathered us in a circle and in his inimitable way he recounted to us wild tales of sea adventures. . . . Certainly Norman's heart must almost have been breaking for I'm sure no brothers were ever closer.<sup>1</sup>

The death of his brother was not the only emotional blow Duncan received during this period. Perhaps far more devastating was his entanglement in an unfortunate business relationship

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<sup>1</sup>R. Kenneth Ruddy, Commemorative Address, Brantford, Ont., 1 July 1979, NDC.



with American playwright and producer, David Belasco. The whole affair had begun in April, 1911, when Duncan received a letter from Beatrice De Mille, the president of the De Mille Company of New York, an agency for writers:

A very great piece of luck has most unexpectedly happened. I sent to David Belasco my book of your "THE MOTHER," asking him to read it with the idea of making a play from it for a star that he has to exploit this autumn.<sup>2</sup>

De Mille's letter contained the wording of a telegram that she had received from Belasco in response to her request:

"See many possibilities in The Mother. Think with splendid work we can get a bully play out of it. I have some big ideas and schemes for it already. Must have a dramatist who will get enthusiastic and get right on the job until we get the kind of play necessary."

Noting how encouraging these comments were, De Mille proceeded to make Duncan an offer to have a play written based on the novel, emphasizing the urgency of the matter.

A little over a week later, Duncan, Belasco and De Mille signed a Memorandum of Agreement which indicated that Duncan himself would write a play for Belasco, while De Mille's function would be to provide "assistance . . . in the writing and construction."<sup>3</sup> Duncan must have begun the work immediately, excited no doubt by the prospect of seeing

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<sup>2</sup>Beatrice De Mille, letter to Norman Duncan, 10 April 1911, NDC. Beatrice De Mille was the widow of H.C. De Mille who had founded the company and had formed a partnership with Belasco in 1887. The General Manager of the company at that time was her son, Cecil B. De Mille, later to become one of Hollywood's most famous movie producers.

<sup>3</sup>Memorandum of Agreement, 19 April 1911, NDC.

his novel dramatized on Broadway. Things progressed well: on May 20, just one month after the signing of the agreement, De Mille acknowledged receipt from Duncan of the first act which, she said, Belasco was delighted with; in the meantime she urged Duncan to "keep your shoulders to the wheel and forge ahead."<sup>4</sup> Work on the play continued and a finished product was presented to Belasco within a few months.

On January 13, 1912, Duncan signed another agreement that was to entangle him and his heirs in a battle that would last for many years. The agreement in question rescinded the original memorandum and read in part:

It is understood and agreed . . . Norman Duncan who is the sole owner of the dramatic rights of the book entitled "The Mother," shall and will, and does hereby assign and transfer and set over unto the said David Belasco, the sole and exclusive rights to dramatize said novel.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, Belasco was dissatisfied with Duncan's efforts to dramatize the play. In a letter written many years later to a family lawyer, Belasco commented that "Mr. Duncan did his best to dramatize the book, but, unfortunately, he did not succeed."<sup>6</sup> Belasco's objections to Duncan's endeavors were explicitly outlined in a detailed critique that he prepared after he had seen the finished product. He felt that the

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<sup>4</sup>Beatrice De Mille, letter to Norman Duncan, 20 May 1911, NDC.

<sup>5</sup>Memorandum of Agreement, 13 January 1912, NDC.

<sup>6</sup>David Belasco, letter to Dennis O'Brien, 14 February 1924, NDC.

play was so different from the novel that the very qualities which had impressed him in the book had disappeared. "The play submitted by Mr. Duncan," he concluded, "is not the play I wanted or expected."<sup>7</sup> Belasco's intention, then, was clear: he wanted to rescind the original agreement and gain for himself the freedom to write the dramatization as he saw fit.

Why Duncan entered into this agreement is not clear. His enthusiasm about having his novel made into a stage play may very well have blinded him to the full significance of what he was signing. He was certainly not fully aware of the implications of this new agreement. The numerous pieces of correspondence on the subject over the next two decades attest to the fact that Duncan had never intended to sign away his right to the dramatized version, but that is precisely what he did. Duncan made repeated attempts to have the contract dissolved, but Belasco would not budge; neither did he produce the play. Family members contend that Duncan, sensitive as he was, was keenly disappointed and even felt betrayed by Belasco. According to biographer Thomas Moore, "his family at that time noticed the ill effects it had on his health."<sup>8</sup> Duncan's sister-in-law, Harriett, often said

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<sup>7</sup>Ms with handwritten title, "Original Criticism of Mr. Belasco," NDC.

<sup>8</sup>Moore, 99.

that the Belasco affair "broke Norman's heart."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, family members noted a marked increase in his drinking in the months that followed this episode.

Following Norman Duncan's death, Ernest made every effort to resolve the matter, which by that time had been further aggravated by the fact that five years after the signing of the agreement Belasco had failed to produce a play. In the meantime, the Duncan family had received several inquiries from other individuals interested in producing the play.<sup>10</sup> In November, 1916, Belasco was still declaring his intention "to ultimately make use of the dramatic rights" and refusing to allow the rights to revert to Duncan's heirs.<sup>11</sup> The dispute with Belasco was never resolved. Belasco himself died in 1931, the play based on The Mother was never produced, and the manuscript prepared

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<sup>9</sup>Susan Duncan, personal interview, 12 May 1985.

<sup>10</sup>See the following correspondence: Blanche Friderici to Ernest Duncan, 12 August 1920, NDC, and Charles Schwartz to Madame Marguerita Sylva, 28 January 1921, NDC. Before his death Norman Duncan had received a letter indicating interest in a movie version of the novel (see Fred Jackson to Norman Duncan, 1 January 1916, NDC.)

<sup>11</sup>David Belasco, letter to Ernest Duncan, 25 November 1916, NDC. Ernest Duncan continued to pursue this matter until his death in 1929. Several items of correspondence attest to his determination, including the following: Ernest Duncan to Mackenzie King, 16 November 1922; Mackenzie King to Ernest Duncan, 22 November 1922; Ernest Duncan to Ida Tarbell, n.d.; Ida Tarbell to Ernest Duncan, 9 December 1924 (all in NDC). After Ernest's death, the struggle was continued by his widow, Harriett Duncan.

by Duncan in collaboration with Beatrice De Mille rests in the Norman Duncan Collection.

While there is no doubt that Belasco was within his legal rights to act as he did, there is definite evidence that he wanted "to have it both ways." There is nothing to suggest that he did much serious work on the script; yet he refused to allow the rights to revert to the family. Whether or not he was, as one friend of the Duncan family was to label him, "an old skin-flint,"<sup>12</sup> he certainly failed to meet his own commitment to produce a play, and ensured at the same time that no one else would be able to do so.<sup>13</sup> As for Duncan himself, the incident demonstrates that he was rather careless about business matters. However, he seems to have learned from the experience, as he was more cautious in his business dealings with his agent Carl Brandt of the firm of Galbraith-Welch. For example, in a letter to Brandt he expressed concern over the possibility of relinquishing his rights to place his stories with magazines of his choice.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Kate Ogleboy, letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan, 13 October 1933, NDC.

<sup>13</sup>Belasco's biographer, William Winter, records that Belasco was the defendant in a number of lawsuits arising from claims of plagiarism and/or copyright, but in every case the plaintiff failed. No reference is made to the Duncan dispute. See William Winter, The Life of David Belasco, 2 vols. (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1918).

<sup>14</sup>See correspondence between Norman Duncan and Carl Brandt, 1 June 1916 and 2 June 1916, NDC.

With the exception of the entanglement with David Belasco, Duncan seems to have met with considerable success on the literary scene in the last two years of his life. After completing his Australian stories in 1915, he returned yet again to what he must have considered his favorite and most successful subject -- Newfoundland. In 1916 he published his third book of Billy Topsail stories, Billy Topsail, M.D., bringing together his now grown boy hero and Doctor Luke, the main character of his first novel. But his main thrust during the last year of his life was a group of new stories for magazines, almost all of which -- 12 of 13 stories -- drew on his experiences in coastal Newfoundland and Labrador. There is also evidence that these stories were very much in demand. For example, having already accepted several stories from Duncan, an editor with the popular Saturday Evening Post wrote him to inquire "if you haven't something else for us in sight."<sup>15</sup> This was followed within a month by another letter urging Duncan to submit a further story: "It has been quite a while since we had a manuscript from you," wrote Churchill Williams of the Post. "Is not another story ready, or about ready which you could show us?" Again in October, just two weeks before Duncan's death, Williams expressed the hope "that we are going to have soon

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<sup>15</sup>K.M. Goode (Saturday Evening Post), letter to Norman Duncan, 19 August 1916, NDC.

a manuscript from you."<sup>16</sup> There is also evidence that Duncan was planning a new novel at the time of his death. On October 11, 1916, he signed a contract with the Bobbs-Merrill Company for the publication of a novel entitled "The White Chase." The wording of the contract suggests that the novel was being planned, and had not yet been written.<sup>17</sup>

Ever since his brief stint as a lecturer at Washington and Jefferson College, Duncan had depended entirely on his writing for a living. While it is hard to ascertain exactly how much money he made in total, we know the amounts that were being paid for certain individual stories. While in 1913 he was receiving \$300 each for at least some of his stories,<sup>18</sup> by 1916 he was receiving \$750 per story from the Saturday Evening Post. Later in the same year the same magazine was offering \$1000.<sup>19</sup> When one considers that in 1916 he wrote and sold over a dozen stories, it is quite possible that his income from this source alone would have been close to \$10,000, a considerable sum. There was now

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<sup>16</sup>Churchill Williams (Saturday Evening Post), letters to Norman Duncan, 21 September 1916 and 4 October 1916, NDC.

<sup>17</sup>Contract between Norman Duncan and Bobbs-Merrill, signed 11 October 1916, NDC. No manuscript for the proposed novel has been found.

<sup>18</sup>For example, Century paid him that amount for each of "Lee Shore off Soap-an'-water" and "The Art of Terry Lute." See Norman Duncan, letter to F.U. Johnson, 22 January [1912], Century Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>19</sup>See the following letters to Duncan from the Saturday Evening Post: 8 February 1916, 25 April 1916, 16 May 1916, 13 June 1916, 4 October 1916. NDC.

also a demand for Duncan's writing from other sources. In May, 1916, he received an expression of interest from the London office of Curtis Brown International Publishing Bureau in the story "The Doctor of Afternoon Arm" as well as in other unnamed stories; in August he received news that one of his recent books, Billy Topsail, M.D., was being published in Canada; and in September the British publisher, Hodder & Stoughton, announced distribution of the same book in England.<sup>20</sup> It seems that Duncan was at a point where he could be selective. For example, in September he denied a request to have one of his stories included in a collection of "platform readings."<sup>21</sup>

What must have been of special interest to Duncan was the intention of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company of Manhattan to make a film based on The Measure of a Man.<sup>22</sup> A movie with the same title was finally released in November, 1916 (not long after Duncan's death), starring Warren Kerrigan as John Fairmeadow and Louise Lovely as Pattie Batch. The film received a rather cool reception: Variety found fault

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<sup>20</sup>See the following correspondence: Curtis Brown International to Norman Duncan, 22 May 1916, NDC; Thomas Allen to Norman Duncan, 4 August 1916, NDC; also Memorandum of Agreement from Hodder & Stoughton, 28 September 1916, Hodder & Stoughton, London, copy, EMP.

<sup>21</sup>Mary Deaderick, letter to Norman Duncan, 29 July 1916, NDC. At the end of the letter, Duncan has written "Permission denied." The letter does not make clear what was meant by "platform readings."

<sup>22</sup>Duncan signed an agreement with this company in April 1916.



with its ending, which "is apparent almost from the beginning," and concluded that the picture was "likely to achieve its strongest successes in the smaller communities."<sup>23</sup> S. Edgar Briggs expressed some displeasure about the publicity for the movie. Possibly because he knew of the complications of the Belasco case, he wrote Ernest Duncan expressing these concerns:

it does appear to me that this organization should give some credit in their publicity material to the owners of the copyright of this book. The fact is in all the advertising material I have seen, the author's name is very carefully concealed.<sup>24</sup>

A second movie based on the same novel was released by Universal Pictures in October, 1924. Directed by Arthur Rossom, it starred William Desmond and Mary McAllister in the leading roles. But it fared no better than its predecessor in Variety, which claimed that it presented "nothing new" and concluded on a negative note: "The picture is just another one of those things that makes a layman wonder."<sup>25</sup>

Several of Duncan's last group of stories attracted the attention of Edward J. O'Brien, a leading contemporary critic of American fiction. O'Brien was in the practice of evaluating current short fiction, and annually published in the Boston Transcript a list of what he considered the best

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<sup>23</sup>Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980, 16 vols. (New York: Garland, 1983) 1: n.pag.

<sup>24</sup>Briggs to Ernest Duncan, 2 February 1917, NDC.

<sup>25</sup>Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980, 2: n.pag.

short stories of the year. These ratings were also published in the Bookman as well as in his own anthologies, which appeared annually, beginning in 1915. In the first of these annual collections, O'Brien listed "A Nice Little Morsel o' Dog Meat" in his "Roll of Honor";<sup>26</sup> the following year he included five of Duncan's stories in his honor list.<sup>27</sup> In the spring of 1916 O'Brien wrote Duncan, asking him to submit what he considered to be his best unpublished story; in return, O'Brien guaranteed it a place in his ratings and promised to see that it was published. He concluded with a personal note: "It is probably unnecessary for me to tell you how real is my feeling for your stories, confirmed as it is perhaps by my own summers on the Labrador."<sup>28</sup> The story that Duncan submitted was "A Little Nipper of Hide-and-Seek Harbor," which O'Brien rated as one of the better stories to appear in 1917, calling it "the last and not the least

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<sup>26</sup>Edward J. O'Brien (ed), The Best Short Stories of 1915 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1916) 280.

<sup>27</sup>Edward J. O'Brien (ed), The Best Short Stories of 1916 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1917) 361. The stories listed were as follows: "The Doctor of Afternoon Arm," Ladies Home Journal 33 (April 1916): 15, 101-5; "The Last Shot in the Locker," Saturday Evening Post 189 (25 March 1916): 6-8, 73-4; "The Last Lucifer," Saturday Evening Post 189 (8 July 1916): 14-16, 42-50; "Two Men of Linger Tickle," Ladies Home Journal 33 (July 1916): 23, 44-5; "White Water," Red Book 27 (August 1916): 761-71.

<sup>28</sup>Edward J. O'Brien, letter to Norman Duncan, 25 April 1916, NDC.

important of the long series of Newfoundland sagas."<sup>29</sup> O'Brien was to mention that story again in a commentary on contemporary fiction in The Best Short Stories of 1918, noting that it "has not been surpassed by Mr. Duncan in his earlier books, and as one who knows the Labrador personally, I can testify to the reality and imaginative truth of Mr. Duncan's epic chronicles."<sup>30</sup>

After the death of Robert in 1914, Norman Duncan set up residence with his brother Ernest, who had settled in Willoughby, Ohio. Ernest and his second wife, Harriett Putnam, had two small children -- Bobbie and Susan -- to whom Norman became very attached. He constantly showered his niece and nephew with gifts, especially after he had been travelling. Harriett Duncan noted that on the occasion of one of Bobbie's birthdays, Norman had sent "five suits of clothes with hats to match, a sweater and stockings."<sup>31</sup> He corresponded regularly with his brother's family when he was travelling, and even sent a letter to little Sue when she was only three years old. The letter shows Duncan's ability to speak to children at their own level, without layers of artificiality or condescension:

This is some mail for Sue. It is a letter. Bobbie got a letter, didn't he? Didn't Daddy bring a letter to Bobbie when he came from Down Town

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<sup>29</sup>Bookman (New York) 46 (February 1918): 699.

