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CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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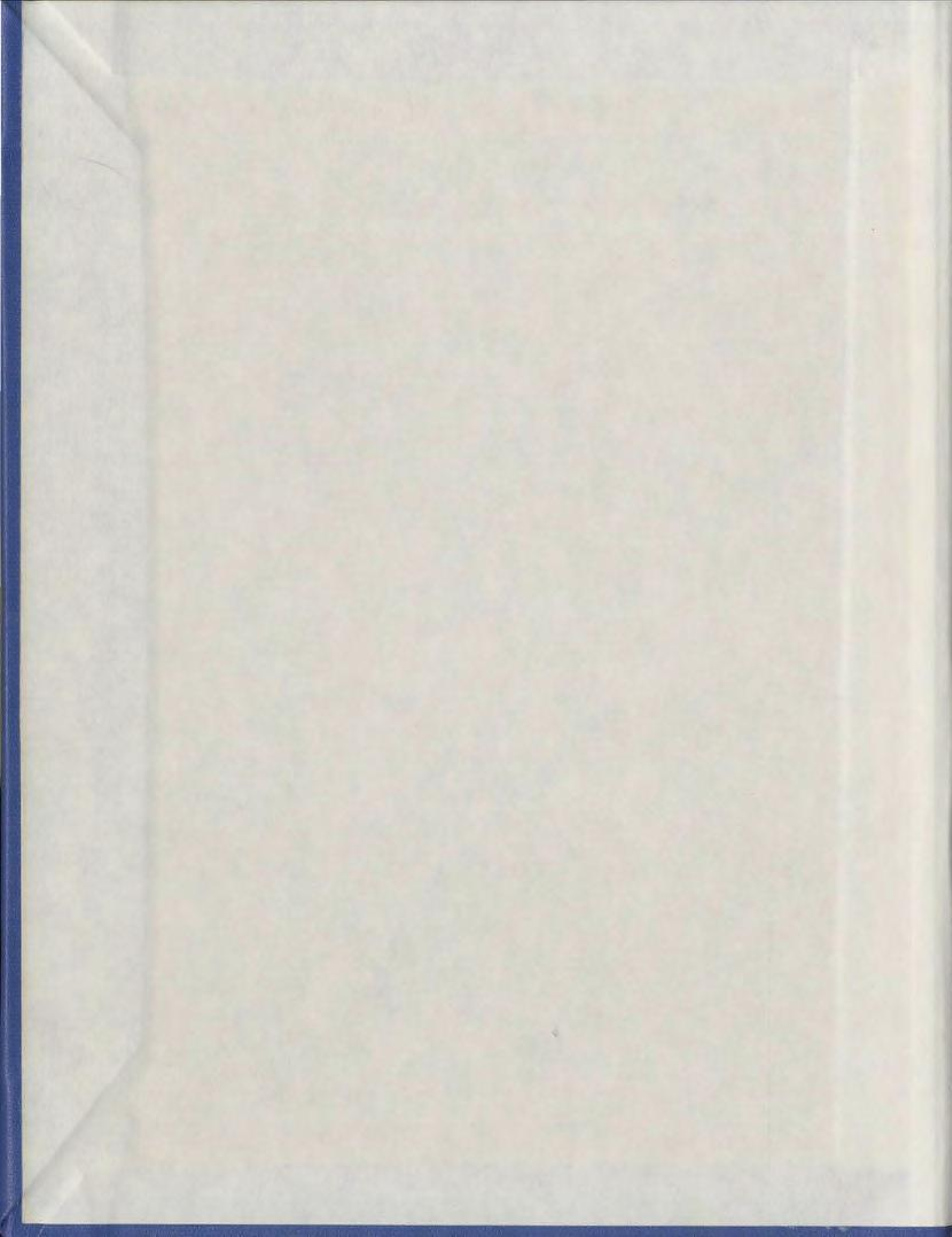

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A BIOGRAPHY OF NORMAN DUNCAN

by

© Thomas Richard Moore, B.A., B.Ed.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This is the first attempt to write a scholarly biography of the important and neglected Canadian writer, Norman Duncan. Duncan was a prolific writer of 20 books and numerous stories and articles before his premature death in 1916. This paper is a result of interviews with the few remaining people who knew Duncan, and a study of his published and unpublished work. Most of Duncan's writing, and, as is the concensus among critics, his best work, dealt with Newfoundland and Duncan's reaction to it. During his first summer in Newfoundland in 1900, and in his subsequent visits to the island, Duncan was captivated and inspired by the fishermen of Newfoundland who eked a livelihood from so harsh an environment. Their struggle symbolized for Duncan man's struggle in a harsh and oppressive universe. Duncan's capacity to enter sympathetically into the life style of the people he described was demonstrated in his Newfoundland writings as well as in his stories about the Syrians in New York, the desert wanderers of Palestine and Egypt, and the settlers of Australia. This paper refers to the writings insofar as they elucidate the man's life story. His biography is traced from his

birth in Brantford, Ontario, in 1871, to his untimely death in Fredonia, New York, in 1916. His work with various American newspapers and universities is discussed, as well as his acquaintance with Sir Wilfred Grenfell and W.L. Mackenzie King. His growing dependence upon alcohol, finally resulting in abject alcoholism, is discussed and related to the writings, especially in his final years. This paper is a correlation of all the existing and often contradictory facts and memories about the life of Norman Duncan.

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD YEARS

The Greenwood cemetery in Brantford, Ontario, records the grave site of a certain James Duncan: "A native of County Down, Ireland." James, who was the uncle of Norman Duncan, came to the New World in 1847, at the age of 23. He was an imaginative young man, as can be seen from his letters sent back home to his parents in Newtownards, Ireland. He was a school teacher by profession and he was hopeful of gaining employment in the New World, as an improvement on the Old.

His brief life, however, was marked by no such improvement and, as the gravestone reports, he died in 1848 at the age of 24. His letters sent to his family in Ireland were for the most part fictitious accounts of the successes which he was having in the New World. Encouraged by these reports, James' father, James, Sr., left Ireland with his wife, Jane, and his whole family, and sailed to find prosperity in this new land, Ontario, about which his son had written so enthusiastically. By the time that James, Jr. heard about this voyage the family was already under way and there was no way to stop them.

The young man's diary records a steady decline in his health from the time of the receipt of this news, as

day by day the time approached when his parents and siblings would arrive from Ireland with all their possessions, seeking the good fortune which they believed he had found. Within a year he was dead.

James, Jr., had a sister, Henrietta, who died in 1906, and also three brothers: Cornelius (1817-1877), Julius (1834-1908), and Robert Augustus (1837-1891). Robert A. Duncan was the father of Norman Duncan, who is the subject of this thesis.

James, Jr., had been living in Brantford, which was then and is now the principal town in Brant County, Ontario. It was at Brantford that Norman Duncan was born on July 2, 1871. His mother was Susan Hawley Duncan, from all indications a gentle and lovable woman. Susan's family had moved to Ontario from New York state earlier in the century. Her father was Abram Hawley, who had moved to Canada when he was six years old. Susan's mother, Jane Barton Hawley, was born in 1806 in Steuben County, New York state. Jane moved with her family to Cainsville, Ontario, in 1820, when she was 14 years old. Cainsville is about four miles from Brantford, and it was at Cainsville that she met her husband, Abram Hawley, and in 1826 they were married.

Abram and Jane Hawley had seven daughters and three sons. Their eldest daughter, Mary, married a man from Brantford named William Welding, who owned a large pottery shop on Darling Street. It was probably through this connection that Norman's father, Robert Augustus, came to know

Mary Hawley's younger sister, Susan. Susan was born in Cainsville in 1841, and around the year 1860 she married Robert Augustus Duncan. Both were the youngest of their families.

Robert A. Duncan and his wife came to live in Brantford at Acton Villas on Darling Street.[1] The house is still standing today as a duplex apartment at 156 and 158 Darling Street. Their first two children, Robert and Mary, died in infancy. The first surviving child was Robert Kennedy Duncan, who was born in 1868. Norman was born in 1871 at what is now 158 Darling Street. In 1876, their last surviving child, Ernest, was born. A daughter, Emily, later died in infancy.

It has not been possible to ascertain the work at which Robert Augustus Duncan was employed in Brantford. It is known that the family moved through a number of towns in southern Ontario during Norman's boyhood.[2] These towns included Brantford, Fergus and Mitchell. There has been some suggestion that Robert Augustus Duncan was a shiftless fellow who could not apply himself effectively to his business interests. One of the few references to Norman's father is a newspaper report on the life of Norman's older

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[1] "Honor Memory of Gifted Canadian Author," Toronto Star, April 28, 1922.

[2] Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), p. 9.

brother, Robert Kennedy Duncan, a noted scientist: "His father had a small manufacturing business and was not at all interested in the experiments of his clever son."[3]

Recent excavations at Brantford have unearthed the remains of William Welding's pottery shop on Darling Street. This building was in the 1870's and the 1880's immediately adjacent to the Duncan household at 158 Darling Street. Welding's wife and Norman's mother were sisters, hence Norman's father, Robert Augustus, may have been associated with his brother-in-law in the pottery business.

Duncan's earliest memories of childhood would be of these Brantford days on Darling Street. His relationships with his two brothers and especially with his mother, were very close from these early days and throughout the remainder of their lives. These relationships and his memories of childhood were to have a noticeable effect upon his writing.

There were several prominent families of Duncan's in Brantford besides the Robert Augustus Duncans. Sara Jeanette Duncan, who wrote the first Canadian novel <u>The Imperialist</u>, was born in Brantford in 1861. The novel is set in Brantford, which is thinly disguised as Elgin.[4] Her birth place is now Thorpe's Funeral Parlor near the Alexander Graham

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[3]Herbert N. Casson, "I Remember Norman Duncan," <u>Mitchell Advocate</u>, August 8, 1974, p. 2.

[4]"Sarah Jeanette Duncan," <u>Encyclopaedia Canadianna</u>, 1975, III, 315.

Bell Memorial Park. However, she was not related to Norman Duncan.

The family of Robert Augustus Duncan moved from Brantford to Fergus, Ontario, around the year 1883. It is known that Norman's mother had a brother living in Fergus at this time, and it may have been that they moved to be with or near him. Once again, it is difficult to ascertain the manner in which Robert Augustus Duncan sustained his family. A family record of the time mentions his occupation vaguely as "merchant,"[5] with no mention of the extent of his business, or the goods he bought and sold.