<sup>30</sup>Edward J. O'Brien (ed), The Best Short Stories of 1918 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1919) 356.

<sup>31</sup>Harriett Duncan, Diary, 10 February 1915, SDP.

today? Yes, he did. Well, this is not a letter for Bobbie. It is a letter for Sue, all by herself, and all for herself.<sup>32</sup>

Although her uncle died when she was but four years old, Susan Duncan remembers him to this day with warmth and affection. In the meantime, however, Duncan's drinking problem was worsening. On one occasion while Ernest was out of town, Norman locked himself in his room; in desperation, Harriett contacted Ernest who returned home immediately. This episode, recorded by Harriet Duncan in her diary, indicates the seriousness with which Ernest and his wife viewed Norman's physical and emotional condition.

Duncan continued his interest in young boys with the acquisition of a new ward, a 15 year old boy named Arthur Cary. But in the process he also gained a romantic admirer in the person of young Cary's mother, Mrs. Margaret Burnes of Santa Barbara, California. It seems that Margaret had been attracted to Duncan through his novels. She wrote him, a regular correspondence ensued, and she invited the writer to visit her at her beach house in California.<sup>33</sup> Duncan made a distinct impression on Margaret, as her son was later to recall:

We were all very fond of him; he was handsome, debonaire, amusing, and I am afraid my mother fell

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<sup>32</sup>Norman Duncan, letter to Susan Duncan, 19 December 1915 (postmark), NDC.

<sup>33</sup>Harriett Duncan's diary notes that Norman left for California on 18 July 1915 and did not return until 5 September.

in love with him. I am sure he found her attractive, for she was quite beautiful, but that was as far as it went.<sup>34</sup>

Cary went on to record how Duncan invited him to spend summer vacations in New York and Maine. Then, in what Cary interpreted as an effort on Margaret's part to become closer to Duncan, she "agreed to an absurd and entirely unnecessary arrangement under which he was sort of a guardian."<sup>35</sup> Official guardianship papers were drawn up and signed by Margaret Burnes as natural mother and by Dr. E.H. Cary of Dallas as guardian of the estate of Arthur P. Cary. Margaret Burnes made at least one visit to the Duncans in Willoughby, at which time she brought gifts for the whole family. According to Susan Duncan, Margaret "wanted to marry Norman, but he was too busy travelling." In correspondence with Arthur Cary many years later, Susan added another reason -- Norman's alcoholism.<sup>36</sup> At any rate, the romance seems to have remained one-sided, even though Duncan made a return visit to her California home during the summer of 1916.

In March of that same year, Ernest Duncan and his family moved to Fredonia, N.Y., and Norman accompanied them. Fredonia, a university town located in the western part of

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<sup>34</sup>Arthur Cary, letter to Susan Duncan, 8 January 1978, SDP.

<sup>35</sup>Arthur Cary, letter to Susan Duncan, 8 January 1978, SDP.

<sup>36</sup>Susan Duncan, letter to Arthur Cary, 21 January 1978, SDP.

the state of New York near the shores of Lake Erie, was noted for its artists and writers. Next door to the Duncans was "Interstrassen," the home of Jean Webster, grandniece of Mark Twain. Among Harriett Duncan's close friends were prominent local writers and artists, providing an environment that must have been very attractive to Norman. These last few months, spent in close proximity to members of his family, seem to have been reasonably happy ones for the writer.

## 2

On October 18, 1916, at the age of 45, Norman Duncan died suddenly while playing golf with friends just outside Fredonia. He had gone to the golf course that day with Marcellus Gray and another friend named J.C. MacManus. According to Harriett Duncan, "He was taken ill and died about 3 suddenly."<sup>37</sup> The account which appeared in the New York Times on the following day provides more detail, attributing his death to "heart disease":

he had been playing a golf match with several friends. He stopped playing, complaining of severe pains in his throat, which he believed to be due to neuritis from which he had been suffering. He seemed to grow better as he walked toward the clubhouse, but when he reached the steps he suddenly

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<sup>37</sup>Harriett Duncan, Notebook, entry for 18 October 1916, SDP.

collapsed. He was carried inside and attended by two physicians, but died thirty minutes later.<sup>38</sup>

Even though his health had been deteriorating in recent years, his death was totally unexpected. "This was a terrible blow to us all," noted Harriett Duncan. "Uncle had seemed unusually well." Ernest Duncan expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to Mackenzie King:

Norman's death was indeed sudden and unlooked for. He spent the summer in California & returned here about two months ago. Since his return to us we often remarked how well he felt and was hard at work at a new book.<sup>39</sup>

Funeral services were held for Duncan at the Fredonia home of his brother Ernest on October 20, following which the body was taken by train to its resting place in Brantford, back in his native Canada. Accompanying the body to Brantford were Ernest and Harriett Duncan as well as J.C. McManus, Arthur Cary, Mrs. Robert Duncan, and Marcellus Gray.

One of the first tributes to Duncan appeared in the Toronto Globe just days after his death:

The sudden death of Norman Duncan has deprived the American world of letters of one of its most brilliant figures. At forty-five years of age he had achieved a high place in the estimation of literary critics.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>"Golf Match Fatal to Norman Duncan," New York Times 19 October 1916: 9.

<sup>39</sup>Ernest Duncan, letter to Mackenzie King, 28 October 1916, MKC; copy, EMP.

<sup>40</sup>"Norman Duncan is Dead: Famous Canadian Author," Globe [Toronto] 20 October 1916: 6.

Many people were greatly affected by Duncan's death. Harriett noted that on the night of the event, "little Bobbie grieved and we found him crying four times." All of the members of Ernest's family were especially close to Norman and were shocked at his sudden passing. A similar response came from Margaret Burnes:

I have been ill from this terrible blow and am but slowly recovering. You know well what the beautiful sincere friendship of Mr. Duncan meant to Arthur and to me -- and we thought he had grown almost, if not quite, strong and well this summer. How lovingly he always spoke of your dear children and his quiet appreciation of you as the mother was so deep, so sincere.<sup>41</sup>

Mrs. Burnes also wrote of her grief to Mackenzie King, adding her desire to bring to its fulfillment a proposal that Duncan had discussed with her during his last summer:

You are the only Canadian I know who can help me with advice, to do what Norman Duncan wanted, himself, to do, in expiation for not going to the war, and so I must come to you. He wanted to take four Canadian orphans and educate them: and now I want oh so earnestly, to do it for him.<sup>42</sup>

Duncan obviously retained his strong affection for children to the very end. That Mrs. Burnes shared this quality is evident in the fact that after his death she offered to provide money for the education of young Bobbie. Years later, his ward Arthur Cary was to recall his own sense of

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<sup>41</sup>Margaret Burnes, letter to Harriett Duncan, 2 November 1916, NDC.

<sup>42</sup>Margaret Burnes, letter to Mackenzie King, 18 January 1917, MKC; copy, EMP.



sorrow at Norman's death: "I felt the greatest affection for him and was saddened at his sudden death."<sup>43</sup>

Another person who responded at considerable length to the news of Duncan's passing was his former classmate and close friend, Mackenzie King. King heard the news by phone just days after the event, and on the following day wrote to Ernest: "I cannot express the grief it has been to me."<sup>44</sup> As his personal tribute to Duncan, King added:

Only those who have known him intimately and have followed his writings can appreciate what a loss his death means not only to his friends but to humanity. His sympathies were so broad, his soul so sincere and his love of his fellows so true!

King added a personal reference to the recent death of his own father which, he assured Ernest, "makes me not less sensitive to your loss but gives a profounder understanding of the grief which must be yours, a grief in which I deeply share."

King and Ernest Duncan corresponded for several weeks after Norman's death, with each letter reiterating the strong sense of loss that each felt. "I cannot get over the sense of loss," wrote King; then, noting how pleased he was that Duncan had been buried in his native Canada, he expressed the hope that there would be some national recognition of

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<sup>43</sup>Arthur Cary, letter to Susan Duncan, 8 January 1978, SDP.

<sup>44</sup>Mackenzie King, Diaries, 22 October 1916, PAC; and Mackenzie King, letters to Ernest Duncan, 13 November 1916 and 27 November 1916, NDC.

his contribution to Canadian letters. In another letter, King made an interesting observation about a remarkable coincidence that had been brought to his attention by Ernest -- the fact that Norman and his brother Robert who had predeceased him had lived exactly the same number of days. King's rather mystical reaction was as follows:

Norman was so passionately fond of Robert that I doubt not he may have been much in Norman's thoughts on the day of his death, and that this little extra dust thrown into the balances of life accounted for his passing away on that day.<sup>45</sup>

But there is no doubt that the person who felt the loss of Duncan the greatest was his brother Ernest. Writing to King, whom it is unlikely he ever met, Ernest exclaimed, "I am very lonely now as both Norman & Robert have gone & I am the last of the family." Once King continued the correspondence, Ernest expressed his sense of loss even more fully:

Norman Duncan was the most unselfish man I ever knew. He denied himself that he might help others and when the poor boy died he had absolutely nothing in the form of this worlds goods -- simply had given it all away as fast as he made it. You knew the man & loved him more for himself than for his work as I did

Since I have lived in this country I never felt as I do now, so absolutely alone -- I almost feel like a stranger in a strange land.<sup>46</sup>

A tribute to Duncan of special interest was expressed by Grenfell, who was loud in his praise of the writer who had

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<sup>45</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to Ernest Duncan, 27 November 1916, NDC; copy, MKC. The calculation done by Ernest Duncan was that both Norman and Robert had lived exactly 16,180 days.

<sup>46</sup>Ernest Duncan, letters to Mackenzie King, 28 October 1916 and 15 November 1916, MKC; copies, EMP.

brought many American readers their first awareness of  
 faraway Labrador:

In all my acquaintance with Norman Duncan I always found him to be a true knight, and to him as such, we are eager to gratefully submit this tribute of our gratitude, and admiration, and love.<sup>47</sup>

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At the time of his death, Duncan had a number of stories written but not published. Six of these had already been accepted for publication; they appeared in print within a few months after his death.<sup>48</sup> The last original story to be published was "Mohammed of the Lion Heart," one that he appears to have been revising up to the day of his death, as it was not mentioned in any of the correspondence between Duncan and his agent. Indeed, an editor's note accompanying the story indicates that it was selected by Ernest Duncan and Norman's agent after it was found among the papers lying on Duncan's desk, written in longhand with corrections and revisions.

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<sup>47</sup>"Dr. Grenfell's Appreciation of Norman Duncan," Among the Deep Sea Fishers 14 (January 1917): 152.

<sup>48</sup>These are as follows: "The Siren of Scalawag Run," Delineator 89 (November 1916): 8-9; "The Red Koran," Delineator 89 (December 1916): 6-7; "The Affair of Ha-Ha Shallow," Red Book (December 1916): 255-65; "A Little Nipper o' Hide-an'-Seek Harbor," Pictorial Review (May 1917): 16-18, 40; "The Little Drover and the Dependable Uncle," Delineator 90 (May 1917): 13, 48; and "Mohammed of the Lion Heart," Delineator 91 (August 1917): 8-9.

In 1918, under the editorship of S. Edgar Briggs, Fleming H. Revell released two volumes of Duncan's stories, Battles Royal Down North and Harbor Tales Down North. These books contained several previously published stories and one new item, "An Idyl of Rickity Tickle," which Duncan had prepared for publication before his death. Contracts for both collections were signed by Ernest Duncan, and the books appeared on the market within weeks of each other. Both carried the same introductory material: an article by Grenfell entitled "Norman Duncan: An Appreciation" and an unsigned biographical note by Briggs.<sup>49</sup> One person who was pleased about the appearance of the two new volumes was Mackenzie King, with whom Briggs had been in touch during the preparation of the texts. Indeed, Briggs had sent King his biographical sketch for comment and suggestion; King had replied with a number of points.<sup>50</sup>

Although the stories that comprised Battles Royal Down North had already been published, some attempt was made by the editor to divide the various episodes into subdivisions and chapters. In the case of Harbor Tales Down North, however, the nine stories were reprinted exactly as previously published. Both collections were essentially adventure stories; however,

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<sup>49</sup>This note has been attributed to Grenfell by Thomas Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan," 111 and 116.

<sup>50</sup>Correspondence: Briggs to King, 1 June 1918, and King to Briggs, 10 June 1918, MKC; copies, EMP.

the second collection was somewhat different as it contained several stories that showed another side of Newfoundland life -- love, courtship and marriage. Many reviewers of the books saw in them examples of what they considered Duncan's finest work; for example, the New York Times heralded both collections, claiming them "worthy of a place among their author's best work."<sup>51</sup> In an article on Duncan, critic C.K. Trueblood commended the writer for the "intimate oral quality, which is both robust and refined," as well as for his "sound intimacy with plain souls and a strong home feeling for essential human meanings."<sup>52</sup> More critical was the New York Sun, which claimed that most of the stories "would be the better for condensation, for they are too garrulous, lacking the selective power of art, the compression that marks the work of genius."<sup>53</sup>

Both books seem to have been reasonably successful; Duncan's estate was the recipient of \$1066.14 in royalties from Revell for the year 1919, most of which undoubtedly came from the sale of these two volumes.<sup>54</sup> Briggs himself was obviously very pleased with the venture and was at one point planning to prepare yet another volume. "The success

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<sup>51</sup>New York Times 17 November 1918: 3.2.

<sup>52</sup>C.K. Trueblood, "Norman Duncan," Dial 65 (28 December 1918): 615, 616.

<sup>53</sup>Sun [New York] 8 September 1918: 9.

<sup>54</sup>"Norman's Royalties from Fleming Revell," handwritten note by Harriett Duncan, NDC.

that we have had for Harbor Tales and Battles Royal," he wrote to Ernest Duncan, "leads me to suppose that we might consider the publication in book form of the stories that have as yet not been brought together in this way."<sup>55</sup> However, such a collection was never published.

These two books, though often reviewed together, are quite different. Battles Royal Down North is divided into five sections, each comprising one long story (often combining two or three magazine stories). Duncan returns to the themes of The Way of the Sea in that most of the stories deal with the conflict between outport men and the sea. Darwinian nature and the demands it makes on human beings are starkly treated in "A Grim Lottery," where men facing starvation engage in thoughts of cannibalism as they struggle over the last piece of food. Few of the stories, however, have such moral concerns. Most are again adventure stories, including even a murder-mystery in "Constable Charlie's Quest." And most are rather weak and episodic. Indeed, in one of them, "The Long Arm," the writer introduces a rather lengthy and somewhat tiresome subplot which has no relevance whatsoever to the story. One senses that Duncan was again capitulating to the demand on the part of his general readership for tales of adventure in faraway places.