After a brief stay in Fergus the family once again moved; this time to Mitchell, Ontario, "when Norman was about thirteen."[6] It was here that Duncan attended public school and high school. Even as a student he was said to have been very energetic in all things, and especially in literary activities. With his brother, Robert, he formed a literary and debating club among the boys he knew at Mitchell. He then persuaded his parents to allow the members to use the attic of their house as a club room. One of the club members was H.W. Casson, who recalled:

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[5]Family Record at the home of Miss Susan Duncan, New York City.

[6]E.J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature," The Canadian Bookman, June, 1926, p. 171.

> At the top of the Duncan home was a large empty loft and it was fitted up as a hall with chairs and a platform. A Boys Debating Club was formed. There were eight of us. There were the two Duncan boys. There was Fergus Kyle who afterwards became an illustrator in Toronto. There was Wilfred B. Race who is now head of the Ontario School for the Blind. There was Alfred Hord who became a lawyer in Western Canada, and there was Warren Thompson who became a successful business man.[7]

The club became very popular and soon widened its interests to include chess tournaments and debates with the nearby towns such as Brantford. Sometimes the young men debated in the town hall in front of the mayor and the townspeople. One of their topics was, "Resolved That the Death of Mary Queen of the Scots Was Justified." It was recorded that the luckless queen lost the verdict.

The constant collaborator with Duncan in these boyhood exploits was his older brother, Robert. Robert was two years older than Norman, and he went on to become famous in his own right as a chemist and scientific innovator. Robert Kennedy Duncan has been called by many the father of modern chemical research in the United States.[8] He established the first industrial fellowships in science, and he founded the Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, Pa., which today has over 120 chemists working and researching for industrial advancement. Robert's dream was to bridge

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[7] Casson, Duncan, p. 2.

[8] Ibid., p. 2.

the gap between chemical research and industry in the early twentieth century. He wrote a number of text books for the study of chemistry, before his untimely death in 1914. These are admired today for their lucidity, insight and enthusiasm.[9]

As boys, Norman, Robert and their friends often spent Saturdays in the woods near Mitchell, collecting bugs, beetles, birds' eggs, and the assorted natural items of interest to an amateur scientist. Besides the debating club, the Duncan boys had a laboratory at their home. This was often the occasion of much embarrassment and confusion due to smoke explosions, insect escapes, and foul smells. There was one teacher at the Mitchell high school who had an influence on all the boys, and Norman's literary instinct was probably encouraged by him:

> All of us boys in our debating club owed much to William Eliott, 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 to create.[10]

Duncan had one other brother, Ernest, with whom he was very close. Ernest was the youngest of the three Duncan boys and his birth coincided with Norman's own birthday. Norman

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[9] The three text books written by R.K. Duncan are: The New Knowledge (1905), The Chemistry of Commerce (1907), and Some Chemical Problems of Today (1911).

[10] Casson, Duncan, p. 2.

was five at the time, and on his return home from Sunday School on his birthday he was told that his present was a new baby brother. He continued to be very loving and protective toward Ernest for the remainder of his life. His younger brother may have taken advantage of Duncan's concern for him at times. As a child, Ernest would hold his breath until he turned red in the face. Duncan would become frantic with worry and the only way to relieve Ernest from asphyxiation was to throw cold water on him. It seems that Ernest enjoyed this prank much more than the sensitive Norman.

All three brothers had an expressed fondness for literature. Dickens, Tennyson, and Stevenson were favorites of the Duncan boys. They could all quote long passages from Dickens by heart. Norman's last effects included a first edition of Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop and photographs of Dickens' London. Reading was a matter of habit with the Duncan family. Norman's uncle and grandfather had been school teachers, as were he and his brother, Robert.

Norman Duncan was to be a newspaper man for much of his life. His first experience with journalism came while he was still living in Mitchell. He was the local correspondent for the Stratford Beacon. A year later he decided to embark on a career in journalism, ". . . and on the strength of his experience as a correspondent, he secured

a position on the Windsor Daily Record."[11] However, after three months as a reporter in Windsor, Ontario, he returned home suffering from acute homesickness and resolved never to enter the field of journalism again.

[11] Hathaway, Who's Who, p. 171.

CHAPTER II

UNIVERSITY YEARS

According to his tombstone, Duncan's father, Robert Augustus, died one month before Norman celebrated his twentieth birthday in June, 1891. The influence of his father is noticeably absent from Duncan's later stories and novels, and it is difficult to estimate how severe a loss his father's death occasioned for him. His older brother, Robert, was at this time attending the University of Toronto, and Duncan followed his brother and enrolled at the University in the fall of 1891. His younger brother, Ernest, was 14 years old and still in high school. His mother, Susan Hawley Duncan, was a recent widow of just a few months when Duncan left his family and boyhood friends in Mitchell and moved to Toronto.

Even as a young man of 20, Duncan had the outgoing personality and ease of acquaintance which were to characterize both himself and Robert in later life. Robert had started his studies at the University of Toronto two years earlier and had distinguished himself by achieving first class honors in physics and chemistry. Thus, Robert could introduce Norman to many of his friends in the faculty of

of science. For this reason, and because of his brother's success, Duncan enrolled in the science faculty instead of the faculty of literature. He was later to regret this decision.

Duncan soon had many friends of his own in Toronto including a thoughtful and ardently religious young man named Bill King. This was William Lyon Mackenzie King, who later served in the Laurier Government as Minister of Labor, and in 1921 became Prime Minister of Canada. Years later, just after Duncan died, King wrote a very moving letter to Norman's brother, Ernest:

> My dear Dr. Duncan:
> I cannot express how sad it has been to me to read of the sudden death of my old and very dear friend Norman. You may know that many years ago we shared lodgings on Fremantle St. in Toronto, and we have been the closest of friends ever since.[1]

King's diary provides an interesting glimpse of Duncan during those University days in Toronto. Duncan is mentioned specifically in six different diary entries and is referred to more generally in many others. The Duncan who emerged from the Mackenzie King diaries is a very unhappy man. He appeared to be ill and discontented most of the time. He was not succeeding at his studies and he was having financial problems. He often took refuge from these considerable worries in carousing, drinking, and lechery. The first

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[1]Letter, Mackenzie King to Ernest Duncan, October 23, 1916.

reference to Duncan in King's diaries is in the entry for September 30, 1894.

> This afternoon I read for a while then went to residence to see Duncan, he looks better than I have seen him for a long time. We were glad to see each other again.[2]

Several days later the diary records how the two young men, Duncan and King, went out together for a night on the town. This entry included the incident of their spending the night with two prostitutes on King Street:

> Duncan and I went down town and he sold me two small dictionaries and I got tickets from Billy G. for the "Rose Hill Folly Co." at the Academy . . . . I had dinner at residence with Duncan then we went to the theatre. We laughed a good deal, some of the jokes were rather good. We went out with two girls who live on King Street and down to their rooms 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 Duncan at the residence. We both felt rather badly.[3]

It is certain that King felt badly, for he later returned to King Street to talk to the girls about Christianity and their immoral way of life. He spoke to the girls about the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery, and at least one of the girls was reformed as a result of his effort.[4]

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[2]Diaries of Mackenzie King, Microfilm Robarts Library, Toronto, Ontario, September 22, 1894, p. 80.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 80.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 84.

The next mention of Duncan is an entry in King's diary two weeks later: "Was much shocked to learn that N.M. Duncan was very sick. I feel extremely sorry."[5] On the next day, October 17, King visited Duncan, who was in bed, and during the course of their conversation King fainted and fell to the floor. Little explanation is given, except perhaps the intensity of their conversation:

> Tonight I had an experience I never wish to have again. 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. Burb brought me to.[6]

King was going through a period in his life which bordered on religious fanaticism, and this may have caused such experiences.

The next reference to Duncan, that of January 2, 1895, seems to indicate that King tried to cheer and possibly to reform a despondent and unpeaceful Duncan:

> I wandered over to varsity and had a long talk with N.M. Duncan. We then went for a walk together and took in a show at the Musee. Glad his mind was not so weak as to enjoy the performance . . . . Charlie and I then went down to Dunc's room in residence had a cup of coffee and a very pleasant chat.[7]

King's private reflection on the state of young Duncan's mind, and the objectionable quality of the performance,

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[7] Diaries of Mackenzie King, Microfilm, Robarts Library, Toronto, Ontario, January 2, 1895, p. 2.

offer an unspoken insight into the life of Norman Duncan in Toronto. One last fleeting reference to Duncan in the King diaries occurred four months later, in May, 1895, when King wrote: ". . . called at residence saw Dunc."[8] This indicates that in late spring of 1895 Duncan was still in Toronto and living at the University of Toronto residence.

Norman Duncan and Mackenzie King had another mutual interest which added to their friendship while at the University of Toronto. Both were newspaper journalists: King wrote for the Toronto <u>Globe</u>,[9] and Duncan had written for the Stratford <u>Beacon</u> and the Windsor <u>Daily Record</u>. Both men were working on the University magazine, <u>Varsity</u>, during the winter of 1895. It was during this winter that an incident of some political importance occurred at the University, and <u>Varsity</u>, its directors and writers found themselves at the very center of it. This series of events in Norman Duncan's life is described briefly in an article published 30 years later in the <u>Canadian Bookman</u>:

> At the first class elections of the year '95 he was elected to the Board of Directors of <u>Varsity</u>, the university newspaper, defeating Arthur Stringer for the position; and associated with him were Lieut. Colonel John A. Cooper as editor, and Rt. Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King as president of the year.
>
> A directorship, however did not call for literary service but it so happened that an insurrection took place at that time in the university, following an

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[8] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 38.

[9] King Diaries, 1894, p. 96.

> arbitary and unpopular action of the President of the university. The class went on strike. Duncan joined the insurgents and refrained from attending certain classes during the entire year. He also wrote a series of letters to the Toronto Globe in defence of the students' position, under the name of "A Gentleman of the First Year."[10]

The student strike at the University of Toronto during the winter of 1895 resulted in a showdown between the Governing Council, including the President of the University, and the University magazine, Varsity. The dispute centered upon the scheduled appearance of two socialists who had been invited with other speakers to come to the University and address the students. The socialists were denied access to the University by the administration, ostensibly because of their unorthodox religious views. Most students objected to this interference and Varsity wrote a biting editorial condemning the administration and questioning its motives:

> Fear, or some short sighted policy, has prevented an open and honest statement of the objections to this meeting. It is therefore small wonder that all sorts of ugly surmises arise.[11]

The students promptly held the meeting outside the University, where a large and enthusiastic audience assembled to hear the two socialists. A debate between the rival factions had meanwhile developed in the Toronto Globe. This precipitated a large amount of unwanted publicity for the University

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[10]"Norman Duncan," Canadian Bookman, June, 1926, p. 171.