Harbor Tales Down North, again comprising all previously published material (except, as previously noted, for "An

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<sup>55</sup>Briggs to Ernest Duncan, 1 August 1919, NDC.

Idyl of Rickity Tickle"), is a different type of book. These stories are more domestic, concerning themselves with the everyday lives of ordinary people in the settlements along the coast. They are local tales, many with a strong moral sense: a rich dishonest man is pitted against a poor honest one; a dedicated doctor risks his life to save a child and reduces his bill. The tone of these stories is more chatty, with several of them employing as narrator a local storyteller. They are diversions with plenty of human interest and humor. The stories have much more of an oral quality, especially the last four in the volume. One detects a "plain, chimney-corner relish,"<sup>56</sup> with little sense of the natural panorama and less profundity than is found in his best fiction. While the sea and ice are there, the reader is more conscious of the kitchen corner and the forecabin of a vessel.

The best story in the two volumes is arguably "The Art of Terry Lute."<sup>57</sup> Here Duncan explores the artistic sensibility and how it is bludgeoned into self-denial by the demands of life in a harsh environment. Terry Lute, a young boy of 14, displays potential as an artist, attracting the admiration of a visiting painter, James Cobden. Lute's masterpiece is "The Fang," a graphic portrayal on canvas of the might and terror of the sea. But as Cobden learns, Lute no longer

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<sup>56</sup>C.K. Trueblood, "Norman Duncan," Dial 65 (28 December 1918): 615.

<sup>57</sup>Harbor Tales Down North, 91-112. Originally published in Century 85 (January 1913): 397-404.

paints pictures. He has long since learned to overcome the fear of the sea that had prompted the picture, and has "put away childish things." As was the case with the child in "The Chase of the Tide," and the philosopher in "The Wayfarer," Duncan is presenting his reader with the incompatibility of such sensibilities with the primitive life of the coast.

Edward J. O'Brien, a critic of American fiction, claimed that "Norman Duncan kept his artistic vigour to the last,"<sup>58</sup> and saw "no flagging in Mr. Duncan's power."<sup>59</sup> If one were to judge this based on certain individual stories, one might concur. Stories such as "The Art of Terry Lute" and "The Wayfarer" retain some of the power and intensity of those in The Way of the Sea. But if one looks at the total picture, one is forced to conclude that there was a certain degree of deterioration in his short fiction after 1903. As suggested earlier, a main cause is the lack of freshness in the material, resulting in somewhat hackneyed plots and tiresome characters. This, combined with the worsening of his health as a result of his increasing reliance on alcohol, may account for a general decline in the quality of Duncan's works in the final years of his life. It is also possible that, once

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<sup>58</sup>Edward J. O'Brien, "The Best 63 American Stories of 1917," Bookman [New York] 46 (February 1918): 699.

<sup>59</sup>Edward J. O'Brien, The Best Short Stories of 1918 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1919) 356.



Duncan achieved "popularity" with Doctor Luke of the Labrador, he was content to continue with the same formula.

There was one further attempt made to publish a new collection of Duncan's stories. In 1924, Andrew Macphail undertook to write an introduction for an anthology of Duncan's stories proposed by Lorne Pierce,<sup>60</sup> a volume that was never published. There exists, however, an unpublished manuscript of commentary by Macphail which was probably the intended introduction.<sup>61</sup> There were reprints of Duncan's works, and some of his stories were included in a number of collections and anthologies. Sales of Duncan's books continued at a reasonably steady rate until 1930; after that date, however, the returns indicate a significant decline.<sup>62</sup>

Several of Duncan's stories and articles were never published.<sup>63</sup> Three of these -- "A Professional Call," "The Pole Route to God's Warning," and "The Engineer of the 'Princess Maud'" -- introduced a new character to the

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<sup>60</sup>See Ian Ross Robertson, "Sir Andrew Macphail as a Social Critic," PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974, 319 (footnote #69). Also see Macphail, letter to Dennis O'Brien 25 January 1924, NDC.

<sup>61</sup>Andrew Macphail, "Norman Duncan: An Estimate," unpublished ms, [1924]. This manuscript is part of the Macphail Papers, Manuscript Group 30 D 150, vol 5, file 9, PAC.

<sup>62</sup>"Norman's Royalties from Fleming Revell," handwritten note by Harriett Duncan, NDC.

<sup>63</sup>The manuscripts of all unpublished material referred to in this dissertation form part of the Norman Duncan Collection.

Newfoundland scene, Dr. Cedric Strong, who, according to the narrator, was "one of the most inspiring characters it has been my good fortune to encounter." A fourth Newfoundland story, "The Wreck of the Trader 'Duchess'," told the tale of old Peter Manuel, the Ruddy Cove trader, a character obviously drawn from the Manuels at Exploits. Two other unpublished narratives dealt with totally different subject matter: "Aboard the Billy Bullet" recounted an Australian adventure, while "David Boyd" was a story drawn from the lore of the Pennsylvania backwoods.

By far the most significant piece of unpublished writing is a short story entitled "The Mastery." Anxious to have the story published, Duncan first submitted it in 1916 to Edward J. O'Brien in response to his request for contributions to the Pictorial Review.<sup>64</sup> O'Brien was enthusiastic, calling the story "superb," and promised to forward it immediately to the magazine's editor. Duncan's agent, Carl Brandt, was equally enthusiastic about the prospect of acceptance. However, a few days later Brandt wrote Duncan to say that although the editor considered "The Mastery" a "tremendous artistic achievement," he could not use it because of the "hopelessness of the ending."<sup>65</sup> Anticipating this response, Duncan had prepared a revised, less tragic ending which he

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<sup>64</sup>Edward J. O'Brien, letter to Norman Duncan, 25 April 1916, NDC.

<sup>65</sup>Carl Brandt, letter to Norman Duncan, 9 May 1916, NDC.

immediately submitted. But the story was still rejected. Attempts continued after Duncan's death in 1916 to have the story published, an indication that both Ernest Duncan and Brandt realized how important the story was to its author. It was turned down by the Saturday Evening Post in late 1916, by Harper's in 1924, and again by the Post in 1933.<sup>66</sup> In each case, though the story was praised for its merit, the view was expressed that the subject matter made it unsuitable for publication.

The story deals with alcoholism. Set in a "skid row" section of lower Manhattan, "The Mastery" tells the story of two alcoholics who have sunk to the lowest level of degradation and despair. The narrative not only gives a perceptive insight into the psychology of an alcoholic, his fears and sense of alienation, but also shows the utter hopelessness of his attempts to abandon his habit. Instead of gaining the earnestly desired mastery over his addiction, the main character in the story gives up in despair. In the original manuscript, the main character is seen at the end looking for his flask. The revised ending is somewhat more indeterminate, as the alcoholic gropes his way out of his dingy hole desperately looking for the light of day. The story illustrates in

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<sup>66</sup>See the following correspondence: Carl Brandt to Ernest Duncan, 22 November 1916; Thomas Wells (Harper & Brothers), to Ernest Duncan, 20 November 1924; G. Lorimer to Mrs. Ernest Duncan, 15 November 1933. NDC.

fictional terms what may have been Duncan's worst fears and anxieties about his own drinking problem.

Another unpublished article among Duncan's papers deals with alcoholism. It seems that Duncan had become acquainted either as an observer or possibly as a participant with a project called in the article a "Self Masters' Colony." The untitled account describes a colony near Union, N.J., "a quiet place to which any troubled man may withdraw until his trouble passes." Duncan stressed in the account the positive attributes of this retreat which caters to "intemperate young men trying to control themselves, men disgusted with dissipation." The emphasis throughout is on the restoration of the self-respect and dignity of the sufferer:

he is not at any time admonished, besought, bewildered at all with questions concerning his state and prospects. Simple labor is given him, according to the measure of his strength: whereby he may rest in self-respect and regain mastery of himself.

These two pieces of writing, dealing so differently with a similar subject, reveal much of the state of Duncan's mind in the months immediately preceding his death, vacillating as he must have been between the extremes of hope and despair. Though neither of these pieces was ever published, they are significant in that they stand as a memorial to a man who not only knew the agonies of the alcoholic, but realized the kind of help that was needed, long before organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous came into being.

While Norman Duncan was alive, he was a popular writer. All his books were reviewed extensively, and his short stories were in demand for magazines. This popularity continued after his death. The publication of the two collections of stories, Battles Royal Down North and Harbor Tales Down North, received much attention, as already noted. Royalties continued to be paid for several years.<sup>67</sup>

In April, 1922, the Canadian Literature Club in Toronto held a program in honor of the writer. The event began with a biographical sketch, followed by an address by D. Moshier, a classmate of Duncan's at the university, a presentation that was "delightful and revealing of the personality of Duncan's tenderness and whimsical humor."<sup>68</sup> The gathering of about 500 people was also entertained by F.W. Hayden, who gave readings from Duncan's stories interspersed with interpretations and anecdotes.

Duncan's reputation for many years rested on his fiction for boys, his most popular work being Doctor Luke of the Labrador. The novel was reprinted in 1934, and consideration

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<sup>67</sup>"Norman's Royalties from Fleming Revell" (NDC) notes that from 1918 to 1940, the Duncans received over \$6100 in royalties from Fleming H. Revell.

<sup>68</sup>"Norman Duncan Jubilee," Telegram [Toronto] 29 April 1922, Alumni files, University of Toronto Archive. For another account of the event, see "Canadian Literature Club Offers Homage to Memory of 'The Dickens of Canada'," Globe [Toronto] 29 April 1922: 17.

was given to making a movie out of it. The issue was first raised in a letter from S. Edgar Briggs to Ernest Duncan, just months after Norman's death.<sup>69</sup> The matter was raised again in 1927 and in 1934. In March, 1934, Fleming H. Revell himself wrote Ernest Duncan's widow, indicating a continued interest in selling the movie rights.<sup>70</sup> Some progress seems to have been made in 1939 when Universal Manufacturing of Manhattan made an offer, about which Revell was optimistic.<sup>71</sup> However, for reasons that are not apparent, the deal fell through and the movie rights were never purchased. In the meantime, literary critics in Canada were beginning to pay attention to their native son and his works. In addition to the interest shown by Lorne Pierce and Andrew Macphail, critics were beginning to include Duncan in their studies of Canadian literature.<sup>72</sup> Duncan was also included in a list of writers studied at a summer school in Canadian literature

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<sup>69</sup>S. Edgar Briggs, letter to Ernest Duncan, 14 February 1917, NDC.

<sup>70</sup>See the following correspondence: S. Edgar Briggs to Ernest Duncan, 21 January 1927 and 26 January 1927; Fleming H. Revell to Mrs. Ernest Duncan, 8 March 1934 and 6 December 1935. NDC.

<sup>71</sup>William Wooster, letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan, 2 August 1939, NDC.

<sup>72</sup>For example, see John D. Logan & Donald G. French, Highways of Canadian Literature (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1924); Lionel Stevenson, Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926); O.J. Stevenson, "The Boy Eternal," in A People's Best (Toronto: Musson, 1927); and Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1927).

organized in 1926 by the Canadian Authors' Association.<sup>73</sup> The most extensive analyses of Duncan were two articles by E.J. Hathaway, published in 1926 and 1928.<sup>74</sup> Although both of these articles are essentially biographical, they contain some critical commentary on Duncan's writing. In this early commentary Duncan is regarded principally as a writer of stories for boys, and Doctor Luke of the Labrador is invariably singled out as his single most significant achievement. It was not until some decades later that critics began to recognize the value of The Way of the Sea. Desmond Pacey, though assessing the work as a failure, claims that it "comes close to success of a kind quite beyond the reach of other Canadian novelists of this period."<sup>75</sup> Other critics claimed that in this collection Duncan "reached a high level of story-telling."<sup>76</sup> Interest in The Way of the Sea has increased in recent years, since its reprinting in 1982. However, all his other works are out of print.

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<sup>73</sup>Desmond Pacey, "The Writer and his Public 1920-1960," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 483.

<sup>74</sup>Ernest J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature: Norman Duncan," Canadian Bookman 8 (June 1926): 171-4, and "Norman Duncan," Ontario Library Review 13 (August 1928): 6-10.

<sup>75</sup>Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961) 107-8.

<sup>76</sup>Gordon Roper, S. Ross Beharriell, & Rupert Schieder, "Writers of Fiction (1880-1920)," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 328.

On July 1, 1979, permanent memorial plaques to both Robert and Norman Duncan were unveiled and dedicated in a ceremony held at Preston Park in Brantford, Ontario. The ceremony was hosted by the City of Brantford, Brant County, the Brant Historical Society and the local branches of the Canadian Legion, "to perpetuate the memory of two brothers, native sons, who during the early years of this century contributed greatly to human progress in the spheres of pure and applied science -- and literature."<sup>77</sup> In attendance were representatives from municipal, provincial and federal governments, university academics, the Carnegie-Mellon Institute of Research, as well as friends and family members. The Commemorative Address in honor of Norman Duncan was delivered by R. Kenneth Ruddy, a relative of the Duncans who had known both brothers personally. He referred to Norman Duncan's "great humanity -- his gifted literary craftsmanship and his remarkable rapport with a breed of men so different from himself."<sup>78</sup> Following this address, the marker honoring Norman Duncan was unveiled by Susan Duncan, the writer's niece. The full text of the inscription on the marker is as follows:

NORMAN DUNCAN  
1871-1916

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<sup>77</sup>Invitation issued by Duncan Plaques Committee, NDC.

<sup>78</sup>R. Kenneth Ruddy, Commemorative Address, NDC.



Born in Brantford and later living in Mitchell, Duncan attended University of Toronto 1891-5. He followed his brother Robert to U.S.A. and received his Litt. D. from University of Pittsburgh and professorships in rhetoric and Eng. Lit. at two large universities, later becoming Editor of New York's most literary daily, The Evening Post.

Duncan's writings describe life in many lands. "Going Down to Jerusalem" is illustrated by Lawren S. Harris famous Brantford born artist. Many of his 20 novels depict in rhythmic sea cadence the rugged life and fatalism of the Newfoundland fisherman. Thrilling sea adventures for boys complement his works.

In a stirring tribute by 500 members of the Canadian Literary Club of 1922, Duncan was named "The Dickens of Canada." In February 1978, C.F. Poole of the Newfoundland Historical Society wrote: "The brilliance of Duncan's insights into the sea-touched character of the Newfoundlander has never been surpassed."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Inscription on Norman Duncan plaque, Preston Park, Brantford, Ont.

## CHAPTER 9

## NORMAN DUNCAN IN CONTEXT

## 1

Norman Duncan's writing shows a number of literary influences, the two most significant of which are the mid-Victorian realism of Charles Dickens, and the American local color movement. The influence of Dickens on Duncan is quite pronounced. The Victorian novelist had always been a family favorite with the Duncans, and Norman kept several items of Dickens memorabilia among his possessions.<sup>1</sup> Several people have drawn comparisons between him and the great Victorian novelist. For example, S. Edgar Briggs asserted that Duncan "has all the tenderness of Dickens,"<sup>2</sup> while Mackenzie King drew a similar parallel.<sup>3</sup> The sentiment was echoed at the commemoration ceremony held by the Canadian Literature Club in 1922, when Duncan was called "The Dickens of Canada," an appellation that is also included in the wording of the

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<sup>1</sup>Among his possessions left in his room at Fredonia after his death were a postcard of the Old Curiosity Shop in London, a portrait of Dickens, and an early edition of The Old Curiosity Shop.

<sup>2</sup>"Biographical Note," Harbor Tales Down North (New York: Revell, 1918) 13.

<sup>3</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to S. Edgar Briggs, 24 July 1918, MKC; copy, NDC.

plaque erected in the writer's honor at Brantford in 1979. Many reviewers have drawn comparisons between Duncan and Dickens. Writing of The Cruise of the Shining Light, one commented: "It is hard to speak critically of this story without pointing a parallel to Dickens."<sup>4</sup> Another, commenting on The Measure of a Man, said that "Dickens is his master."<sup>5</sup> At times, the comparisons were made in the form of adverse criticisms: for example, a reviewer of The Mother complained that the story had "rather too strong a suggestion of Dickens."<sup>6</sup> Critics of Canadian literature such as V.B. Rhodenizer, Lionel Stevenson, and Desmond Pacey have also drawn attention to the influence of Dickens on Duncan.<sup>7</sup> This influence can be seen in Duncan's choice of subject matter, methods of characterization, style, and moral didacticism.

The types of situations around which Duncan constructed his plots are in many respects Dickensian. Children are frequently leading characters in Duncan's fiction. Two of his three major novels, Doctor Luke of the Labrador and The Cruise of the Shining Light, trace the growth and development

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<sup>4</sup>North American Review 185 (7 June 1907): 328.

<sup>5</sup>Nation 93 (17 August 1911): 144.

<sup>6</sup>Critic 47 (December 1905): 578.

<sup>7</sup>See the following: V.B. Rhodenizer, A Handbook of Canadian Literature (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1930) 150; Lionel Stevenson, Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926) 228; Desmond Pacey, A Book of Canadian Stories (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947) 118, and Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952) 108.

of a young boy into manhood, with the accompanying movement from innocence to experience. To take the comparison further, the boys in both of Duncan's novels are (or become) orphans. Like Dickens, Duncan felt an affinity with the orphaned child, though the social implications of such a deprived conditions are not nearly as pronounced in Duncan as they were in his master. Orphans or semi-orphans are also central characters in other Duncan works: for example, the child on the train in The Suitable Child, the abandoned baby in The Measure of a Man, and the fatherless Dickie Slade in The Mother.

But the work by Duncan that is most Dickensian is The Cruise of the Shining Light. The relationship between the orphan boy and the rough rogue is reminiscent of Great Expectations; and in Duncan's novel as in Dickens's, the bond of love proves stronger than the hatred and crime that has been part of the guardian's past. Duncan's novel contains many echoes of Great Expectations that must be more than coincidental. But Duncan does not achieve Dickens's success in plot construction; rather than a well integrated plot, Duncan's story is more of a succession of scenes. Even though The Cruise of the Shining Light is his most well-constructed work, it lacks the perfection of form for which Great Expectations is famous. The expansive effect in Dickens, that of a world opening before the reader as he progresses, is lacking in Duncan. Also lacking is Dickens's sense of outrage at general social conditions in his society.

It is in the area of characterization that the parallels between Duncan and Dickens are most pronounced. Duncan seems to have the same skill as Dickens to evoke objects and figures with intensity. Consider, for example, the initial description of Nicholas Top in The Cruise of the Shining Light:

my uncle was a broad, long-bodied, scowling, grim-lipped runt, with the arms and chest of an ape, a leg lacking, three fingers of the left hand gone at the knuckles, an ankle botched in the mending (the surgery his own), a jaw out of place, a round head set low between gigantic shoulders upon a thick neck (1-2).

The precise detail with which he describes Top suggests physical attributes which become permanently associated with that character. Other similarities to Dickens in characterization include the occurrence of one-dimensional, often grotesque, minor characters. While Duncan in no way matches Dickens in this regard, the greatest strength of The Mother, for example, lies not in the rather maudlin sentimentality of the mother-son relationship, but in the interesting and imaginative delineation of the circus "freaks." Dickens's practice of using the name of a character as a key to his personality is well known. While Duncan does not employ the practice as readily or as frequently as Dickens, there are examples of it in his work. The most notable is Dr. Luke, whose name suggests a parallel with the biblical Great Physician.

The style of Dicker has been considered by some critics to be rhetorical, melodramatic and sentimental. The same

charges have been levelled against Duncan. Dickens, writing in his own defense, once stated:

What is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions, is plain truth to another. I sometimes ask myself ... whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?<sup>8</sup>

One can imagine Norman Duncan saying the same thing. Because he felt strongly, he wrote passionately. His best writing is often his most intense.

Finally, there is the moral tone of Duncan's fiction. Common to both Duncan and Dickens are the values of hearth and home, the resolution of the dissonance of the world through marriage, and the belief in love as a means of redemption for flawed, sinful man. The latter idea pervades all of Duncan's novels: love sustains Doctor Luke, permitting him to rise above his sinful past and find peace; the love of Nicholas Top for young Dannie is stronger than the combined sins of the past; and the love of John Fairmeadow for his backwoods parishioners redeems many. Redemptive love is also the central focus of The Mother, Finding his Soul, and The Suitable Child.

But even when Duncan is at his best, he never manages to match the narrative genius of Charles Dickens. Indeed, the novel was not Duncan's best literary genre. It was in the short story that he excelled, and to trace the influences

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<sup>8</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface," Martin Chuzzlewit (London: J.M. Dent, 1907) xvii.

here, one must go the American literary scene in the late nineteenth century.

## 2

Though he was born and raised in Canada, Duncan wrote and published in the United States. Consequently his work should be examined in the context of nineteenth century American literature. His writing, especially his short stories, shows the influence of the local color movement in the United States and, to some extent, of Bret Harte.

Harte is generally considered the first proponent of local color in American fiction. The publication in 1868 of his first short story, "The Luck of Roaring Camp," brought him instant fame. Much of this was due to the fact that he had introduced American readers to the exciting, albeit often over-romanticized, life on the new American frontier -- the goldrush settlements of California. This pioneer life he endowed with a heroic setting and peopled with fascinating and unforgettable characters. He was the first American fiction writer to make the peculiarities of an area a major impetus for the writing of fiction. It was Harte who "first interested himself in the impressionistic features of a life distinctly American, and tried to put them into short stories."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Henry S. Canby, A Study of the Short Story (New York: Holt, 1913) 50.

His success, combined with the general appetite of the American public in the post-Civil War years for such democratic and patriotic literature, spawned a whole era in American fiction, the period of local color. Over the next few decades, numerous writers appeared on the scene, extolling in their works the virtues of life in their own specific regions. These writers, with varying degrees of success, gave their readers somewhat nostalgic yet realistically detailed descriptions of life in virtually every region of the United States. Some, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, were content with painting for their readers domestic and pastoral scenes, while others, including Charles Egbert Craddock, portrayed dangerous lives and romantic escapes.

The major contribution of the local colorists to the development of American fiction was in the area of setting and dialect. In his study on the importance of setting in the works of the local colorists, Robert D. Rhode notes that:

all local colorists of the period have a single important feature in common, an absorbing interest in landscape, scenery, or nature, . . . and a tendency toward an inordinate preoccupation with setting as a part of their narrative technique.<sup>10</sup>

For the most part, the local colorists were nostalgic, recording a vanishing way of life. But they were dedicated to providing accurate descriptions of life in the various

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<sup>10</sup>Robert D. Rhode, Setting in the American Short Story of Local Color 1865-1900 (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 167.



regions of the country. Working from personal experience, "they recorded the facts of a unique environment and suggested that native life was shaped by the curious conditions of the locale."<sup>11</sup> In order to convey a more authentic impression, they freely employed dialect, so that American fiction began to abound in almost every vernacular spoken in the country. By the 1880s, the use of dialect in American fiction was well established. It found favor with the proponents of realism, because it showed the writer in close touch with the people, in the midst of life.

The local colorists attracted the attention of many influential writers and editors, most notably William Dean Howells, one of the early giants of the American realist movement. As editor of the Atlantic Monthly, Howells brought many of these writers to the attention of an American public hungry for regional literature. As a group, these writers provide a link between the popular sentimental romances of the early nineteenth century and the emerging realism of the later decades.

Duncan can be seen as an extension of the American local color movement. By the end of the nineteenth century, the regional writers had almost exhausted the supply of fresh localities. As the American frontiers receded, interest turned further afield, particularly to the uncharted regions

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<sup>11</sup>Jane Benardete, "Introduction," American Realism (New York: Putnam's, 1972) 13.

of the north. Duncan, like Harte before him, was fortunate in that he was able to present to the American readership regions that were almost entirely unknown, new frontiers that combined the unique with the adventurous. His earliest stories were, of course, closer to home, drawing on the immigrants of Lower Manhattan. The stories that comprise The Soul of the Street belong to the general category of local color, as they concentrate on the locale, its distinguishing features, and the relationship between the characters and their immediate environment. These stories also present Duncan's first attempts at reproducing a local dialect. But his greatest successes were the stories that resulted from his visits to Newfoundland and Labrador. Unlike most of the local colorists who wrote in praise of their own native regions, Duncan "adopted" his locale and was able to provide an external as well as an internal perspective missing in many of the regional writers. But as was the case with Harte, his imagination needed the stimulus of living models for its setting and characters. Duncan's Newfoundland was like Harte's California several decades earlier -- a place virtually unknown, wild and primitive. Duncan's trips to Newfoundland and Labrador were timely. Even though his settings were not part of the United States, the readers saw them as extensions of their own receding frontiers, and were drawn to them accordingly.

It is possible to observe a number of parallels between the works of Harte and Duncan.<sup>12</sup> Referring to Harte, one early critic observed: "Seldom do time and place and temperament come together so fortunately."<sup>13</sup> The same can be said of Duncan, who rarely describes the landscape for its own sake. The scene is always in accord with what is happening in the narrative to such an extent that, at times, it takes on the qualities of a character. The personification of nature is a dominant attribute of both Harte and Duncan. The following passage is from Harte:

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine boughs, flew like white winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon through the rifted clouds looked down on what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.<sup>14</sup>

Duncan's nature, rather than being gentle and caressing, is harsh and threatening, but the technique is the same. Another similarity lies in characterization. One can detect in Harte's stories a number of stereotypical characters such

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<sup>12</sup>It is quite possible that Duncan deliberately imitated Harte. There is evidence that Duncan admired Harte's fiction, and considered his short story "Tennessee's Partner" as "perfect." See O.J. Stevenson, "The Boy Eternal" in A People's Best (Toronto: Musson, 1927) 253.

<sup>13</sup>Edward J. O'Brien, The Advance of the American Short Story (1931; St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1972) 99.

<sup>14</sup>Bret Harte, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," The Best of Bret Harte, ed. Wilhelmina Harper & Aimee M. Peters (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947) 301.

as the strong, silent man, the stoic who is reckless in danger and, above all, the man with the rough exterior who is tender within. So, too, Duncan creates his stereotypes, the "hardy Newfoundlander" and the "outport warrior." The tender man with the rough exterior appears as Nicholas Top in The Cruise of the Shining Light and Gingerbread Jenkins in The Measure of a Man.

Duncan, like Harte, was a prolific writer, and his works, like those of his predecessor, showed a noticeable decline in quality with the passing of years. The major reason for this decline was the same in both writers. Harte's earlier stories, notably "The Luck of Roaring Camp," "Tennessee's Partner," and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," excited readers with their freshness of material, characters and dialect. But Harte soon exhausted his subject matter and, instead of seeking new frontiers, fell back on the same material. As a result, his later stories tended to "repeat in varied combinations his old characters and backgrounds and motifs, and always it was with a growing mechanicalness and loss of original freshness and charm."<sup>15</sup> At points in his career, Duncan may have sensed the same thing happening to him, as he frequently attempted to find new material. But because he repeatedly came back in his fiction to Newfoundland and Labrador, it was almost inevitable that the same fate would

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<sup>15</sup>Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1966) 234.

befall his work. Even though he was successful in introducing new characters and situations, the basic formulas remained unchanged.

Harte's influence on Duncan's technique can also be observed, particularly in the area of narrative voice. Like Duncan, Harte frequently brings the fact of his craft before the reader, as in the following passage from "Tennessee's Partner":

That day week they were married by a justice of the peace, and returned to Poker Flat. I am aware that something more might be made of this episode, but I prefer to tell it as it was current at Sandy Bar.<sup>16</sup>

Duncan employs a similar technique, though at times he uses it to explore with his readers alternative images or metaphors:

I may write: It was as though the sea's ally were relentlessly about its business. . . . Or, if you will, the fog was in the form of a gigantic hand, shaped like a claw, being passed cautiously over a table, to close in on a careless fly.<sup>17</sup>

Duncan often drew on narrative devices that had worked well for Harte, in particular the use of the striking contrast between the rough and the tender. Duncan's introduction of an innocent baby into the drunken taverns of Swamp's End in The Measure of a Man is a direct imitation of a similar device in Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp." The technique recurs in much of Duncan's fiction: we see it, for example,

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<sup>16</sup>Bret Harte, "Tennessee's Partner," The Best of Bret Harte, 18.

<sup>17</sup>The Way of the Sea, 18-19.

in the presence of Pattie Batch among the sinful women of the logging town in The Measure of a Man, the association between Millie Slade and the curate in The Mother, and the relationship between Nicholas Top and his young "gentleman" in The Cruise of the Shining Light.

While the influence of Harte on Duncan is pronounced, one can argue that Duncan is the better writer. Duncan succeeds in penetrating the minds of his characters with an intuitive sympathy not apparent in Harte, whose characterizations are more superficial. Harte viewed his fictional world through a veil of sentiment, finding "purity in the wilderness, charity in rascals, and soft hearts in the most uncouth."<sup>18</sup> At times, Duncan demonstrates a similar quality, but in his finest stories, such as those in The Way of the Sea, the characterizations are more complex and, consequently, more satisfying. In these same stories, Duncan's style has an intensity not apparent in Harte's more direct, less passionate delineation. But Duncan is indebted to Harte for establishing the concept that the short story was indeed an effective instrument for the depiction of regional life.

There were other trends in nineteenth century American literature that helped to shape Duncan's fiction. The adventure story was still very popular at the turn of the century. A genre that had its beginnings with the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, the adventure story appealed to the frontier

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<sup>18</sup>Canby, 35.

mentality of Americans and provided those living in the cities with an opportunity to experience vicariously the excitement of frontier life. Written almost exclusively for a masculine audience, these stories celebrated the cult of manhood. The most popular form was the "western," though sea stories also were widely read. These works of fiction were essentially romantic, featuring the standard heroes and villains of the Wild West, and abounding in exciting battles between pioneers and Indians, and eleventh hour rescues and escapes. Invariably, the morality of the pioneer dominated. After the opening up of the last western frontiers, this type of fiction began to shift its focus somewhat. As exploration focused on the northern areas of the continent, new imaginative frontiers appeared. At the turn of the century, one of the most popular fiction writers was Jack London, whose stories of adventure and danger in the north brought him instant success. Another factor was the increasing wave of immigrants to America from abroad, further whetting the appetite for travel literature with its emphasis on adventures in strange lands among exotic peoples. Towards the end of the century, magazines and newspapers began to realize the importance of these, and many special correspondents were dispatched to the far corners of the globe to write feature stories.