[11]Varsity (University of Toronto), January 16, 1895, p. 104.

administration, as charge and counter-charge was made by the students and professors alike. Frustrated in their attempt to stop the meeting and the debate which had ensued, the administration struck back. They dismissed a professor named Dale who had sided with the students, and they demanded the suspension of the editor of Varsity and a printed apology from the new editor. When Varsity printed an explanation of its charges but no apology, the administration declared that the new editor, Tucker, would not be allowed to write his final B.A. exams that May.

Members of the staff at Varsity reacted to this blatant affront to freedom of the press. They made speeches to groups of students. They wrote letters to the newspapers. They circulated a petition in support of Tucker. Then at a meeting of the students, held on Friday, February 15, Mackenzie King "moved the resolution to strike until we were granted an investigation."[12] The students did strike and an investigation was soon promised and carried out by the administration of the University. As King recorded in his diary at the investigation's conclusion, "it is rather a whitewashing affair."[13] Tucker was still refused admission to the exam hall in May, but was reinstated in the following September. Professor Dale was rehired.

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[12] King Diaries, 1895, p. 15.

[13] Ibid., 1895, p. 34.

For Norman Duncan, 1895 was an exciting year, but it was supposed to have been his graduating year. He did not graduate, although the University of Toronto records do not offer any elucidation. It is quite conceivable that he wrote and failed his exams, for King's diary records that he was still at the University in May, 1895. A Canadian Bookman article states that the science course which Duncan was studying "proved altogether distasteful, and in 1895 he left university without graduating."[14]

In concluding the events of this period in Norman Duncan's life, one other item is important. In 1895, Duncan probably had his first acquaintance with the island of Newfoundland, a country with which he was to soon become very familiar. Most of Duncan's later stories and articles, and approximately half his books are about Newfoundland.

Most of the letters to the editor published during the student strike appeared in the Toronto Globe. Another news item which received wide and extensive coverage in the Globe that same winter and spring was the debate in Newfoundland concerning confederation with Canada. This issue sparked great interest in Toronto. The Newfoundland delegation in the negotiations was invited to Toronto to address the Board of Trade in April, 1895. The

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[14] Bookman, Duncan, p. 172.

four man delegation from the island, including Robert Bond and Edward Morris, was invited to Toronto by the Toronto City Council.[15]

In March, 1895, the Globe carried a front page story on the situation in Newfoundland. The story told of the present government under William Whiteway and the railway he was attempting to build. The abject poverty and destitution in Newfoundland described by these articles prompted the Toronto readers to raise and send money to the stricken island and its inhabitants.[16] Accounts of the St. John's riot of 1895 as well as many discussions of the financial plight on the island appeared in the Globe. On April 26, the Globe recorded that Newfoundland had rejected the terms of union proposed by Canada, and was determined to remain proudly independent.[17] In the aftermath of the Newfoundland confederation issue the Canadian government's discussion of the terms of union in Ottawa was all reported faithfully by the Globe.

Since Norman Duncan was in Toronto during these months and was obviously following the press reports of the student strike in the Globe, it is reasonable to infer that he would be aware of the debate over Newfoundland's confederation

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[15] Globe (Toronto), April 13, 1895, p. 7.

[16] Globe, March 26, 1895, p. 1.

[17] Globe, May 1, 1895, p. 2.

with Canada. He was an avid reader and would probably have read the _Globe_ in any case, but being involved with the strike himself, he and his fellow students would be concerned about the public reaction to their activities at the University of Toronto.

CHAPTER III

NEWSPAPER WORK IN NEW YORK

The period of Duncan's life immediately following his four years at the University of Toronto was a difficult one. In a brief biography done in 1918, Sir Wilfred Grenfell referred to Duncan's "own experiences of poverty and struggle after leaving university."[1] The Duncan family fortunes were certainly at an ebb by 1895, for the father, Robert Augustus, had been dead for four years. During these years, university and high school expenses had to be paid for the three boys, and only Robert, the eldest, had been working, and only since 1893.[2]

Duncan had bungled his degree at the University of Toronto by either failing or skipping his exams. Academic failure, no doubt, contributed to the sickness and depression referred to at an earlier date by Mackenzie King in his diary.[3] This failure did not appear to daunt Duncan in

[1] Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North, with an introduction by Wilfred T. Grenfell (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), p. 7.

[2] William A. Hamor, Impressions of Robert Kennedy Duncan (Pittsburgh: Mellon Institute Publication, 1927), p. 1.

[3] Diaries of Mackenzie King, Microfilm, Robarts Library, Toronto, Ontario, 1894, p. 84.

later life, especially after his successes as a writer, but academic failure is referred to in his novel, The Measure of a Man. John Fairmeadow, the hero, is temporarily disappointed because of his failure to pass his examination for admittance to the ministry.

> "If in half an hour I don't know a good deal more about God than I seem to know at this moment," he added impressively, "I'll flunk."
> "Ye'll what?"
> "Flunk, I tell you!"
> "That's awful," said the Beast. "Is it deadly?"
> "Not necessarily," Fairmeadow replied, "but it's a very unpleasant experience."[4]

In 1895, Duncan was still five years away from achieving any significant stature as a writer, and the insecurities and homesickness which he had experienced as a young reporter in Windsor recurred in Toronto.[5] He was to suffer from a frail constitution and poor health, coupled with a growing reliance on alcohol, for the remainder of his life.[6] In 1895, Duncan was poor and without any set direction for his future. As on many other occasions throughout his life, his family served as a source of refuge. The Duncan family of Susan Duncan and her three boys, were very close. The

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[4] Norman Duncan, The Measure of a Man (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1911), p. 258.

[5] E.J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature," The Canadian Bookman, June, 1926, p. 171.

[6] Josiah Manuel, private interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

most conspicuous participant in this relationship between Duncan and his consanguine family was his mother. When the family was separated she wrote that she "lived for her boys,"[7] and she made a great display of her love for her sons, especially for Norman who did not have a family of his own. Duncan responded warmly to this affection, both in real life and in his writings. His first book, The Soul of the Street, is dedicated as follows: "Mother/ Here is the Flower of/ Your Love."[8] His first novel is the story of a Labrador doctor, and it is extraneously prefaced with the following laudation of mother love:

> . . . And the glory of the coast - and the glory of whole world - is mother-love: which began in the beginning and has continued to this present time unchanged - the great constant of the problem.[9]

In 1905, Duncan wrote his second novel, The Mother, which is the story of a possessive, almost incestuous love between a mother and her young son. This novel describes the fear of the mother that her son will eventually mature and abandon her for another woman:

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[7] Letter from Susan Duncan, Brantford, Ontario, June 15, 1903.

[8] Norman Duncan, The Soul of the Street (New York: McClure, Phillips and Company, 1900), Dedication.

[9] Norman Duncan, Doctor Luke of the Labrador (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1905), Foreword.

"We are like the lights on the river," she said. "The river will take us to the place where the lights go different ways."
"We will not go!"
"The river will take us."
The boy was puzzled: he lifted his head to watch the lights drift past, far below; and he was much troubled by this mystery. She tried to gather his legs into her lap - to hold him as she used to do when he was a child at her breast; but he was now grown too large for that, and she suffered, again the familiar pain: a perception of alienation - of inevitable loss.[10]

The Suitable Child is another of Duncan's novels which explores the theme of mother love. In this novel, a little orphan boy is alone on a west bound train, on Christmas Eve night. He is being returned to the institution by a dissatisfied family. In his longing for a mother, he asks the passengers on the train if they want to adopt an orphan. He asks the pretty lady in black:

"Do you want one?"
"Want what?"
"Want-a-norphan?"[11]

Susan's letters to Norman reveal a great concern and affection. She encouraged him on the prospects of his career as a writer, and she wrote how much she missed him, and planned when they would be together again.[12] Duncan was not encumbered by this possessive love of his mother, but rather

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[10]Norman Duncan, The Mother (New York:, Fleming H. Revell, 1905), pp. 28-29.

[11]Norman Duncan, The Suitable Child (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), p. 40.

[12]Susan Duncan, letter.

seemed to draw strength from their relationship.

Soon after he finished university, in 1895, Duncan went to Auburn, New York, where his mother and brothers were living. Susan's family had originally lived in New York state, and since 1893, Robert had been employed as a chemistry teacher in Auburn at the "Academic High School."[13] Duncan's youngest brother, Ernest, was finishing his last year of high school and going on to study dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania.[14]

After his brief period of employment with the Windsor Daily Record, Duncan had resolved never to enter the field of journalism again.[15] However, circumstances necessitated his finding a job, and in the final months of 1895 he went to work as a reporter with the Auburn Bulletin.[16] One of the news items which Duncan covered for the Bulletin was the Charles Burgess murder trial of 1896. He was very pleased with his own writing about this locally famous trial, and he collected all his published articles from the Bulletin in a large scrapbook. This scrapbook story of the

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[13]Hamor, Impressions, p. 1.

[14]Susan Duncan, private interview held in New York city, November, 1976.

[15]Hathaway, "Who's Who," p. 171.

[16]Grenfell, Introduction, p. 9.

trial is still extant although it has never been published.[17]

By 1897, Robert and Susan Duncan had already moved to New York City, where Robert was a teacher at the "Doctor Julius Sach's Collegiate Institute." In 1897, Duncan joined his family in New York City, where his earlier work with the Auburn Bulletin facilitated his securing a position on the staff of the prestigious Saturday Evening Post. The next four years with the Post were four of the most rewarding and enjoyable years of Duncan's life.[18] During these years he received several promotions, and succeeded at his work. He was free to pursue his own interests as a writer, and he developed as never before his promising talents.

In 1898, while with the Post, Duncan served as a correspondent in the Spanish-American war which began that year. He was sent to the United States naval station at Montauk Point, N.Y., to report on the preparations, and later the course of the war.[19] At Montauk Point, Duncan met the new assistant secretary of the navy, Theodore Roosevelt, who was eagerly preparing for the war with Spain. Roosevelt had left his very successful position as city police commissioner in order to help organize the powerful United States

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[17] Susan Duncan, Interview.