Duncan is very much a part of these trends. He used the adventure story for a large portion of his juvenile fiction, most notably the three books in the Billy Topsail series. In

many respects, these are "westerns" adapted to a new environment: the protagonist (the Newfoundland boy) tackles the enemy repeatedly and successfully, but instead of Indians and outlaws, the antagonists are the sea and its creatures. Duncan also shared the interest in foreign travel, as nearly all of his literary production deals with regions outside the United States.

One can find in Duncan, then, features of the adventure story and the story of local color, both of which were dominant forms in nineteenth century American literature. But on closer examination, one can also find traces in his work of the influences that were beginning to dominate American fiction towards the end of the century. In some of his finest work, such as the stories that comprise The Way of the Sea, he demonstrates a realism that, though mingled with sentimentality and romance, is nevertheless present. The early American realists preferred to pass over the great, the remote, and the romantic for the common and familiar. Duncan's works abound in insights into the lives of ordinary people. Where Duncan differs from the realists is in his attempts to make his ordinary people extraordinary by presenting them with an aura of heroism. Some critics might argue that Duncan cannot be classified a realist because his techniques do not satisfy the demand that they convey the illusion of truth. The presence of the external narrator who interprets as he presents, casts a layer of



unreality on the stories. That does not make them any less effective as works of fiction. But it does put them outside the realist movement in American literature.

There are also suggestions that Duncan was influenced, at least temporarily, by one of the tenets of naturalism: the close relationship between character and "race, moment and milieu." A few of his stories, notably "The Strength of Men" and "The Wayfarer," make a case for social Darwinism, and have much in common with the "tooth and claw" fiction of his contemporary, Jack London, whose depiction of the rough frontier life showed man drawn close to the beasts. However, the fact that such sentiment does not pervade the majority of Duncan's Newfoundland stories leads one to the conclusion that Darwinism was a passing fancy for him, and not a fundamental part of his vision as a writer and interpreter of human nature. Even in his tragic tales, Duncan leaves the reader with an admiration for man and a glorification of his heroic potential. The occasional glimpses of both realism and naturalism show that Duncan was aware of these literary trends and may even have felt the desire to "try them out" in his stories. But essentially Duncan demonstrates a style rooted firmly in the nineteenth century influences of romance, adventure and local color.

In an article dealing with Canadian fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Gordon Roper includes Duncan in a list of "prolific writers" who published volumes of material, but whose production came out of the United States.<sup>19</sup> To account for this significant emigration of Canadian writers, Roper cites the rise in the United States of the popular magazines whose editors were actively seeking writers, creating a writer's market. Duncan, however, was not motivated to migrate to the United States primarily for the purpose of advancing his career. It was the decision of his mother and younger brother to join the oldest son, Robert, in Auburn, N.Y. that prompted Norman to make the move. Only after another move on the part of Robert did Norman Duncan find himself in New York, where he was able to take advantage of the opportunities available for an aspiring writer.

Commenting on Duncan in 1924, Archibald MacMechan wrote: "That Canada has a right to claim [Duncan] as her own is more than doubtful."<sup>20</sup> While it is true that he was born and educated in Ontario, and also that he never did take out

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<sup>19</sup>Gordon Roper, "New Forces: New Fiction 1880-1920," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 268.

<sup>20</sup>Archibald MacMechan, The Headwaters of Canadian Literature (1924; Toronto: Canadiana House, 1968) 214.

American citizenship, all of his serious writing was done while he was living in the United States. Furthermore, very little of this material uses a Canadian context, or what could be perceived as distinctly Canadian themes. The literary influences on him were more American than Canadian. Though he was personally familiar with certain contemporary Canadian writers such as Drummond and Campbell, there is nothing to indicate that any Canadian writer had an influence on his work. Nor was Duncan writing with Canadian readers in mind; his material was directed at an American audience.

On the other hand, several critics and literary historians have included Duncan in their surveys of Canadian literature. Desmond Pacey categorizes him as a writer of the "regional idyll," the dominant form of Canadian prose fiction in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> He groups Duncan with a number of writers whose objectives were "to perpetuate the rural values" and to "inculcate love of their chosen region, pride in its past and a respect for the Victorian ideals in religion and morality."<sup>22</sup> But Duncan differs considerably from many of the regional writers mentioned by Pacey. First of all, while a large proportion of Duncan's literary works are set in what could in broad geographical terms be called a "region" of Canada (although

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<sup>21</sup>Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961) 102.

<sup>22</sup>Pacey, 102-3.

Newfoundland did not join Canada until 1949), nine of his books do not use either Newfoundland or Labrador as their setting. Well over one-third of his total literary production has no connection with Newfoundland whatsoever. Consequently, he does not consistently explore any one region in his works, and cannot be totally identified with a specific area as clearly as can, for example, writers such as Lucy Maud Montgomery or William Henry Drummond.

Regional idylls were for the most part the products of writers who were becoming aware of the artistic possibilities of their own place. Duncan was never prompted to write of his own locality: the areas in which he grew up do not appear in any of his work. The regional idyll was domestic in emphasis, with considerable treatment of young love, the home and the family. While some of Duncan's Newfoundland stories, especially those of his later period, fall into this category, his best work, The Way of the Sea, is quite different. Unlike the writers of regional idylls, who viewed their localities from within, Duncan sought out new horizons and wrote as an outsider. Newfoundland for Duncan was not an escape but a discovery. It was the primitive rather than the idyllic that drew his most powerful responses. He was a writer who sought out unfamiliar regions that had potential for imaginative literature, and interpreted those regions with a sense of wonder and awe that is absent from the majority of regional writers. While he was not predominantly

a writer of the idyll, Duncan nevertheless has to be classed as a regional writer. He has to be seen as part of a trend in Canada that had its counterpart in the local color movement in the United States.

Because he is the interpreter of many regions rather than just one, he does not share the major weaknesses that characterize many of the regional writers. Fred Cogswell identifies one of these weaknesses as a tendency to parochialism arising from a lack of "adequate knowledge and experience of at least one other region."<sup>23</sup> Because Duncan's regions are many, he brings to bear on each a universality that is not always associated with regional fiction. This fact has been recognized by at least one critic, who credits Duncan with successfully balancing the local and the universal in his stories of Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>24</sup> According to Desmond Pacey, another major fault of the regionalist movement was that

Instead of challenging the values of the new industrial society, these writers ignored its existence. Instead of seeking to show how the old ideals could be adapted to the needs of a new generation, they sought merely to turn the clock back.<sup>25</sup>

However, Duncan can hardly be accused of trying to "turn the clock back." There is no suggestion in any of his better

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<sup>23</sup>Fred Cogswell, "Introduction," The Atlantic Anthology Vol 1: Prose (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1984) 6.

<sup>24</sup>William H. Magee, "Local Colour in Canadian Fiction," University of Toronto Quarterly 28 (January 1959): 186.

<sup>25</sup>Pacey, 103.

fiction that he was recommending the way of life that he found in Newfoundland. Finally, regional writers have been accused of failing to give the reader an honest account of the life of their region.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, much of Duncan's Newfoundland and Labrador material comprises sentimental romance and adventure, but in the stories in The Way of the Sea he achieves a realism that is quite alien to the works of many of the regionalist writers.

While there is no evidence of any direct influence on Duncan by contemporary Canadian authors, there are striking similarities between Duncan and one regional writer of the early twentieth century, Ralph Connor. Connor's works in turn are reminiscent of the stories of Harte, with his stereotypical characters. But Connor brings to his fiction a "muscular Christianity" rooted in a conviction that the simple virtues of his native Glengarry could be readily transferred to the new communities of the West. His works present virile, dedicated men of God, fighting against the evils of gambling, drinking and swearing. The crusading moralism behind his novels was one of the main reasons for their popularity in the first two decades of this century, at which time he was Canada's most widely read author.

The parallel with Duncan can be observed in The Measure of a Man. Whether Duncan knew Connor or had even read his earlier novels is not known. However, it appears that they

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<sup>26</sup>See Pacey, 103.

shared a similar experience that helped to shape one of their novels. Both visited the lumber camps of Northern Minnesota and met Francis Higgins. As indicated earlier, Duncan modelled the protagonist of The Measure of a Man, John Fairmeadow, on Higgins, and it has been suggested that at least one of Connor's heroes was the product of his admiration for the same Higgins.<sup>27</sup> Duncan differs from Connor, however, in one major respect. Connor provides much more specific information about the everyday life of people in his region, while Duncan's emphasis, at least in his better works, is on the more heroic qualities that arise as a result of man's confrontation with the elements. In fact, Duncan's handling of the opposition between man and his environment provides a glimpse of what would be a major factor in later Canadian fiction by writers such as Frederick Philip Grove. Solomon Stride, who through heroic efforts withstands years of famine and deprivation only to have his efforts thwarted repeatedly by nature, is a forerunner of Abe Spalding, the protagonist of Grove's Fruits of the Earth (1933). Again, one can see Duncan as part of the period of transition to realism.

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<sup>27</sup>This suggestion was made in a letter to the writer of this dissertation by J.C. Ryan, Minnesota Logging Historian with the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth. His source seems to have been Harold T. Hagg, "The Lumberjacks' Sky Pilot," Minnesota History 31 (June 1950): 77. Hagg suggests that Higgins was the prototype for the hero of The Man from Glengarry.

Duncan's permanent place is in the literary history of Newfoundland. A native Newfoundland literature was very slow in developing, a reflection of retarded growth in a number of other areas. Consequently, very little of the imaginative literature of the nineteenth century that used Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders was written by local authors.<sup>28</sup> The New Priest in Conception Bay (1858), by Robert Traill Spence Lowell, was the first novel based on prolonged firsthand experience of life in Newfoundland. The book presents a number of significant successes: a response to the rugged, primordial beauty of the landscape, a sense of Newfoundland humor, and occasional glimpses into the lives of ordinary Newfoundlanders. Lowell was also the first novelist to attempt to duplicate in print a variety of Newfoundland dialects.<sup>29</sup> However, in spite of these successes, the novel uses Newfoundland merely as a backdrop for "higher themes,"

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<sup>28</sup>For a synopsis of nineteenth century Newfoundland writing, see Patrick O'Flaherty, "Writing in Newfoundland," The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983) 548-52.

<sup>29</sup>For a discussion of this novel, see Patrick O'Flaherty, "Introduction," The New Priest in Conception Bay by R.T.S. Lowell (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974). A study of the use of Newfoundland dialect in the novel has been done by Philip Hiscock, "Dialect Representation in R.T.S. Lowell's novel, The New Priest in Conception Bay," in Languages in Newfoundland and Labrador, ed. Harold Paddock (Memorial University of Newfoundland: Dept. of Linguistics, 1977) 81-89.



and the main characters, who dominate most of the book, are "highly improbable residents of an outpost."<sup>30</sup>

During the last half of the nineteenth century, Newfoundland frequently appears in works of fiction written by outsiders who had either visited the island or who were drawn to its remoteness and primitive appeal. Newfoundland attracted the attention of a number of writers, both English and American. Winfrid A. Stearns's Wrecked on Labrador (1888), for example, is an adventure story, based to a great extent on personal experiences, which includes some insights into the style of life of local inhabitants. The emphasis, however, is not on realism, but adventure: boys are seen exploring caves, unloading a wreck, and being rescued from various dangers. The main characters are Americans who have come to Newfoundland in search of adventure and excitement. The confrontations with nature are exciting, and the ending is predictably happy. There is no attempt to show the local residents as products of their environment, or to show the tragic consequences of the continuous confrontations between man and nature. The book is similar to another account written by an American, Left on Labrador (1873) by C.A. Stephens, a narrative of a voyage to Labrador undertaken by a group of men who set out from Maine.

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<sup>30</sup>O'Flaherty, "Introduction," The New Priest in Conception Bay, 4.

In 1889 R.M. Ballantyne, a prolific English writer of sea stories, wrote The Crew of the Water Wagtail. Set in the sixteenth century, the story tells of a ship that set out from Bristol, was driven off course by winds, and landed on a remote coast of Newfoundland. The sailors have a series of adventures including meetings with natives, a mutiny among the group, an encounter with a giant squid, and a meeting with a white hunter who had spent years in the wilderness. The book contains all the ingredients of an action-packed adventure novel. The Newfoundland setting is merely a convenient location for a romanticized tale. There is very little realism in either episode or description; indeed, many of the descriptions of the environment are romanticized. The island of Newfoundland figures once again in the setting of Captains Courageous (1897) by Rudyard Kipling. But again, the novel is concerned with Newfoundland (actually the Grand Banks off the south coast of Newfoundland) only as a convenient setting. The story could have taken place in a number of other locations with the same effect. There is nothing uniquely "Newfoundland" about it.

There is no way of knowing whether Duncan had read any of these accounts. There are obvious similarities between some of Duncan's work and the stories of these early writers, most notably in the Billy Topsail stories which resemble in episode and treatment the narratives of Stearns and Ballantyne. However, Duncan's better works differ markedly in that they

provide a far greater depth of perception into the local inhabitants. The setting and characters are not merely incidental backdrops, but rather are the essence of the stories. The stories in The Way of the Sea in particular explore areas not even suggested in these earlier adventure books. In the representation of Newfoundland in fiction, Duncan broke new ground.

Duncan also had considerable success incorporating dialect into his stories, a technique that none of the writers since Lowell had employed to any great extent. As was the case with Lowell, Duncan uses dialect out of a desire to inject local color into his stories rather than from a scientific interest in linguistics. The author who employs dialect in literature is, of course, not a linguist. Rather, he attempts to duplicate a dialect by picking out certain features of it and blending them into the speech of his characters. Duncan had used a local dialect in his earliest stories, The Soul of the Street, but there his attempts were limited to phonetic duplication of pronunciation. In his Newfoundland stories, he expands this. His attempts to duplicate the Newfoundland dialect, while possibly not as intricate as Lowell's had been, are quite significant. A close examination reveals that he was conscious of a number of features of the dialect. On occasions, he only imitates the sounds of the accent used by the residents of those parts of the coast that he visited: "iss" for "yes"; "goa"

for "go"; "zur" for "sir." At other times, he captures the grammatical irregularities of local speech in phrases such as "you be," "you is," "him and me is," and "afraid of he." His ear was successful as well in picking up much of the local idiom, and his Newfoundland stories abound in Newfoundland words and phrases: for example, "broose," "barbarous," "bay-noddie," "bogey-stove," "copying," and "droch."<sup>31</sup>

Duncan sometimes draws a distinction between characters through their dialect. This can be best observed in Doctor Luke of the Labrador. The narrator speaks in standard English, even though he was born and raised in Newfoundland. He has been "away" for a number of years, and is telling the story from the vantage point of wisdom and sophistication. However, when he recounts his own conversations as a boy, the narrator employs the local dialect. All of the characters except Doctor Luke use the local speech. There is, however, some inconsistency with Mrs. Roth, Davy's mother, who originally came from the United States. Most of the time she speaks in a slightly more cultivated language, but at other times, as can be expected in such a circumstance, she slips into the dialect. Duncan employs dialect in all of his Newfoundland and Labrador stories, but it is generally not overdone. Exceptions to this are The Best of a Bad Job, which is

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<sup>31</sup>For the meanings of these words, see George M. Story, William J. Kirwin, & John D. Widdowson (eds), Dictionary of Newfoundland English (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

narrated in dialect by a local fisherman, and the three Syrian stories in the volume Every Man for Himself, in which the dialects of the Syrian Quarter of Manhattan and the northeast coast of Newfoundland are mixed. In these works, Duncan comes close to that use of dialect that many of the critics of the local color movement in the United States found excessive and obtrusive.