[18] Grenfell, Introduction, p. 9.

[19] Frederick Niven, "To Remember Norman Duncan," Saturday Night, June 20, 1942, p. 29.

navy.[20]

American newspapers of the Hearst and Pulitzer chains had previously sympathized with the Cubans against the domination of Spain. In 1898, newspapers, including the Post, wrote embellished accounts of the struggle as the victories occurred. Sensational newspaper accounts of Spanish atrocities against the helpless Cubans bordered on propaganda.[21] This was the journalistic climate which produced the incredible legends of Teddy Roosevelt and his "Rough Riders." Reporters such as Duncan admired Roosevelt immensely, and they also appreciated the appeal which his exploits would have for their readers. Roosevelt was also admired by many of the press for his flamboyant tenure as city police commissioner of New York, when his sensational war against crime and corruption was widely publicized, especially his Sunday closing law for bars and saloons.[22] This was of special concern to Duncan who was convinced of the corrupting influence which liquor was having in the lives of many young men of his generation. This was soon to be a recurring theme in his writing, as the influence of

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[20] "Theodore Roosevelt," Encyclopedia Americana, 1974, XXIII, 685.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

liquor found its way into his own life. The war ended in 1898 and Roosevelt campaigned for the governorship of New York state. Duncan was one of the reporters who followed him through the state on his victorious campaign.[23]

Duncan's articles were being well received at the Post, and his employers offered him a promotion to city editor. He amazed many of his friends by refusing the offer. Duncan told them that he wanted to work as a "special" writer, so that he could have more freedom to roam at will throughout the city and investigate subjects that were of interest to him.[24] Frederick Niven wrote about this period in Duncan's life:

> He had certainly in the ordinary course of reporting shown that he had the makings of a special article writer in him, and he had, promptly, his desire. With free hand granted him he went prying into the various precincts of polyglot New York. The picturesqueness of many of them as much as the humanity that was common to all attracted him.[25]

Promotions ensued, and in the course of his four years with the Post, "Duncan served successively as reporter, copy editor on city desk, special writer for the city and, finally, editor of the Saturday supplment."[26]

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[23] Niven, "To Remember Norman Duncan," p. 29.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Grenfell, Introduction, p. 9.

Duncan's interest in the various sections of New York City eventually led him to the Syrian Quarter on the lower east side. His relationship with these Syrian immigrants reveals another dimension in Duncan's many faceted personality. A great intimacy developed between the young reporter and the citizens whom he interviewed. Many of them were destitute and homesick for a native land which had been overrun by the Turks. Most of them were bewildered in their new home, which was the largest city on the continent. They were adrift without the sustaining customs of their homeland, which they attempted to maintain. The Syrians seemed to accept Duncan as they accepted few others, and his stories and articles reveal an unusual intimacy between author and subject:

> In the Syrian Colony he was speedily understood and at home. Chiefs of the colony frequently called on him to give advice, or to arbitrate disputes, and on a visit of the Turkish minister to "Little Syria" the young Canadian was invited to make the leading speech of welcome and to lay before him the Syrian requests.[27]

Duncan explored their way of life, their music, poetry and their literature. He tried to capture their very way of life in these stories--the very essence of their existence. One of the characters described in The Soul of the Street is Nageeb Fiani, "The Greatest Player in all the World."

> On the third night Nageeb Fiani came out of his room; and when the rain had swept the noisy traffic from

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[27] Niven, "To Remember Norman Duncan," p. 29.

> the street, he played the new-born music for his friends, and his friends' friends in the back room of the shop. It was then that the doctor, moved to tears and sobs, solomly said there was no greater player in all the world, and rising, called upon the company to drink to the health of Nageeb Fiani, his friend, the master of the violin.[28]

Besides his "special" in the Post, Duncan began submitting a number of these short stories to various popular magazines in New York. These early short stories set in the Syrian Quarter were all rejected by the publishers. Finally, one carefully rewritten story crossed the desk of Ida Tarbell, who was the editor of McClure's magazine. On her recommendation the story was published in Atlantic magazine, and other published stories by Duncan soon followed. His stories were published in magazines including Outlook, Atlantic, and McClure's.[29]

In 1900 a collection of these stories was published by McClure, Phillips and Company, called The Soul of the Street. Duncan's first book comprises a sympathetic study of the Syrian immigrants in their daily life, and it shows Duncan's compassion for the minority, the poor and oppressed. For example, in his story "The Under Shepherd," the young wife of "Sadahala the Merchant" is caught in a love triangle with her husband and the fierce "Atta the Wrestler."

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[28]Duncan, The Soul of the Street, p. 55.

[29]Hathaway, Canadian Bookman, p. 172.

She is saved from her trouble by the brave priest, Father Nikola, who risks his life to demand that the wrestler leave her to her husband.[30] Another victim in this quarter of poverty and its affiliated vices is Billy Halloran, a crippled boy in the story "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," whose mother spends most of her days intoxicated. Billy is saved from loneliness and despair by the selfless Khalil Khayat, who risks insult and injury to visit and to cheer the boy by telling him stories.[31]

Among these victims are the heroes of Duncan's stories, such as Father Nikola, Doctor Effendi, and the newspaper editor, Khalil Khayat. The latter endures a starvation salary so that he may write his stories of freedom and encouragement for his countrymen.[32] These characters endure personal hardship in order to help those less fortunate than themselves. Doctor Effendi has given up a prosperous practice in order to come to the Quarter and serve those who are poor.[33]

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[30]Duncan, The Soul of the Street, p. 122.

[31]Ibid., p. 27.

[32]Ibid., p. 22.

[33]Hutchins Hapgood, "Norman Duncan's 'The Soul of the Street'," The Bookman, Vol. XII, p. 584.

Constituent traits of Duncan's literary style, such as pathos, idealism, and gushing sympathy for oppressed characters, especially children, can be observed in this first book. His technique was developing, and The Soul of the Street is a significant milestone in that development. It represented an achievement as his first published volume, and it presaged his future success as a novelist and story writer.

At this time Robert Duncan was pursuing a career in chemistry, and Duncan encouraged his brother to submit articles on his scientific studies to the editors whom he knew in New York. Many of these stories and articles by Robert Kennedy Duncan were published by the New York magazines.[34] The three Duncan brothers were helping each other as much as was possible and supporting each other financially in their education expenses.[35] Duncan and his mother occupied a suite in New York at the Cumberland apartments, located in a triangular plot of land where Broadway crosses Fifth Avenue at Madison Square. Presently, this plot of land is occupied by a huge structure called the "Flatiron" building.[36] This was the center of one of the most

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[34] Hamor, Impressions, p. 2.

[35] Susan Duncan, Interview.

[36] Ibid.

fashionable areas of New York in 1900. The location is also very near the old Fleming H. Revell publishing offices at 158 Fifth Avenue, which were soon to play an important role in Duncan's life.

CHAPTER IV

NEWFOUNDLAND VISITS

One of the most significant events in Duncan's life occurred in the summer of 1900 when he visited the island of Newfoundland. As a "special" writer, he had already visited the Atlantic coast of the United States in order to write about the fishing settlements, but found them overcrowded with tourists and unsuitable for study in his writings.[1] He decided to go to Newfoundland in order to study and write about the way of life there. Duncan discussed the matter with the editor of McClure's magazine who commissioned him to go to Newfoundland and write an article for McClure's. Duncan was to sail to St. Anthony, in Newfoundland, and secure an interview with Sir Wilfred Grenfell,[3] the mission doctor and philanthropist who was rapidly becoming known in the United States through his successful fund raising campaigns. Duncan was later to be of great service to Grenfell's mission because of the publicity which his books gave the doctor's work in

[1]E.J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature," The Canadian Bookman, June, 1926, p. 172.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Josiah Manuel, private interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

Newfoundland. As indicated earlier, Duncan had probably read about Newfoundland in the Toronto Globe in 1895. His one published book in 1900, The Soul of the Street, contains a reference to "the important and high-souled doctor who gave up a good practice in the East to take care of the proletarian Syrians" in New York.[4] This book was written before Duncan visited Newfoundland and the reference to Doctor Effendi bears obvious resemblance to Grenfell, who left England in order to practice medicine on the bleak coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. This indicates an acquaintance with Newfoundland previous to Duncan's visit in 1900.

Duncan dreaded sea travel for he usually became violently seasick. He made elaborate plans in order to avoid a long sea trip.[5] He took the train from New York to Canada. From Nova Scotia he took the brief ferry crossing to Port aux Basques in Newfoundland. From there he travelled on the recently completed Newfoundland railway to Lewisporte. From Lewisporte he took the steamer "Kyle" to Exploits where he was to change vessels to the coastal steamer which was sailing down to St. Anthony. The "Kyle" took Duncan from Lewisporte to Exploits under command of

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[4] Hutchins Hapgood, "Norman Duncan's 'The Soul of the Street'," The Bookman, Fall, 1900, Vol. 12, pp. 583-585.

[5] Josiah Manuel, Interview.

Skipper Joab Knee.[6] The vessel's main purpose was to ship freight, especially food and equipment, between Lewisporte and Exploits. Passenger facilities were meager or nonexistent. The number of passengers on the voyage varied from 20 or 30 to none at all.[7]

As expected, Duncan became seasick on the brief sea voyage to Exploits.[8] He was supposed to meet the coastal steamer which was making the run between St. John's and Cape Bauld, carrying supplies, passengers, food and mail. Unless a large quantity of cargo was due for discharging from the "Kyle," that vessel usually anchored off the wharf and sent in a small boat with the passengers and the cargo. This was the case when Duncan arrived from Lewisporte. Then he discovered to his chagrin that the steamer going to St. Anthony had already departed and would not be returning for another two weeks.[9] Duncan was very ill and therefore reluctant to return immediately to Lewisporte. Captain Knee made arrangements for Duncan to stay with a friend of his, Jabez Manuel, in Exploits.