Duncan not only had a reasonably good ear for the speech of the local residents; he also carried away with him bits and pieces of local folklore, many of which found their way into his stories. The Way of the Sea and Doctor Luke of the Labrador contain a number of fragments of songs, riddles and other lore which form part of Newfoundland's great folk heritage.<sup>32</sup> Thus Duncan can be credited with assisting in the important process of preserving in print an essentially oral tradition. Indeed, one Newfoundland folklorist has drawn attention to the fact that one of the song fragments recorded in The Way of the Sea is its earliest extant printed version.<sup>33</sup>

Duncan was not the only writer producing Newfoundland fiction during the first two decades of this century. A fellow Canadian, Theodore G. Roberts, wrote Brothers of

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<sup>32</sup>See, for example, The Way of the Sea, 13, 17, 274, and 275.

<sup>33</sup>The fragment in question is "Lukie's punt were painted green" (The Way of the Sea, 274). Neil Rosenberg, letter to George Casey, n.d., EMP.

Peril (1905) and The Harbor Master (1912). Writing of The Harbor Master, Desmond Pacey comments that Roberts belonged with a group of Canadian writers, including Gilbert Parker and William Kirby, who agreed that

a novel should have a strong and intricate plot, that it should contain striking and deliberately contrasting characters, that it should have a setting remote or exotic either in space or time, that it should create an atmosphere of suspenseful apprehension, and that in the end the apprehensions should be relieved and the harmony of men and nature restored.<sup>34</sup>

Roberts succeeds in capturing the atmosphere of a bleak and rugged setting, and also attempts the Newfoundland dialect. His delineations of characters in his fictitious settlement of Chance Along, and their relationship with the rugged coast and the sea, are more authentic than anything in Ballantyne and Stearns. But his portrayals have a violence in them, an occasional gruesome touch, that is not as dominant in Duncan. Like Duncan, Roberts spent some time living in Newfoundland and attempted to write from firsthand experience. But his stories lack the intensity and the powerful didacticism of many of those of Duncan. His attempt at the dialect is not as successful, and there is not as profound an insight into the everyday lives of Newfoundlanders.

Another writer of the day was J.B. Connolly, author of The Crested Seas (1907), a series of stories set in Newfoundland, or more accurately, off the west coast of the island. The

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<sup>34</sup>Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," The Harbor Master by Theodore G. Roberts (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968) 10.

heroes are not Newfoundlanders, but fishermen out of Gloucester in New England who came annually to these waters to fish. While this and his other books on a similar subject give a vivid picture of the life and work of these American fishermen, they provide no insight into Newfoundland or Newfoundlanders. Once again, Newfoundland is nothing more than the exotic, faraway setting intended to attract American readers. While Duncan, then, was not the only writer of the period who used Newfoundland and Labrador as literary settings, he was probably the best.

How did Newfoundlanders of the day respond to Norman Duncan? His books were available in local bookstores, and there were occasional references to him in the St. John's newspapers. One item of interest is the following account of a debate that took place in St. John's in 1907, the topic of which was Duncan:

The weekly meeting of St. Andrew's Literary Association was held Thursday night in the Presbyterian Hall, Mr. D. Nicolson, presiding. The subject for discussion was: "Does Norman Duncan rightly interpret the Newfoundland spirit?" Mr. P.K. McLeod led for the affirmative, being supported by Mr. A. Jackson. The negative was upheld by Messrs A. Bryden and K. Blair. The other speakers were Rev. Dr. Robertson, Messrs Charles, Brown, Rouger, Young, McIntyre, McDougall, Frew, Spurrell, and Capt. Linklater. Upon the vote being taken the affirmative won by a majority of six.<sup>35</sup>

Duncan's works are also an aid to Newfoundlanders of the present day who are anxious to see themselves, not only

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<sup>35</sup>"An Interesting Debate," Daily News [St. John's] 16 March 1907: 1.

as they were in the past, but as they were perceived. No other outsider has ever come as close to giving an accurate representation of outport Newfoundlanders as Duncan. Some of his essays on Newfoundland and Labrador, especially those that comprise the middle chapters of Dr. Grenfell's Parish, are invaluable sources of information about life around the turn of the century. There also exists a large number of photographs, some of which Duncan used in his articles and books.<sup>36</sup> While one can argue whether Duncan has earned a permanent place in the literary history of the United States or even of Canada, there is no doubt about his central position in the annals of Newfoundland literature.

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<sup>36</sup>Duncan's collection of photographs is in the Norman Duncan Collection.



## CHAPTER 10

## NORMAN DUNCAN: THE MAN AND THE WRITER

It is impossible to separate Norman Duncan the man from Norman Duncan the writer. Writing was indeed his life, and that writing was essentially enriched by the events of his own life. As an artist he fed on personal experiences for inspiration, and his writing reflects the concerns that were closest to his heart.

What kind of man and writer, then, was Duncan? The tributes published after his death and the comments made by his friends and acquaintances suggest that he was a sensitive, generous man who was loyal to his family. Lawren Harris described him as "a lovable, considerate, gentle character, and a fine companion."<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie King called him "as tender-hearted as he was sensitive, and as loyal in his friendships as he was generous."<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Grenfell asserted that "All who love men of tender, responsive imagination loved Duncan."<sup>3</sup> Andrew Macphail wrote that while Duncan was living in New York, "he spent all he earned, not upon himself, but in

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in O.J. Stevenson, "The Boy Eternal," 253.

<sup>2</sup>Mackenzie King, letter to S. Edgar Briggs, 10 June 1918, MKC.

<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "Norman Duncan: An Appreciation," Battles Royal Down North, 6.

works of charity and mercy."<sup>4</sup> But one comment stands out above the rest. Arthur Cary, who was probably as close to Duncan as anyone else during the last two years of his life, once referred to him as "a tortured soul."<sup>5</sup>

From what is known of both Duncan the man and Duncan the writer, it is possible to reconstruct a complex personality. Biographical evidence points to several traits: a fondness for young boys, an exceptionally close relationship with his mother, a strong emotional dependency on his family, an attraction to masculine heroes, the absence of relationships with women, and a growing dependence on alcohol. Each of these traits finds its way into his writing, for Duncan was, first and foremost, a writer who did not attempt to separate his own concerns from the events and characters of his fiction.

Duncan's interest in or attraction to young boys exhibits itself in a variety of ways in his life: his befriending of a young actor in Toronto; his association with Gordon Grahame in Brooklyn; the close companionship with Joe Manuel; and his taking responsibility for two wards, Marcellus Gray and Arthur Cary. This pattern suggests the possibility of homosexuality. While there is no concrete evidence to support

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<sup>4</sup>Andrew Macphail, "Norman Duncan: Biography," Unpublished ms, [1924], 4. This manuscript is part of the Macphail Papers, Manuscript Group 30 D 150, vol 5, file 9, PAC.

<sup>5</sup>Arthur Cary, letter to Susan Duncan, 8 January 1978, SDP.

such a theory, the attraction that boys had for him points at least to the possibility of a latent homosexuality. Further support for this can be drawn from the fact that Duncan's own personal "heroes" were men, strong and masculine: Wilfred Grenfell and Francis Higgins. Turning to his writing, one can readily find examples of relationships between young boys and older men, though once again there is never any suggestion of physical encounters. Duncan's first short story, "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," deals with a young boy who is befriended by an older man. Several similar relationships occur throughout his fiction. Doctor Luke of the Labrador centers on one such friendship; the motivating force behind old Nicholas Top of The Cruise of the Shining Light is his love for the young boy that he has adopted; and in The Adventures of Billy Topsail, Bobby Lot is adopted after his mother's death by an older fisherman. But closer examination of these relationships suggests another possibility: that Duncan is exploring his own self. In many respects, he was always a boy, relying emotionally first on his mother and after her death on his brothers. He was a boy looking for heroes. In many of the relationships between boys and men in his fiction, Duncan is actually portraying men who are surrogate fathers, and is possibly compensating for the loss of his own father. For example, in Doctor Luke of the Labrador, Davy Roth finds in the doctor the emotional support he needs to help him accept his mother's death. At the end

of the novel, Dr. Luke takes on the role of father, not only to the son that is born to Bessie but, symbolically, to Davy himself. Doctor Luke is in a way the ideal father that Duncan himself might have wished to have, one who could have helped him over the loss of his mother (which occurred while the book was being written) and one who demonstrated those qualities of strength and zeal that Duncan as a man so much admired. Similarly in other stories inadequate fathers are replaced: Dannie in The Cruise of the Shining Light finds his symbolic father in Nicholas Top, and John Fairmeadow in The Measure of a Man becomes both the adoptive father of Pattie's baby and the spiritual father of the entire logging community; Nazareth Lute's father in "In the Fear of the Lord" died mad, leaving his son a legacy of distorted religion; Pattie Batch's father, a drunk, dies leaving her to fend for herself in a man's world.

Coupled with this recurring theme of inadequate fatherhood is the presence of mothers. With very few exceptions, the mothers in Duncan's fiction demonstrate the traditional traits of motherhood: warmth, comfort and caring. The relationships between Davy Roth and his mother in Doctor Luke of the Labrador, and between Dickie and Millie Slade in The Mother, have already been noted. In those fictional situations where a child is without the benefit of a mother, a substitute is invariably found: the orphans in the Suitable Child and The Measure of a Man find mothers; the woman with

whom Dannie in The Cruise of the Shining Light falls in love fills the void in his life created by the absence of a mother; Davy's sister in Doctor Luke of the Labrador marries his substitute father. In all of Duncan's major fiction, such parental relationships are central, again reflecting the importance that Duncan himself placed on them in his own life.

What may be disturbing to the modern reader is the sensuousness with which Duncan describes the relationships between mothers and sons, most notably in Doctor Luke of the Labrador and The Mother, the two novels that were directly influenced by the death of Duncan's own mother. There are moments when one detects a strong physical attachment between the fictitious mother and son. Whether these are simply the result of Duncan's outpouring of his own grief or, more profoundly, suggestive of an oedipal tendency in his personality, cannot be determined.

There is no doubt that Duncan was a religious man: the frequent recurrence of the themes of sin and redemption, as well as a fascination for characters who in one way or another are religious fanatics, strengthens the view that he considered religion important. Duncan was brought up a Presbyterian. Of the three central doctrines of Presbyterianism -- original sin, predestination, and election -- the only dominant one in his fiction is original sin. His obsession with sin and redemption, however, can be attributed as much to the circumstances of his own life as to his Presbyterian

faith. There is a marked increase in the delineation of heroes with sinful pasts and drinking problems after 1903, by which time evidence suggests that Duncan was beginning to succumb to alcoholism. There is the sinful past of the hero of Doctor Luke of the Labrador, the sinful present of Nicholas Top in The Cruise of the Shining Light, and the conversion of John Fairmeadow of The Measure of a Man from a Bowery drunkard to a man of God. Sin and redemption figure strongly in Duncan's shorter novels: Millie Slade in The Mother is saved from a life of abandonment to promiscuity, while James Falcontent in Finding His Soul discovers peace for his troubled soul (as Duncan himself might very well have tried to find) in a journey to the Holy Land. Accompanying these episodes of sin are strong feelings of guilt on the part of the characters concerned, again reflecting not only Duncan's Presbyterianism but his own personal anguish. The association of drinking with sin frequently occurs in his fiction. The mother in Doctor Luke of the Labrador succumbs to her illness because the government doctor will not leave his drinking to come to her aid. The havoc that alcohol can wreak on a mother-son relationship is also illustrated in The Measure of a Man, in the story of the lumberjack who squanders on liquor the money he has saved for a visit home to his mother.

Perhaps the most interesting exploration of religion is to be found in his short stories based on Newfoundland. In the small, isolated coastal settlements, Duncan found perceptions

of God that were totally foreign to his own religious upbringing. The Old Testament God of fear and wrath which dominated the faith of many of these people, their primitive practices of faith-healing, and the strong fundamentalism that prevailed in both their beliefs and practices were a source of amazement for Duncan, raised on the Presbyterian view of a God of love. Duncan clearly identified with those characters who saw the deity in terms of his own faith:

[God] is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.<sup>6</sup>

But rather than impose his own religious teaching on the people he wrote about, Duncan attempted to present them as they were.

What emerges from Duncan's life and works, then, is the portrait of a troubled man. According to his niece, Susan Duncan:

he was far from happy himself. I feel quite sure that the reasons he never married were -- first because of the responsibility he felt toward his mother and younger brother, then his interest in travel, and then the reason most of all was because of his drinking problem.<sup>7</sup>

His desire to be with his family suggests more than simple attachment to loved ones. It suggests an inability to establish emotional independence, a problem no doubt compounded by his

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<sup>6</sup>Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, n.d.) 441.

<sup>7</sup>Susan Duncan, letter to Arthur Cary, 21 January 1978, SDP.

reliance on alcohol. His love of travel temporarily satisfied his restlessness, and may be attributed at least in part to the fact that he had no sense of "roots" himself. Throughout his life, as in his childhood, he was frequently on the move; consequently, one gets no sense in any of his works of "his own" place. He seems to have been happiest when actively engaged in meeting new people and discovering new places.

He was, then, in many respects "a tortured soul." Yet at the same time, he was an individual whose life made a difference to those who knew him. Not an unkind word against him is recorded. Everyone who knew him spoke highly of his love for his family, his generosity to those in need, and his sensitivity to all humanity. He was especially interested in the lives of ordinary people, and, while he was never actively involved in politics, there is a strong democratic element in his writing. His opposition to tyranny and his support of personal freedoms are central themes in his stories of the New York Syrian Quarter. His resentment of the indifference towards the outports on the part of the central government in Newfoundland is made clear in several of his essays and stories. In "The Codfishers of Newfoundland," he criticizes the neglect of the fishermen on the part of merchants and politicians in the city; in the concluding paragraph of "The Strength of Men" in The Way of the Sea, the narrator shows a controlled anger at the profit motive of St. John's merchants. The theme arises again in the treatment of the uncaring



government appointed doctor in Doctor Luke of the Labrador. And in his novel, The Cruise of the Shining Light, there is a corrupt politician, ironically referred to as "the Honorable." But Duncan was not much interested in politics. While he worked briefly as a teacher, and turned down at least one offer of government employment, he was first and foremost a writer. Writing was not just a hobby; it was his life.