Exploits in the summer of 1900 was a prosperous fishing community of over 500 persons. Located in the

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

center of Notre Dame Bay, it comprised two islands joined by a wooden bridge. This bridge has subsequently been replaced by a concrete construction. The community was spread along both sides of the central harbor formed by these two islands. Because of the central location and the safe harbor, Exploits served as a relay point for goods and services en route to the Great Northern Peninsula.[10] Exploits also served as a distribution point for food and fishing equipment for the neighboring communities in Notre Dame Bay. Finally, Exploits was the local outport marketing center where fish was brought and then sent by the merchants to St. John's for export to foreign markets. The safe harbor at Exploits is reminiscent of the "Our Harbor" described by Duncan in his first novel, <u>Doctor Luke of the Labrador</u>, four years later:

> Thus our harbor lay, a still, deep basin, in the shelter of three islands and a cape of the mainland: and we loved it, dear as it was, because we had been born there and knew no kinder land; we boasted of it, in all the harbors of the Labrador, because it was a safe place, whatever the gales that blew.[11]
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> . . . God's Warning broke the winds from the North: the froth of the breakers, to be sure, came creeping through the north tickle when the sea was high; but no great wave from the open ever disturbed the quiet water within. We were fended from the southerly gales by the massive, beetling brow of the Isle of Good Promise . . . .[12]

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[10] <u>Ibid</u>.

[11] Norman Duncan, <u>Doctor Luke of the Labrador</u> (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1904), Chapter 1, p. 16.

[12] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 14.

Jabez Manuel "took Duncan under his wing"[13] at Exploits, and made arrangements for him to stay at the house of his brother and sister-in-law. Jabez operated the largest fish buying business in Exploits, which he had inherited from his father, Josiah Manuel. The old man was still alive, but Jabez and his younger brother, Chesley, managed the business in 1900. For many decades the Manuel store was the most prosperous business in all of Exploits and the surrounding communities.[14] A deep and lasting friendship was soon to develop between the young merchant from Newfoundland and the young writer from New York. This friendship with Jabez and his family had a profound effect on Duncan's writing.

The business which Jabez had inherited from his father was a booming enterprise that involved the buying of fish along the coast and from Labrador for resale in St. John's. This fish later found its way to Italy and the West Indies, and much of Jabez's herring was sold in New York. He sold to the fishermen along the coast all the fishing gear, food and other supplies which they needed. Under the Manuels' firm, a prosperous boatbuilding industry flourished at Exploits. Each season two or three

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[13] Josiah Manuel, Interview.

[14] *Ibid.*

fishing schooners were built.[15] These were usually operated by the company for a season or two and then sold while they were still new. Sometimes they were sold along with their cargo of fish to the Crosbie family, who were St. John's cousins of the Manuels. Jabez's company also built at least three large three-masted vessels for the trans-Atlantic trade. These were also sold to the Crosbies in St. John's, who loaded them with fish and sent them to the Mediterranean. This, of course, was before the introduction of steam driven vessels in ocean crossings.

The Manuel family employed 15 to 20 schooners that plied the Labrador fisheries each summer.[16] Each spring their fleet would sail down to Labrador and bring back their cargoes of fish late in the summer or fall. All the crews were paid a share, and they then bought their supplies for the rest of the year from the company store. It was a very profitable business, and each year the company saw a volume of business of one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty thousand dollars.[17]

In 1892, Jabez Manuel married Mary Windsor. The Windsor family owned the second largest retail and fish

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[15]*Ibid.*

[16]*Ibid.*

[17]*Ibid.*

buying business in Exploits. The wedding celebrations lasted a week, as both families rejoiced in the union. It was Jabez and Mary Manuel whom Duncan came to know so well at Exploits.

Duncan had come to Newfoundland hoping to explore the life of its fishermen for his stories. The opportunities that arose from his accidentally missing the steamer to St. Anthony facilitated this hope far better than he had planned. He did not continue on to St. Anthony that year, but decided to spend the entire summer in Exploits with the Manuels. During that first summer in Exploits in 1900, Duncan stayed with Jabez's brother, Tom, and his wife, Aunt Phoebe, a lively woman with a reputation for having an inventive tongue. The couple had no children and lived near the Manuel store. Duncan spent his days in Exploits walking over the hills and exploring the coast on foot. A number of people from Exploits recall his love of nature and his walks. Jabez's son, Joe, writes of Duncan:

> I being a young boy went for walks with him. We would climb the hills and lie in the grass and talk. He liked the outdoors.[18]

Duncan seemed to love the company of young children and was a great favorite with them. He was a very generous

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[18] Josiah Manuel, personal letter to Tom Moore, October 2, 1976.

man, continually giving them money for candy. Jabez's son, Norman, tells of Duncan's generosity and of how Jabez instructed his children not to bother Duncan or accept his money.[19] Norman Manuel, who was named after Duncan in 1903, tells of an incident during the Duncan visit of 1910: Duncan came across the harbor to Jabez's store on a very windy day. Jabez was, as usual, at work and as Duncan wanted a travelling companion, he called young Norman, who was then seven years old, to go with him. The object of Duncan's curiosity that day was a breakwater which protected Exploits Harbor from the north Atlantic. Duncan wanted to watch the waves breaking in against the land on the seaside of the breakwater. The young man and the boy did just that.[20]

Jabez usually did not have much time to spend talking with Duncan during the six workdays of the week. Duncan would often go into the net lofts and talk with the fishermen and hear their stories of life on the coast. He would also talk with the hired men at Manuel's store, especially a Mr. Cook, whose role in Duncan's writing will be discussed later in this chapter. Old Josiah Manuel, Jabez's father, was no longer of working age, and with the

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[19] Norman Manuel, private interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

[20] Ibid.

status of reverence then afforded old age, he would spend his days sitting near those who were at work, giving advice, nodding off to sleep, and drinking large amounts of rum which he had imported from St. John's by the cask. Duncan was 29 years old on his first trip to Newfoundland, and from all reports was well disposed to elbow bending even then. He and Josiah Manuel, Sr., spent many summer afternoons in Exploits near the Manuel store, drinking together from the old man's supply of rum.[21]

Duncan spent a great amount of time talking with the fishermen, but he rarely went fishing with them. His fear of boats and of seasickness kept him on the shore. During his stay in Newfoundland he never did accompany the fleet of schooners from the Manuel company which went north to Labrador every spring. At Exploits the men would finish the day's work in the evening and after supper many would gather in the store to drink together and talk. This did not include all the fishermen, but rather a few family friends. Jabez's son, Joe, recalls one such night, and the presence of a certain Mr. Cook who was employed by the Manuel family:

> There was a man named Cook who worked for my father who was a great story teller and would talk by the hour. I think he gave Mr. Duncan quite a few ideas for his stories. I sat up late one night

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[21] Josiah Manuel, Interview.

listening to Cook and finally fell asleep while sitting on the counter of the store.[22]

The story about "Pinch-a-Penny Peter," and the idea of a hearty seaman with a frail rose plant in his cabin,[23] are two examples of the many stories suggested by his friends at Exploits. Young Joe Manuel was the model for Billy Topsail, and in spite of Duncan's later denials, Dr. Wilfred Grenfell was undoubtedly the model for Doctor Luke of the Labrador.

Duncan was very fond of Jabez's sister, Jenny, who, although a pretty girl, was burdened with a deformed back. There is some rumor of a romantic involvement by Duncan which the lady discouraged because of her feelings of incapacity. This cannot be confirmed and it possibly arises due to a dearth of such romantic interludes in Duncan's life.

Duncan was also fond of the boy Norman, whom Mary Manuel named after the writer in 1903. On the child's first birthday Duncan sent the family a silver cup with young Norman's name on it. Duncan was fond of all the Manuel boys and was generous to them. In 1910 he bought a twelve foot boat with a new two cylinder engine for Jabez's son, Raymond. The boat was built at Exploits by Captain Jack Parnell.[24]

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[22]Josiah Manuel, Letter.

[23]Josiah Manuel, Interview.

[24]*Ibid.*

The craft was a novelty at the time because of the motor, which in 1910 was an innovation. It is also interesting to note that the illustrator of many of Duncan's books, George Harding, was in Exploits with Duncan in 1910, and painted the little boat's name on her pennant. Duncan named her the "Flirt," as a private joke between himself and Raymond.[25]

A very special affection developed between Duncan and young Joe Manuel, or Josiah, as he was called after his grandfather. In the dedication to the novel The Best of a Bad Job, 1912, Duncan wrote, "To Josiah Windsor Manuel/ aboard the 'Fog Free Zone'/ in this fall weather."[26] He sent the first copy that came off the press that November to Joe, who at 18 years of age was still in Newfoundland sailing in the "Fog Free Zone," a schooner of his father's firm. Inside the cover of the copy sent to Joe, in Duncan's handwriting, is the following note:

> 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 times which I shall not forget.
> Your friend of long standing,
> Norman Duncan.[27]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Norman Duncan, The Best of a Bad Job (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), Dedication.

[27] Private note from Norman Duncan to Josiah Manuel, inside front cover of The Best of a Bad Job, presently located in the Norman Duncan Manuel collection, Innisfail, Alberta.

A copy of The Mother, 1905, was sent to Joe's mother with a note inscribed by the author.[28]

Today, at 82 years of age, Joe Manuel has fond memories of Norman Duncan, whom he calls "Mr. Duncan."

> He was a very generous man, also religious. He was very good to me and my family, and I thought very highly of him. The books he gave me and my family [that he had written] are now in the possession of my son Norman Duncan Manuel whom I named after my dear friend.[29]

In 1901, when Duncan made a second summer trip to Exploits, he took young Joe back to New York with him. The boy needed hospitalization for tonsillitis. Joe underwent surgery in New York for the removal of his tonsils and adenoids, and stayed with Duncan all that winter in his New York apartment. Joe's memories of those days offer an excellent picture of Duncan's life in New York. This will be discussed more extensively in a later chapter.

One winter between 1902 and 1906 Joe lived with Duncan in Washington, Pa., where the latter was a Professor of English at Washington and Jefferson College. Young Joe went to school all winter in Washington at Duncan's expense. Once again many of Joe's memories are quite vivid.[30] In 1911, Joe was again with Duncan in New York. Jabez Manuel

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[28]Private note from Norman Duncan to Mary Windsor Manuel, inside front cover of The Mother, presently located in the Norman Duncan Manuel collection, Innisfail, Alberta.

[29]Josiah Manuel, Letter.