Duncan's strengths as a writer lie in his short fiction and his documentary essays. It is in his longer works that one encounters his somewhat irritating habit of piecing together as a book a collection of previously published segments. Of his 20 books, only one, The Mother, was composed of entirely original material. Some of his books were nothing more than anthologies of previously published stories or essays, even though the impression was given that they were new works. In fact, all but about 20 of his 143 magazine pieces appeared again in some form in books. This practice of rehashing earlier pieces suggests, among other things, that he felt more at home in the shorter modes of story and essay than in the novel. The journalist's habits of writing short pieces quickly, and then looking back to see what could be used again, stayed with Duncan and to a great extent damaged his art. Consequently, there is little development in Duncan as a writer after 1903, the year he published his finest work, The Way of the Sea. While the expansion of subject matter after that time is considerable,

Duncan showed little inclination to explore new techniques; nor is there any evidence of further intellectual growth in the writer. However, the impressive nature of the craft exhibited in the stories in The Way of the Sea, along with that of several essays from this early period, makes Norman Duncan a writer worthy of consideration.

Even though Duncan is not regarded as a major figure in the literary history of either the United States or Canada, he is nonetheless a writer of merit. Undoubtedly his greatest contribution is to the literature of Newfoundland. Had Duncan never visited Newfoundland and Labrador, he might have gone completely unnoticed. But the strong impressions that were formed on his mind as a result of those visits produced literary representations that "probed into our [Newfoundlanders'] relation with the sea as brilliantly as it has ever been done."<sup>3</sup> In spite of the uneven quality of his work after The Way of the Sea and his early essays on Newfoundland and Labrador, Norman Duncan deserves recognition as a writer of significance whose contribution to the literary history of Newfoundland is substantial.

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<sup>3</sup>Cyril F. Poole, "The Soul of a Newfoundlander," in In Search of the Newfoundland Soul (St. John's, Nfld.: Harry Cuff Publications, 1982) 92.

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Battles Royal Down North. With an Appreciation by Wilfred Grenfell. New York: Revell, 1918. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

Harbor Tales Down North. With an Appreciation by Wilfred Grenfell. New York: Revell, 1918. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

## 2. Chronological list of Norman Duncan's contributions to periodicals.

"In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran." Atlantic Monthly 85 (February 1900): 255-61.

"The Greatest Player in All the World." Ainslee's 5 (April 1900): 206-13.

"The Lamp of Liberty." Atlantic Monthly 85 (May 1900): 649-56.

"For the Hand of Haleem." Atlantic Monthly 86 (September 1900): 347-55.

- "The Under Shepherd." Ainslee's 6 (September 1900): 129-37.
- "The Spirit of Revolution." McClure's 15 (September 1900): 466-73.
- "The Chase of the Tide." McClure's 17 (August 1901): 307-16.
- "In Remote Newfoundland." Ainslee's 8 (December 1901): 428-35.
- "Newfoundlanders of the Outports." Outing 39 (December 1901): 271-8.
- "From Him that Hath Not." Collier's Weekly 28 (28 December 1901): 13-4.
- "'Tween Earth and Sky." Youth's Companion 76 (9 January 1902): 17.
- "A Dog of Ruddy Cove." Youth's Companion 76 (16 January 1902): 29.
- "Astray in the Night." Youth's Companion 76 (27 February 1902): 105.
- "The Raging of the Sea." McClure's 18 (March 1902): 433-41.
- "The Spell of the Desolation." Ainslee's 9 (June 1902): 413-20.
- "The Fruits of Toil." McClure's 19 (July 1902): 257-62.
- "The Cutting Out of the 'Heavenly Home'." Ainslee's 9 (July 1902): 529-37.
- "In the Fear of the Lord." Atlantic Monthly 90 (August 1902): 145-56.
- "Of The Real Sea." Outing 40 (August 1902): 590-6.
- "Concerning Billy Luff and Master Goodchild." Ainslee's 10 (September 1902): 125-32.
- "Hunting the Seal from the Outports." Outing 41 (October 1902): 91-9.
- "The Healer from Far-Away Cove." Harper's 105 (October 1902): 669-76.
- "Halfyard's Mutiny." Ainslee's 10 (November 1902): 114-21.

- "The Schooner and the Iceberg." Youth's Companion 77 (22 January 1903): 37-8.
- "The Longest Way Home." Youth's Companion 77 (19 February 1903): 89.
- "A People from the East." Harper's 106 (March 1903): 553-62.
- "On the Face of the Cliff." Youth's Companion 77 (2 April 1903): 161.
- "The Tenement Book and Reader." Harper's 107 (June 1903): 100-106.
- "The Codfishers of Newfoundland." World's Work 6 (July 1903): 3617-38.
- "Ol' Tom Tulk." Ainslee's 12 (August 1903): 149-55.
- "The Fur Trader's Story." Youth's Companion 77 (20 August 1903): 389.
- "The Strength of Men." McClure's 21 (September 1903): 532-42.
- "A Beat t' Harbor." Harper's 107 (September 1903): 614-25.
- "A Point of Honor." Youth's Companion 77 (22 October 1903): 489-90.
- "A Yarn of the Old 'Can't Help It'." Youth's Companion 77 (29 October 1903): 541.
- "Breath of the North." McClure's 22 (November 1903): 44-52.
- "Santa Claus at Lonely Cove." Atlantic Monthly 92 (December 1903): 742-9.
- "A Tube of Nitroglycerine." Youth's Companion 77 (24 December 1903): 649.
- "The Yarn of the 'Sink or Swim'." Harper's 108 (February 1904): 444-52.
- "The Labrador Liveyere." Harper's 108 (March 1904): 514-23.
- "The Fleet on 'The Labrador'." Harper's 108 (May 1904): 856-67.
- "In the Offshore Gale." Youth's Companion 78 (9 June 1904): 277-8.

- "Our Harbor." Outlook 77 (6 August 1904): 846-53.
- "The Giant Squid of Chain Tickle." Youth's Companion 78 (1 September 1904): 404-5.
- "The Chase of the Finback Whale." Outing 44 (September 1904): 679-85.
- "Grenfell of the Medical Mission." Harper's 110 (December 1904): 28-37.
- "A Bearer of Tidings." Youth's Companion 79 (13 July 1905): 333-4.
- "A Romance of Whooping Harbor." Harper's 111 (July 1905): 268-74.
- "The Dream of Nageeb Fiani." Canadian Magazine 25 (July 1905): 241-3.
- "The Wreck of the 'Will o'the Wisp'." Canadian Magazine 25 (August 1905): 330-8.
- "Halfyard's Mutiny." Canadian Magazine 25 (September 1905): 433-9. [Identical to story of same title published in Ainslee's 10 (November 1902): 114-21.]
- "The Fool of Skeleton Tickle." Outlook 81 (23 September 1905): 229-33.
- "The Boss of the Gang." Canadian Magazine 25 (October 1905): 506-15.
- "Her Majesty's Mail." Youth's Companion 80 (25 January 1906): 37-8.
- "They Who Lose at Love." Harper's 112 (February 1906): 338-46.
- "Stout Hearts and Red Decks (1)." Youth's Companion 80 (28 June 1906): 320-1.
- "Stout Hearts and Red Decks (2)." Youth's Companion 80 (5 July 1906): 329-30.
- "Stout Hearts and Red Decks (3)." Youth's Companion 80 (12 July 1906): 341-2.
- "Stout Hearts and Red Decks (4)." Youth's Companion 80 (19 July 1906): 349-50.

- "Every Man for Himself." Harper's 113 (July 1906): 255-63.
- "The Wayfarer." Atlantic Monthly 98 (August 1906): 145-56.
- "Cast Away on Feather's Folly." Cosmopolitan 41 (August 1906): 353-60.
- "The Ninety-ninth Notch." Harper's 114 (March 1907): 633-40.
- "A Comedy of Candlestick Cove." Harper's 114 (May 1907): 954-64.
- "The Revolution at Satan's Trap." Century 74 (June 1907): 185-97.
- "The Cure of Fear." Youth's Companion 81 (12 September 1907): 421-2.
- "The Cure of Hezekiah." Harper's 115 (November 1907): 940-5.
- "A Lad o'Wits." Youth's Companion 82 (6 February 1908): 61-2.
- "A Dog with a Bad Name." Outing 51 (March 1908): 705-8.
- "The Surplus." Harper's 116 (April 1908): 749-59.
- "The Squall." Harper's 116 (May 1908): 826-36.
- "The Minstrel." Harper's 117 (June 1908): 29-37.
- "Riding Down to Egypt." Harper's 117 (July 1908): 165-74.
- "'By-an'-By' Brown of Blunder Cove." Harper's 117 (September 1908): 526-34.
- "In Camp at Bir El-Abd." Harper's 117 (October 1908): 651-61.
- "The Camel Trader from Ain El Kaum." Harper's 117 (November 1908): 918-28.
- "One Day's Adventures." Harper's 118 (December 1908): 133-44.
- "The Diwan of Ahmed Ased-Ullah." Harper's 118 (January 1909): 198-209.
- "A Skeikh of et-Tih." Harper's 118 (February 1909): 449-58.



- "Breaking Camp at Kantara." Harper's 118 (March 1909): 516-29.
- "Beyond Beersheba." Harper's 118 (April 1909): 782-94.
- "A Chance in a Million." Youth's Companion 83 (22 April 1909): 193-4.
- "Higgins: A Man's Christian." Harper's 119 (July 1909): 165-79.
- "The Suitable Child." Harper's 119 (September 1909): 511-20.
- "The Little Romance." Harper's 119 (November 1909): 841-53.
- "The Questing Veteran." Harper's 120 (January 1910): 245-52.
- "The Carpet of Ali Hassan." Youth's Companion 84 (14 April 1910): 193-4.
- "The Sympathetic Part." Harper's 120 (May 1910): 858-65.
- "The Fate of the 'First Venture'." Youth's Companion 84 (23 June 1910): 321-2.
- "With That Measure of Love." Harper's 121 (September 1910): 579-89.
- "The Judgment of John Fairmeadow." Harper's 121 (October 1910): 717-25.
- "Youngsters of the Seven Seas." Harper's 122 (December 1910): 126-36.
- "John Fairmeadow's Foundling." Harper's 122 (January 1911): 298-308.
- "The Regenerate." Century 81 (January 1911): 439-45.
- "A Stitch in Time." Harper's 122 (February 1911): 463-70.
- "Flying to Cuba." Harper's Weekly 55 (18 February 1911): 8-9.
- "The Ordination of John Fairmeadow." Outlook 97 (25 March 1911): 649-59.
- "Small Sam Small." Harper's 122 (April 1911): 736-47.
- "A Father for the Baby." Harper's 122 (May 1911): 933-42.

- "The Miracle at Pale Peter's." Harper's 123 (July 1911): 239-47.
- "The Best of a Bad Job." Harper's 124 (February 1912): 410-18.
- "The Lower Animal." Harper's 124 (April 1912): 752-8.
- "The Black Pawn." Harper's 125 (July 1912): 264-70.
- "A Lee Shore off Soap-an'-Water." Century 84 (July 1912): 455-60.
- "A Madonna of Tinkle Tickle." Atlantic Monthly 110 (November 1912): 615-23.
- "A Croesus of Gingerbread Cove." Harper's 125 (November 1912): 862-8.
- "The Animal Shop." Harper's 126 (December 1912): 79-91.
- "A God in Israel." Harper's 126 (January 1913): 165-75.
- "The Art of Terry Lute." Century 85 (January 1913): 397-404.
- "All The Way to Fremantle." Harper's 127 (October 1913): 651-64.
- "Australian Bypaths: Neighbors of the Golden Mile." Harper's 127 (November 1913): 849-61.
- "Australian Bypaths: The Heart of the Jarrah Bush." Harper's 128 (December 1913): 123-36.
- "Australian Bypaths: A Day or Two in the Dry-Lands." Harper's 128 (January 1914): 209-22.
- "A Trooper of the Outlands." Harper's 128 (February 1914): 421-33.
- "A Night in the Open." Harper's 128 (March 1914): 591-603.
- "Booked Through." Harper's 129 (September 1914): 508-21.
- "Forty Mile Inn." Harper's 129 (November 1914): 899-912.
- "Cannibal Country." Harper's 130 (January 1915): 279-91.
- "Shipmates of the Coral Sea." Harper's 130 (February 1915): 425-37.

- "Thursday's Island." Harper's 130 (April 1915): 748-61.
- "Sorcerer's Work." Harper's 130 (May 1915): 922-34.
- "A Hypothetical Case." Harper's 131 (June 1915): 118-23.
- "Battle Royal." Saturday Evening Post 188 (3 July 1915): 5-7,57-8.
- "A Nice Little Morsel o' Dog Meat." Saturday Evening Post 188 (16 October 1915): 6-9,53-62.
- "A Point of Honor." Harper's 131 (November 1915): 914-20.
- "A Certain Recipient." Harper's 132 (December 1915): 104-12.
- "The Last Shot in the Locker." Saturday Evening Post 189 (25 March 1916): 6-8,73-4.
- "The Doctor of Afternoon Arm." Ladies' Home Journal 33 (April 1916): 15,101-5.
- "The Little Fiddler of Amen Is and." Every Week 2 (24 April 1916): 5-7.
- "The Wreck of the Rough-an'-Tumble." Red Book 27 (July 1916): 433-42.
- "Huskie Dog." Saturday Evening Post 189 (1 July 1916): 14-15,61-2.
- "The Last Lucifer." Saturday Evening Post 189 (8 July 1916): 14-16,42-50.
- "Two Men of Linger Tickle." Ladies' Home Journal 33 (July 1916): 23,44-5.
- "White Water." Red Book 27 (August 1916): 761-71.
- "The Law in His Own Hands." Saturday Evening Post 189 (2 September 1916): 15-17,52-4.
- "Snow Blind." Saturday Evening Post 189 (16 September 1916): 11-12,69-70.
- "Madman's Luck." Every Week 3 (16 October 1916): 7-10.
- "The Siren of Scalawag Run." Delineator 89 (November 1916): 8-9.

- "The Red Koran." Delineator 89 (December 1916): 6-7.
- "The Affair of Ha-Ha Shallow." Red Book 28 (December 1916): 255-65.
- "A Little Nipper o' Hide-an'-Seek Harbor." Pictorial Review May 1917: 16-18, 40.
- "The Little Drover and the Dependable Uncle." Delineator 90 (May 1917): 13, 48.
- "Mohammed of the Lion Heart." Delineator 91 (August 1917): 8-9.

### 3. Chronological list of Norman Duncan's contributions to newspapers.

A series of articles covering the trial of Charles Burgess.  
Auburn Bulletin: March 14, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,  
 28, 30, 31, 1896; April 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 1896. NDC.