[30]Ibid.

was then ill with asthma, and travelling through the United States looking for a new home in a more congenial climate. On his journey through Florida, which is described in his diary, he was joined by Joe and Duncan. Later in the year Duncan and Joe went north again, to Maine, while Joe was waiting for his boat returning to Newfoundland. This was late summer of 1911, at a time when Duncan was having trouble with his drinking. These months will be discussed in a later chapter.

The critics unanimously agree that Duncan's Newfoundland writings comprise his best work, and it was through the Manuel family that Duncan's interest in Newfoundland was fostered. It is remarkable how readily he was accepted at Exploits and how close the people there became to "Mr. Duncan," when on the surface they had so little in common with him. It seems to have been a meeting of kindred spirits.

The Manuel men had the reputation of lacking the keen religious fervor of most other members of that isolated community. The Manuels often drank, swore, and they did not condone the "holy roller" prayer meetings which were then popular.[31] This is not to suggest that they were without religious convictions. Duncan had been baptized a

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[31] Josiah Manuel, Interview.

Presbyterian and his convictions recur in his writings, although they may not have included the conventional forms of worship of his day. There is no record of his ever having discussed his religious beliefs with his friends at Exploits.

Duncan also avoided discussing the themes and significance of his work with the Manuels. To them he was a good man, warm and generous, who delighted in listening to their stories and taking their photographs. When asked why they thought Duncan found Newfoundland so conducive to his writing, they answered that he came to Newfoundland "to get information for his stories," or that he came here to relax on his summer holidays.[32] While both answers are obviously true, they offer little insight into the workings of Duncan's mind as he was preparing his books.

After Jabez's death in 1913, the First World War killed the price of fish, and his younger brother, Chesley, went bankrupt attempting to keep the long time family business viable. Young Joe was the head of the family after 1913, and in 1915 he bought a farm in Innisfail, Alberta, where he still lives today. He moved his mother and brothers out to Innisfail in 1915, and it was there that he learned of Duncan's death in 1916.

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[32] *Ibid.*

For some reason the informants from Exploits are not familiar with Duncan's visits and acquaintance with Sir Wilfred Grenfell. From stories such as The Doctor of Afternoon Arm, 1918, the novel Doctor Luke of the Labrador, 1904, and the book of essays Doctor Grenfell's Parish, 1905, as well as Grenfell's own writings, such an acquaintance is apparent. Duncan visited St. Anthony, was a friend of Grenfell's and was familiar with the crew of Grenfell's hospital ship, the "Strathcona." Duncan lists the crew by name in his dedication to Doctor Grenfell's Parish, and includes their photograph in the book.[33] Grenfell, in his introduction to Battles Royal Down North, refers to "the days when the writer of these stories was a guest aboard our little hospital vessel."[34] The doctor writes very movingly of his friendship with Duncan, and it is obvious from Duncan's writing that he greatly admired the doctor. In the introduction to Doctor Grenfell's Parish, he writes that the book was intended "to spread the knowledge of the work of Dr. Wilfred Grenfell of the Royal Naval Mission to to Deep Sea Fishermen, at work on the coasts of Newfoundland

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[33] Norman Duncan, Doctor Grenfell's Parish (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), Dedication.

[34] Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1918), Introduction by Wilfred Grenfell, p. 5.

and Labrador."[35] The book contains many descriptions of Grenfell's work, of the three hospitals which he operated, and of the many patients whom he served.

> It is, then, to the outporter, to the men of the fleet and to the Labrador liveyer that Doctor Grenfell devotes himself. The hospital at Indian Harbor is the center of the Labrador activity; the hospital at St. Anthony is designed to care for the needs of the French shore folk; the hospital at Battle Harbor--the first established, and possibly, the best equipped of all--receives patients from all directions, but especially from the harbours of the Strait and the Gulf. In the little hospital ship, "Strathcona," the doctor darts here and there and everywhere, all summer long, responding to calls, searching out the sick, ...[36]

Duncan was amazed at the primitive medical facilities available to these poor people, and the great necessity of Grenfell's services. His stories reflect a great admiration for Grenfell and his missionary work along the coasts. Stories like "The Healer from Far Away Cove" describe the people's primitive understanding of the many complaints with which they were afflicted, and their cures which were often more harmful than their original diseases.[37]

Duncan's reactions to the Newfoundland fisher folk are described in many of his stories. The stories describe the fishermen he saw and met along the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. One such fisherman--

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[35] _Ibid._, Dedication.

[36] _Ibid._, p. 132.

[37] Norman Duncan, _The Way of the Sea_ (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903), p. 187.

> had put out to sea in his punt at least twenty thousand times, that he had been frozen to the seat of his punt many times, that he had been swept to sea, with the ice-packs, six times, that he had weathered six hundred gales, great and small, and that he had been wrecked more times than he could "just mind" at the moment.[38]

Duncan also delighted in describing the hearty sea captains whom he met along the coasts. Their native abilities at navigation and survival were a marvel to him.

> The remarkable quality of the sea-captains who come from among them impressively attests the fact--not only their quality as sailors, but as men of spirit and proud courage. There is one--now a captain of a coastal boat on the Newfoundland shore--who takes his steamer into a ticklish harbour of a thick, dark night, when everything is black ahead and roundabout, steering only by the echo of the ship's whistle! There is another, a confident seaman, a bluff, high-spirited fellow, who was once delayed by bitter winter weather--an inky night, with ice about, the snow flying, the seas heavy with frost, the wind blowing a gale.
>
> "Where have you been?" they asked him, sarcastically, from the head office.
>
> The captain had been on the bridge all night.
>
> "Berry-picking," was the laconic despatch in reply.[39]

These seafaring people so captivated Duncan that he returned to Newfoundland year after year to live with them, to study their way of life, to photograph them, and to write about them. He was obviously moved by their life style and activities along the coast. One of their seasonal activities

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[38] Norman Duncan, Doctor Grenfell's Parish (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), p. 107.

[39] Ibid., p. 89.

was the Labrador cod fishery which took place each summer. The men left their homes along the coast and sailed to Labrador each spring. Their subsequent return home in the fall was a cause for great rejoicing along the coast and Duncan demonstrated a great understanding of their joy:

> . . . 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.[40]

The bleak coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador were the setting for his stories, and served as a backdrop against which lived and moved the people Duncan so lovingly described. He was repelled by the harsh and bitter land just as much as he was attracted to the warm and hospitable people who lived there. The harshness and oppression of the environment seemed to mitigate against any kind of life surviving along the coast.

> The great storm from the North--the wind that swept furiously out of the unknown and laid waste the wilderness--burst over Ragged Harbour, belated, as the door closed behind Eleazar. It made the little cottage under the hill shiver and shake; but it could not lift it from its place, for Eleazer had builded, with cunning and forethought, that house for a home. It made the sea to rage--gave the waters irresistible power; but no man of the coast was on the sea in those hours: the sound of the breakers lulled Jim Rideout to sleep, where he lay beside the fire. If the soul

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

> of man might interpret the song of the wind, this was the song it sang: I am the Wind of the North! Swift I come from the Waste of Death.[41]

Duncan noted that the waters were treacherous to all seafaring craft, and that storms were frequent. Many lives were lost and ships wrecked. For those who attempted to make a living on shore, the land was barren and the soil was thin.

> So, in such a land--where, on some bleak stretches of coast, the potatoes are grown in imported English soil, where most gardens, and some graveyards, are made of earth scraped from the hollows of the hills, where four hundred and nineteen bushels of lean wheat are grown in a single year . . . .[42]

As Duncan related, there was often not enough soil to bury the dead of a community. He marvelled at a simple people who could survive in such a hostile environment. The timeless struggle of generations of Newfoundland fishermen who continued to live and love and multiply in such an oppressive environment attracted Duncan's attention. Their struggle for life became symbolic for Duncan of his own spiritual struggle in a universe fraught with disappointment and chaos. He saw represented in these Newfoundlanders, that which he considered noble and pure in mankind, and

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[41] Norman Duncan, The Way of the Sea (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903), p. 121.

[42] Norman Duncan, Doctor Grenfell's Parish (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), p. 104.

most necessary to insure mankind's continual survival in an industrial world. Duncan was excited in discovering a land, and a people, remote from the civilized world, who seemed to possess, as a body, essential virtues which North American civilization of the early twentieth century saw itself losing as it moved inexorably into the modern age.

> Here in this remote island colony he found exactly what he wanted. He was moved by the eternal conflict between human beings guided and controlled by the unconquerable soul and ruthless forces of nature. He saw life here as a great epic theme, one worthy of the highest gifts of literary creation. As in the Syrian Quarter, he entered sympathetically into the lives of the people, and making Exploits, a little community on the northeast coast, his headquarters, he lived with them, sailed with them, and in every way tried to understand the Way of the Sea, thoroughly.[43]

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[43]Hathaway, "Who's Who," p. 172-3.

CHAPTER V

WASHINGTON, PA.

> There seems to have been a remarkable sympathy between the various members of the Duncan family. In 1901 Robert was appointed Professor of Chemistry at Washington and Jefferson University, Pa. Norman and his mother and younger brother, Dr. Ernest H. Duncan, all went there from New York in order that they might still be together.[1]

The Duncans loved to be near one another, and this love continued after Robert had married Charlotte Foster, of Brantford, and had started a family of his own in 1899. Robert had precipitated the move to Washington, Pa., when he decided to change from high school to college education. He applied for and was appointed to the professorship of chemistry at Washington and Jefferson College. Ernest had been studying at the University of Pennsylvania where he had finished his dental training that same year. He moved to Washington to start a practice there.[2] Their mother, Susan, also moved to Washington with her sons. Norman Duncan did not move to Washington in 1901, but retained his position with the Post until he was accepted in a suitable one in Washington. Duncan did not receive a full professorship

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[1]E.J. Hathaway, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature," The Canadian Bookman, June, 1926, p. 173.

[2]Susan Duncan, private interview held in New York City, November, 1976.

as had Robert, perhaps due to his erratic university record. In 1902, Duncan was accepted at Washington and Jefferson College as "assistant to the professor of English, and one year later he was elected Wallace Professor of Rhetoric at the same institution, a post which he held until 1906."[3]

Josiah Manuel, Jr., of Exploits, visited Duncan in Washington sometime between 1902 and 1906, and he recalls many interesting incidents from his stay.[4] Duncan was living on campus in an apartment with a negro houseboy named Calvin. The apartment building was immediately opposite the College. Duncan's apartment was at one end of the building, adjacent to a museum. At the other end lived a Professor Weyer, who also taught at the College. From Joe's description, Calvin was a rascal who stole from Duncan's supply of whiskey, and replaced the pilfered quantity with water so that his employer would not be suspicious. Like Duncan, Calvin was fond of strong drink, and Joe recalled one night when Calvin returned home bleeding from knife wounds. He had become involved in a fracas while visiting a lady friend. Duncan and Joe bound his wounds and put him to bed.

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[3]Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North, with an introduction by Wilfred T. Grenfell (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), p. 10.

[4]Josiah Manuel, private interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

Duncan was drinking heavily in Washington, especially when he was troubled by "writer's block." If he was having difficulty beginning a story or getting an idea for a scene, Duncan would become nervous. He would resolve this by going for long walks by himself through the woods outside Washington College, and often by resorting to alcohol. Joe recalls coming home from school and finding Duncan unconscious on a couch. If a story idea came to Duncan he did not spare himself, but often worked straight through the night clanking the story out on his typewriter.

Duncan's frail constitution was precariously entrusted to Calvin's dubious culinary skill, for Duncan completely ignored his own health and welfare. He was a chain smoker of home-rolled cigarettes, and he was frequently bothered by a stomach sickness which he assuaged by eating baking soda. This complaint was probably due to his reckless consumption of food and drink, coupled with his nervous tension and heavy smoking. Duncan's writing appears to have been a true agony and ecstasy for him. His teaching duties comprised only one hour per day, and the rest of his time was free for writing. Joe recalls that this suited Duncan very well for he was happiest when he had time to write. In spite of the nervousness, and mental blocks, the drinking rampages and late hours, the successes outweighed the failures. Duncan was writing some of his best

stories during this period of his life.

Outside Washington, Duncan had a cabin in the woods where Calvin would take him to recover from his bouts of drinking. Duncan found nature an effective aid in the recovery from his growing dependence on alcohol. Joe remembers himself and a number of other young boys from Washington going into the woods to gather chestnuts. The boys found so many that they took off their shirts and tied the nuts in carrying sacks made from the shirts. This sack thrown over his back, Joe returned to Duncan's apartment with his cache of nuts. He caused much amusement when it was discovered that the dye from the nuts had soaked through the shirt and stained his back with a non-erasable blotch. This colorful stain from the nuts remained with Joe for most of his winter with Duncan. Joe went to school all that winter in Washington, and as Duncan was a Professor at the College, the affiliated school gave Joe a reduction on his education expenses for the year. Joe seems to have enjoyed his visit with Duncan and remembers much of his winter at school in Washington. He went on tours of the various industries in the city, including a glassmaking factory, with his classmates.

Joe recalls that Duncan did not have very many friends who visited him at Washington. There was Professor Weyer, Robert, his wife, Charlotte, and their daughter,

Elspeth, Ernest, and an occasional visitor from the publishing company, Fleming H. Revell. Once Duncan and Joe visited the manager of the publishing company, Edgar Briggs, who lived in a huge house in Newark, New Jersey. At home their nights in the apartment would be spent reading, often aloud, playing cards and chatting. Joe recalls that Duncan taught him how to play poker.

One surviving photograph from that winter in Washington shows a happy, if somewhat posed, party of 12 boys and young men, probably from the College. Joe and Duncan figure unobtrusively in the group, who are eating and drinking. Someone with a sense of humor had placed a large sign on the table which read "No trespassing."

Joe and Duncan sometimes made trips to New York City, where Duncan had business interests to which to attend. It was on one of these trips that Joe saw Duncan angry, and the occasion was both humorous and prophetic. 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. The bartender tried to explain the new policy, but Duncan informed him that he had no intention of paying for the drink. The bartender then explained that Duncan was responsible for paying for the drink since he had ordered it. Whereupon Duncan uttered an expression of both disgust and frustration and stomped out of the new hotel.

Among his characteristics of self-neglect and excess, Duncan's literary achievement seems to be his only redeemable quality. Such is not the case. Without exception, all sources who knew Duncan personally witness to his great kindness and sympathy for his fellow man. One of the characteristics that dominated Duncan's personality was his generosity. At times he appears to have been dominated by generosity to the exclusion of right reason. His generosity to the Manuels was the rule rather than the exception. He provided young Joe Manuel with a home away from home. He was especially kind to the young, the poor, and the unemployed. He would meet children who were playmates of Joe's, and if they appeared ill fed or poorly clad, he would make inquiries about their families. He sent Calvin with many Christmas hampers of food to those who were in need. To his own family Duncan "would give everything he owned, if they asked him." Joe recalls that Duncan was particularly munificent to his younger brother, Ernest, who was just launching his career in dentistry. Susan Duncan was by this

time dependent upon Duncan for her financial support.

Joe also mentions that Duncan was reticent in discussing his own writings, "for that would seem too much like bragging." He was modest about his work, and did not presume upon his rising importance as a writer of note. His work was becoming more widely known between 1902 and 1906, and it was during this "Washington" period that he wrote five of his books as well as a large number of published stories. Between 1902 and 1906, Duncan published five books, each of which is significant to this study. In 1900, when Duncan had seen that his stories were being published in magazines including Atlantic and McClure's, he had quickly decided to press his good fortune and have them published as a book. Four of the six stories included in The Soul of the Street had been published only months before by Atlantic and McClure's, when the volume appeared in 1900.[5] The book had received mixed reviews, including the Bookman review by Hutchins Hapgood who had criticized Duncan for his sentimentality and lack of realistic detail. "We learn nothing about the special characteristics of that quarter of our city, the habits of life of its inhabitants."

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[5]These four stories are: "For the Hand of Haleem," Atlantic, 86:347-55, September, 1900; "In the Absence of Mrs. Halloran," Atlantic, 85:255-61, February, 1900; "Lamp of Liberty," Atlantic, 85:649-56, May, 1900; "Spirit of Revolution," McClure's, 15:466-73, September, 1900.

He ended his review with the following comment:

> But the fact remains that The Soul of the Street is an excellent book in a limited way--a little note that is soon exhausted, but that is pure and admirable as far as it goes.[6]

The Nation had praised Duncan's use of colloquial language: "What seem at first like affectations of speech are looked back upon as Orientalisms when one has fairly entered into the scene . . . ." This reviewer remarked upon Duncan's obvious intimacy with his subject, and how he successfully portrays this subject, Syrian life, to his readers:

> The writer's evident intimacy with his subject conveys itself to the reader, who growing acquainted with a new circle of fellow citizens, at the last, seems to be parting with friends.[7]

The reviewer's summary was an observation on the book's function as a conveyor of information about an unknown place: "In good report and evil, the record is valid and the book a noteworthy document upon a little known phase of our city history."

When The Way of the Sea was published in 1903, it received cautious notice in a number of reviews. One such review was in the prestigious New York Times, which although not wildly enthusiastic, praised the book as exploring new ground. Reviewers seemed to be unsure of this new approach

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[6]Hutchins Hapgood, "Norman Duncan's 'The Soul of the Street'," The Bookman, Vol. XII, p. 584.

[7]Nation, Vol. VXXII, April 4, 1901, p. 280.

to a relatively foreign subject and were consequently unsure of what to make of it. They wrote generally about "the simple joys and stern sorrows of a people more or less primitive." The Times gave special praise to stories such as "The Chase of the Tide" and "The Strength of Men," and concluded with cautious praise for "the unadorned chronicle of an actual happening in a community where the modern Sunday school is unknown."[8]

Duncan's first novel was Doctor Luke of the Labrador, which was also published while he was living in Washington in 1904. It was the first of his many books to be published by the New York publishers, Fleming H. Revell. It was his most popular novel,[9] for it appealed to the adult audience to which Duncan had been so far addressing himself, as well as the younger audience who were soon to become his faithful readers. Duncan's great interest in young people and his sympathy for them were bound to intrude into his writing. The results were predictably favorable when the writer combined his talent with a subject that most interested him. Duncan was developing his own style, already characterized by long rolling sentences, lucid prose, sentimental characterization, and a keen if conservative sense of humor. His subject matter was becoming native to him as well; it was

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[8]New York Times, October 24, 1903, p. 751.

[9]Susan Duncan, Interview.

the remote, the unknown, and the oppressed, as in The Soul of the Street. Critics could see what he was attempting to do and praise for his work was widespread:

> A novel of unusual high merit. But Mr. Duncan has not only a new field to exploit, he has style. The swift yet long and undulating sentences move with a distinctive rhythm that is as fresh as it is new. They tell a strong beautiful love story. Altogether, Doctor Luke of the Labrador is one of the season's two or three best books.[10]

> Mr. Duncan has added a new province to the realm of literature. The grey, ice-bound fields of Labrador, those stern, grim seas, that verile, simple folk, and its life of tragic monotony, - these things are now possessions to the imagination, possessions of enduring value.[11]

> Mr. Duncan has brought us face to face not only with the rigors and romance of life on the Labrador coast, but with its humor as well, now droll and again grim, but always an accurate description. A romance full of interest and charm.[12]

> There is a group of figures of excellent variety, and the best sort of originality, self-stamped as made up of discovery and sympathetic interpretation. The story is perfectly fitted into the strange, wild surroundings.[13]

Some reviewers remarked that his work lacked a wholeness or unity that was necessary in a novel. Duncan's writing experience had hitherto been in the short story form. In

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[10] Review of Reviews, Vol. 31: 118, January, 1905, p. 170.

[11] Independent, Vol. 58: 210, January 26, 1905, p. 280.

[12] Ibid., p. 280.

[13] Nation, Vol. 80: 97, February 2, 1905, p. 540.

fact, sections of the novel had previously appeared in periodicals as stories, and Duncan had attempted to weave these many stories together into a unified novel. In spite of the praise afforded it, the book was lacking in the organic unities requisite in a novel, as was pointed out by a reviewer in the Reader: "As an organic, thoroughly-developed novel, it is a failure."[14]

Duncan was delighted with the praise which his first novel received, and it became his "roman locomotive." However, he was essentially a short story writer, as can be seen from the fact that most of his novels, including Doctor Luke of the Labrador, were either previously published in sections as stories, and then knit together as a novel, or elongated stories, such as The Suitable Child, The Mother, Finding His Soul, and Christmas Eve at Topmast Tickle.