- "A Syrian Coffee-House." Evening Post [New York] 10 December 1898: 18.
- "Fiancee, the Musician." Evening Post [New York] 7 January 1899: 13.
- "In the Syrian Quarter." Evening Post [New York] 13 May 1899: 13.
- "Training Acrobats." Evening Post [New York] 27 May 1899: 13.
- "The Love of the Maid." Evening Post [New York] 3 August 1901: 13.

[NOTE: In addition, two articles can be very tentatively ascribed to Duncan, though their authorship is not certain: "The 24th in Mitchell," Stratford Beacon 27 May 1887: 1, and "Passing of Herr Most," Evening Post [New York] 4 September 1897: 2. Most of Duncan's contributions to newspapers during his career as a journalist cannot be identified.]

**4. Unpublished manuscripts (excluding letters) by Norman Duncan, listed alphabetically.**

"Aboard the Billy Bullet." [An Australian story.] NDC.

"David Boyd: Being the True Account of His Captivity among the Indians." [A story set in the backwoods of Pennsylvania.] NDC.

"The Engineer of the 'Princess Maud'." [A Newfoundland story.] NDC.

"The Forgiveness of Sin." [An incomplete story.] NDC.

"The Mastery." [A story of alcoholism on the streets on New York.] NDC.

"The Mother." [A play in three acts based on the novel The Mother and written in collaboration with David Belasco and Beatrice De Mille; a second version has four acts.] NDC.

"The Pole Route to God's Warning." [A Newfoundland story.] NDC.

"A Professional Call." [A Newfoundland story.] NDC.

"The Wreck of the Trader 'Duchess'." [A Newfoundland story.] NDC.

Untitled article. [An account of a "Self-Master's Colony" for alcoholics.] NDC.

Four untitled stories. NDC.

**5. Correspondence listed alphabetically by author (including Norman Duncan).**

Abbott, George. Letter to Mrs. E.H. Duncan. 14 December 1929. NDC.

Abbott, George. Letter to Mrs. E.H. Duncan. 15 January 1930. NDC.

- Allen, Thomas. Letter to Norman Duncan. 4 August 1916.  
NDC.
- Allen, Thomas. Letter to Mackenzie King. 31 July 1918.  
MKC.
- Belasco, David. Letter to E.H. Duncan. 25 November 1916.  
NDC.
- Belasco, David. Letter to Dennis O'Brien. 14 February  
1924. NDC.
- Biggar, Harry P. Letter to Mackenzie King. 25 June 1905.  
MKC.
- Biggar, Harry P. Letter to Mackenzie King. 24 July 1905.  
MKC.
- Brandt, Carl. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 22 November 1916.  
NDC.
- Brandt, Carl. Letters to Norman Duncan. 22 April 1916, 26  
April 1916, 5 May 1916, 9 May 1916, 11 May 1916, 13 May  
1916, 15 May 1916, 17 May 1916, 22 May 1916, 23 May 1916,  
26 May 1916, 29 May 1916, 31 May 1916, 1 June 1916, 2  
June 1916, 5 June 1916, 6 June 1916, 10 June 1916, 12  
June 1916 (2), 14 June 1916 (2), 15 June 1916. NDC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to J.E. Hodder Williams. 17 June  
1904. Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Wilfred Grenfell. 7 July 1904.  
Grenfell Papers, Yale University Library Archive.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 25 January  
1917. NDC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 2 February  
1917. NDC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 8 February  
1917. NDC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 14 February  
1917. NDC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Mackenzie King. 1 June 1918.  
MKC.
- Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Mackenzie King. 7 June 1918.  
MKC.

Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 1 August 1919.  
NDC.

Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 20 December  
1922. NDC.

Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 21 January  
1927. NDC.

Briggs, S. Edgar. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 26 January  
1927. NDC.

Burnes, Margaret. Letter to Harriett Duncan. 2 November  
1916. NDC.

Burnes, Margaret. Letter to Mackenzie King. 18 January  
1917. MKC.

Burnett, Howard. Letter to Patrick O'Flaherty. 11 June  
1981. EMP.

Cary, Arthur. Letter to Susan Duncan. 8 January 1978.  
SDP.

Curtis Brown International. Letter to Norman Duncan. 5 May  
1916. NDC.

Curtis Brown International. Letter to Norman Duncan. 22  
May 1916. NDC.

Davies, Wilbur. Letter to Susan Suncan. 1 February 1968.  
NDC.

Deaderick, Mary. Letter to Norman Duncan. 29 July 1916.  
NDC.

De Mille, Beatrice. Letter to Norman Duncan. 10 April  
1911. NDC.

De Mille, Beatrice. Letter to Norman Duncan. 20 May 1911.  
NDC.

De Mille, Beatrice. Letter to Norman Duncan. 28 June 1912.  
NDC.

Dent, J.M. & Sons. Letter to Harriett Duncan. 12 March  
1945. NDC.

Drummond, W.H. Letter to Mackenzie King. 2 February 1905.  
MKC.

- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to Mackenzie King. 28 October 1916.  
MKC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to Mackenzie King. 15 November  
1916. MKC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to David Belasco. 31 October 1922.  
NDC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to Mackenzie King. 16 November  
1922. NDC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to Ida Tarbell. n.d. NDC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to Dennis O'Brien. 5 December 1923.  
NDC.
- Duncan, Ernest. Letter to J.W. Magraith. 10 November 1926.  
NDC.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ernest J. Hathaway. 24 November  
1903. Personal papers of John C. Adams, Toronto.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Mackenzie King. n.d. [1905].  
MKC.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Mackenzie King. n.d. [1905?].  
MKC.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to J.E. Hodder Williams. 18 July  
1906. Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Joe Manuel. 12 January [1908].  
NDC.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Gabriella Page. 21 February  
1911. Martha (Waller) Johnson Papers, Virginia Historical  
Society.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Joe Manuel. n.d. [1911-12?].  
Manuel Family Papers, Innisfail, Alberta.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Wilfred Grenfell. 27 March n.y.  
Grenfell Papers, Yale University Library Archive.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ida Tarbell. n.d. Ida M. Tarbell  
Collection, Pelletier Library, Allegheny College,  
Meadville, Pa.
- Duncan, Norman. Letter to Robert S. Yard. 12 January  
[1912]. Century Collection, New York Public Library.



Duncan, Norman. Letter to R.U. Johnson. 22 January [1912].  
Century Collection, New York Public Library.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Mackenzie King. n.d. MKC.

Duncan, Norman. Postcards (4) to Ernest Duncan. n.d.  
 [1912]. NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Postcards (4) to Robert (Bobbie) Duncan.  
 n.d. [1912]. NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 4 January [1913].  
 NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 20 January 1913.  
 NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to [Thomas] Wells. 10 February  
 [1913]. NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Robert Duncan. 10 February  
 [1913]. NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 10 February  
 [1913]. NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 15 March 1913.  
 NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Bobbie Duncan. 15 March 1913.  
 NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Bobbie Duncan. 15 March 1915  
 (postmark). NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Susan Duncan. 19 December 1915  
 (postmark). NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Susan Duncan. n.d. [1916?].  
 NDC.

Duncan, Norman. Letter to Carl Brandt. 1 June [1916].  
 NDC.

Duncan, Susan (Mrs. R.A.). Letter (transcript) to Ernest  
 Duncan. 15 June 1903. NDC.

Duncan, Susan (Mrs. R.A.). Letter (transcript) to Norman  
 Duncan. 15 June 1903. NDC.

Duncan, Susan. Letter to R.K. Ruddy. 5 February 1975.  
 SDP.

- Duncan, Susan. Letter to R. K. Ruddy. 10 March 1975. SDP.
- Duncan, Susan. Letter to Philip McLeod. 3 January 1975. SDP.
- Duncan, Susan. Letter to Philip McLeod. 2 April 1975. SDP.
- Duncan, Susan. Letters to Thomas R. Moore. 1 October 1976, 6 October 1976, 14 December 1976, 12 January 1977, 14 January 1977, 10 February 1977, 12 July 1977, 16 August 1977. TMC.
- Duncan, Susan. Letter to Arthur Cary. 21 January 1978. SDP.
- Duncan, Susan. Letter to Louise Beldon. 1 August 1979. SDP.
- Duncan, Susan. Letters to Elizabeth Miller. 18 September 1984, 2 January 1985, 7 February 1985, 17 March 1985, 6 June 1985, 29 June 1985, 27 July 1985, 12 August 1985, 27 September 1985, 16 October 1985, 3 November 1985, 9 November 1985, 9 December 1985, 22 February 1986, 25 February 1986, 17 June 1986, 25 July 1986, 27 September 1986, 29 October 1986, 12 January 1987, 12 February 1987. EMP.
- E.E. [?]. Letter to Mrs. Keese. 16 July 1914. Little Family Papers, Boston, Mass.
- Fiske, Dorothy (Harper & Brothers). Letters to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 24 October 1935, 24 June 1936, 29 July 1940, 6 October 1942. NDC.
- French, Reginald. Letter to Elizabeth Miller. 29 August 1985. EMP.
- Friderici, Blanche. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 12 August 1920. NDC.
- Friderici, Blanche. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 15 February 1921. NDC.
- Friderici, Blanche. Letter to Harriett Duncan. 29 November 1933. NDC.
- Gilman, Edith (Mrs. James Carruthers). Letter to Mackenzie King. 18 April [1906?]. MKC.

- Grenfell, Wilfred. Letter to Norman Duncan. 8 December [1906]. NDC.
- Harland, H.H. (Bobbs-Merrill Co.). Letter to Norman Duncan. 9 October 1916. NDC.
- Harris, Lawren. Letter to Sydney Key. 3 June [1948]. Art Gallery of Ontario.
- Hathaway, E.J. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 7 April 1926. NDC.
- Herring, Rev. H.D. Letter to Thomas Moore. 6 October 1976. TMC.
- Hill, John (Fleming H. Revell). Letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 10 April 1930. NDC.
- Hill, John (Fleming H. Revell). Letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 2 December 1930. NDC.
- Jackson, Fred. Letter to Norman Duncan. 1 January 1916. NDC.
- Keese, Marion (Little). Letter to [?]. 1914. Little Family Papers, Boston, Mass.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Harry P. Biggar. 10 July 1905. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Harry P. Biggar. 4 August 1905. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 23 October 1916. NDC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 13 November 1916. NDC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 27 November 1916. NDC. [There is a copy of this letter in MKC.]
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Mrs. James Carruthers. 2 January 1918. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to S. Edgar Briggs. 10 June 1918. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to A.L. Peabody. 24 June 1918. MKC.

- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to S. Edgar Briggs. 24 July 1918. MKC. [There is a copy of this letter in NDC.]
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to S. Edgar Briggs. 3 August 1918. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Thomas Allen. 3 August 1918. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Thomas Allen. 4 September 1920. NDC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Fleming H. Revell. 18 August 1918. MKC.
- King, William Lyon Mackenzie. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 22 November 1922. NDC.
- Lee, Charlotte E. Letter to Harriett Duncan. Easter Day 1938. SDP. [There is a copy of this letter in TMC.]
- Lorimer, G. Letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 15 November 1933. NDC.
- Macphail, Andrew. Letter to Dennis O'Brien. 25 January 1924. NDC.
- Macgrauth, J.W. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 4 December 1924. NDC.
- Macgrauth, J.W. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 22 November 1924. NDC.
- Macgrauth, J.W. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 3 November 1926. NDC.
- Markham, Violet. Letter to Mackenzie King. 2 January 1918. MKC.
- McClure, Robert. Letter to J.E. Hodder Williams. 3 February 1904. Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- McClure, Robert. Letter to J.E. Hodder Williams. 11 February 1904. Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- McLeod, Philip. Letter to R.K. Ruddy. 14 November 1974. SDP.
- McLeod, Philip. Letter to R.K. Ruddy. 22 October 1976. SDP.

- O'Brien, Dennis. Letter to Andrew Macphail. 5 February 1924. NDC.
- O'Brien, Dennis. Letter to Andrew Macphail. 18 February 1924. NDC.
- O'Brien, Dennis. Letters to Ernest Duncan. 20 March 1923, 17 May 1923, 4 September 1923, 18 February 1924, 12 January 1928. NDC.
- O'Brien, Edward J. Letter to Norman Duncan. 25 April 1916. NDC.
- O'Brien, Edward J. Letter to Norman Duncan. 3 May 1916. NDC.
- Ogleboy, Kate. Letters to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 3 May 1933, 2 June 1933, 13 October 1933. NDC.
- Ormand, Jane. Letter to Elizabeth Miller. 8 September 1986. EMP.
- Putnam, George P. Letter to William Wooster. 13 July 1938. NDC.
- Revell, Fleming H. Letter to Mr. Doran (Hodder & Stoughton). 10 August 1912. Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Revell, Fleming H. Letter to Mackenzie King. 7 August 1918. MKC.
- Revell, Fleming H. Letters to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 20 November 1933, 8 March 1934, 14 November 1934, 6 December 1935. NDC.
- Rosenberg, Neil. Letter to George Casey. nd. EMP.
- Ruddy, R. Kenneth. Letters to Thomas Moore. 14 April 1974, 15 May 1974, 14 August 1975, 26 September 1975, 30 September 1936, 11 October 1976, 4 December 1976, 22 December 1976, 27 December 1976. TMC.
- Ryan, J.C. Letter to Elizabeth Miller. 28 January 1987. EMP.
- Saturday Evening Post (miscellaneous authors). Letters to Norman Duncan. 8 February 1916, 25 April 1916, 10 May 1916, 16 May 1916, 7 June 1916, 13 June 1916, 20 June 1916, 19 August 1916, 21 September 1916, 27 September 1916, 4 October 1916. NDC.

Schwartz, Charles. Letter to Marguerita Sylva. 28 January 1921. NDC.

Strong, Frank. Letter to Norman Duncan. 9 June 1906.  
Kenneth Spencer Library, University of Kansas.

Strong, Frank. Letter to Norman Duncan. 24 January 1907.  
Kenneth Spencer Library, University of Kansas.

Tarbell, Ida. Letter to Ernest Duncan. 9 December 1924.  
NDC.

Wells, Thomas (Harper & Brothers). Letter to Ernest Duncan.  
20 November 1924. NDC.

Williams, James P. Letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 9 August 1938. NDC.

Williams, James D. Letter to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 12 August 1938. NDC.

Wooster, William (Fleming H. Revell). Letters to Mrs. Ernest Duncan. 21 June 1938, 27 July 1938, 2 August 1939. NDC.

Wyatt, S. Letter to Richard Apted. 13 June 1977. NDC.

**6. Reviews used or consulted in the preparation of this dissertation, listed chronologically by book reviewed.**

**A. The Soul of the Street:**

Bookman [New York] 12 (February 1901): 583-4.

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[This is a major collection, originally owned by Susan H. Duncan of New York and purchased by the Centre for Newfoundland Studies in 1986. The Collection contains: a number of manuscripts (several handwritten) of published stories and articles by Duncan; contracts between Norman Duncan and his publishers; several mss of unpublished stories; two drafts of the play "The Mother"; unpublished mss of two plays by Mark Traverse entitled "Pattie Bestirs Herself" and "At Pale Peter's"; rough draft ms of The Cruise of the Shining Light; a collection of photographs. Numerous other items are acknowledged elsewhere in this Bibliography.]

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