Doctor Grenfell's Parish, published in 1905, was a collection of Duncan's previously published essays on Labrador and the Grenfell Mission work along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was similar to the earlier two in style and subject matter but it was written in the essay form. The thin guise of fiction which covered Grenfell in Doctor Luke of the Labrador, and Newfoundland in Way of the Sea, fell away in Doctor Grenfell's Parish. He

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[14]Reader, Vol. 5: 789, May, 1905, p. 210.

praised Grenfell overtly, and he tried to describe Newfoundland and Labrador for his audience in America. Fictions creep in as the narrator shares his stories of the coast.[15] Duncan's writing came to accommodate this strange blend of fact and fiction which is native to the storytelling tradition along these coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. This blending was not suspected by either his public or his critics, who both applauded his latest book:

> In this book the author's freight is fact and the language is vigorous. What he calls Dr. Grenfells' parish is the long, rocky coast of Newfoundland and Labrador . . . .[16]

> It is a better and more interesting piece of work than either of its predecessors by the same pen.[17]

> This is indeed a different and a better tale from any figment of the imagination. It reaches the heart with the force of verity.[18]

Duncan's essays merged at times with fiction, and his fiction was also merged with the realities of his life. This is demonstrated clearly in his next book of the Washington period, The Mother, written in 1905, just months after his own mother's death in 1904. Susan had been living in Washington with her sons until her death on May 2, 1904. In

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[15] Susan Duncan, Interview.

[16] New York Times, Vol. 10: 182, May 25, 1905, p. 670.

[17] Athenaeum, Vol. 1: 591, May 13, 1905, p. 450.

[18] Reader, Vol. 6: 117, June, 1905, p. 460.

Duncan's short novel, The Mother, the truth of his own life and his relationship with his mother was merged into the fiction of his two main characters. Other characters such as the "Dog-face" man, and the acrobat, Jim, fade into the background of the novel, and the two main personalities take the center of attention. Duncan was grief-stricken at the time in which he wrote The Mother, and the character of the mother in the book was merged with the memory of his deceased mother. The self-denial and sacrifice of Millie Slade in the novel are done in the face of a cold and degrading world, which demands that she be relegated to a life of prostitution to care for her only son. Fact and fiction are blended in the novel as she invents stories for the youngster about the riches and success of her social life, and the men of distinction who court her.[19] Since he cannot read she pretends that the social pages of the newspaper are accounts of her romantic engagements with various city dignitaries, and describes such stories in loving detail. This clever fiction makes a degrading life endurable for herself and the young boy because the fiction, through her imagination, has been transformed into the reality.

No doubt his publisher was becoming aware of the viable market Duncan's books could garner as juvenile

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[19] Norman Duncan, The Mother (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1905), p. 36.

literature. As has already been mentioned, Duncan had a great interest in young children, and he often concerned himself with their welfare. The last book which he wrote in Washington was The Adventures of Billy Topsail, 1906, the first in what was to be a three part series. Children functioned prominently in many of Duncan's earlier writings, and it could be seen from the outset that he was eminently qualified to write a book for juveniles. The Adventures of Billy Topsail was another significant milestone in Duncan's career as a writer. Much of his later writing was written for a juvenile audience, and Duncan found that in fiction as well as in real life he could hold them spellbound with his stories. The Adventures of Billy Topsail was the first volume of this kind and once again the critics did not know what to make of it at first. The praise was again hesitant or it discussed certain constants, like the style or locale. "A rare style marks the book."[20] Some reviewers were not so favorable in their comments:

> The Adventures of Billy Topsail are not in themselves of absorbing interest and Mr. Duncan's style is rather spasmodic and impressionistic, but they have the virtue of being out of the ordinary.[21]

This book was published in 1906 when Duncan was spending his last year in Washington. Robert Kennedy Duncan had

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[20] Nation, Vol. 83 : 484, December 6, 1906, p. 140.

[21] Review of Reviews, Vol. 34: 767, December, 1906, p. 50.

been preparing a series of articles on "the relations of modern chemistry to industry in various European countries" for Harper's magazine.[22] In 1907, Robert returned from his travels to accept the Chair of Industrial Chemistry in the University of Kansas. Ernest Duncan was living in North East, Pa., where he was practising dentistry. Susan Duncan was dead since 1904, and Duncan's ties with Washington had all but disintegrated by 1906. Once again, he began to feel that it was time to move.

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[22] William A. Hamor, Impressions of Robert Kennedy Duncan (Pittsburgh: Mellon Institute Publications, 1927), p. 3.

CHAPTER VI

KANSAS

The two subjects which Duncan writes about most prevalently are Newfoundland, and spiritual salvation. The Measure of a Man, 1911, Higgins: A Man's Christian, 1909, and Finding His Soul, 1913, are three examples in this latter category. Duncan seems to have been pessimistic about man's salvation in both this life and the next, except when he was inspired from time to time by a personality such as Sir Wilfred Grenfell.[1] Grenfell and the dauntless Newfoundlanders whom he served possessed an undying spark of hope, which was unextinguishable by even the bitterest human circumstances. This spark of goodness and hope represented to Duncan the undying if somewhat amorphous love of God about which he was to write much after 1907. He saw this spark in Grenfell, and in the missionary preacher, Francis E. Higgins, who brought the gospel to the lumber camp of Minnesota.[2] In his writings, such figures abound. The most obvious are "Doctor Luke" and "John Fairmeadow" who are characters drawn respectively from the two aforementioned missionaries. In

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[1]Norman Duncan, Doctor Grenfell's Parish (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1905), p. 7.

[2]Norman Duncan, Higgins: A Man's Christian (New York: Harpers, 1909), p. 11.

Going Down From Jerusalem, 1909, Duncan tells of meeting a young Christian missionary, practically alone in a sea of "twenty thousand Mohammedans . . . ."[3] "Here he dwelt then in discomforth and grave isolation, in much real peril,--in poverty, doubtless, without hope of any gain--but was ingeniously proud of his employment."[4]

The missionary tirelessly preached his message and proudly boasted of his success--one man converted to Christianity.[5] Billy Topsail, the boy hero of Duncan's Newfoundland adventures, decided to become a missionary doctor and serve in as hopeless a parish as had Grenfell.[6] Goodness endured in a universe of overwhelming darkness. This theme was poignantly displayed in The Breath of the North, as Jim Rideout was freezing in an open boat. He kicked his feet against the mast to maintain the spark of heat and life.

> To what enduring advantage? The cold fills uttermost parts of the universe. It is inexhaustible. Stars blaze in it, disturbing it; but blazing stars are transient, infinitesimal. Night and cold are of all time.[7]

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[3]Norman Duncan, Going Down From Jerusalem (New York: Harpers, 1909), p. 5.

[4]Ibid., p. 5.

[5]Ibid., p. 6.

[6]Norman Duncan, Billy Topsail, M.D. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1916), p. 316.

[7]Norman Duncan, The Way of the Sea (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903), p. 110.

Grenfell, Higgins, and fictional characters such as Jim Rideout, Billy Topsail, and Solomon Stride[8] in his Newfoundland stories; Doctor Effendi and Khalil Khayat in his Syrian stories; the young missionary in Going Down From Jerussalem; and the kind passengers in The Suitable Child,[9] all actualize an enduring hope. They flaunt the dictates of a hostile universe which militates against hope and kindness.

In 1907, Duncan was 35 years old. He was described by Grenfell as being physically weak and frail, "never a fighter or an athlete,"[10] but filled with a nervous energy that characterized his every undertaking. A photograph of Duncan, takenraround this time, reveals a stark contrast to earlier photos taken when he first arrived in Newfoundland seven years before. Duncan's face was much thinner and drawn in the latter photo and his eyes suggested uncertainty and fear. The full crop of hair had become thin, and prematurely streaked with grey. The face peered from behind a thick, dark mustache.[11]

There is no complete biographical account of Duncan, and the partial records provided by Grenfell and others are

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[8] Ibid., p. 319.

[9] Norman Duncan, The Suitable Child (New York: Harpers, 1909), p. 15.

[10] Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918, with an introduction by W.T. Grenfell), p. 7.

[11] Photo of Duncan, from the Norman Duncan Manuel Collection, Innisfail, Alberta.

vague and often contradictory. Such contradictions occur nowhere as frequently as at this juncture in Duncan's life. It is apparent that when Robert Duncan left Washington and Jefferson College in 1905, Duncan had few ties remaining in Washington, Pa. By 1907, Susan Duncan was dead, and Ernest was married and living in North East, Pa., where he was a practising dentist.[12] Robert was teaching industrial chemistry at the University of Kansas in 1907,[13] and official records from that university state that "Norman Duncan was Adjunct Professor of English Language and Rhetoric between 1906 and 1908."[14] However, the records from Washington and Jefferson College, i.e., their Alumni Director and College Catalogue, show that Duncan was Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory from 1903-1907.[15] Other sources offer little elucidation. Grenfell says he was "Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Kansas"[16] between 1908 and 1912. Hamor writes, "He was also with Robert . . . at the University

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[12]Susan Duncan, personal interview held in New York City, November, 1976.

[13]William Hamor, Impressions of Robert Kennedy Duncan (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Mellon Institute Publication, 1927), p. 5.

[14]Letter from Sally Atkinson, University Archives, University of Kansas, October 15, 1976.

[15]Letter from David Kraeuter, Memorial Library, Washington and Jefferson College, October 14, 1976.

[16]Duncan, Battles Royal, p. 11.

of Kansas as Adjunct Professor of English Literature, 1907-10."[17] Morgan, in his Canadian Men and Women of the Time, 1912, writes, "since 1907 [Duncan] has been Adjunct Professor of English Literature, University of Kansas."[18] The Brantford Expositor wrote a death notice stating that Duncan had been at the University of Kansas from 1907 until the time of his death.[19] V.B. Rhodenizer writes, "Between these two periods of travel he was for two years Adjunct Professor of English Literature at the University of Kansas,"[20] i.e., 1909-1911. Norah Story contends that Duncan worked at the University of Kansas after 1906 and spent his summers as a travelling writer for Harper's,[21] while most other sources, including Sylvestre, Conran and Klinck suggest that he worked there full time between the two travel periods of 1907-8 and 1912-13.[22]

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[17] Hamor, Impressions, p. 4.

[18] H.J. Morgan, Canadian Men and Women of the Time (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1912), p. 354.

[19] The Brantford Expositor (Canada), October 19, 1916, p. 1.

[20] Vernon Blair Rhodenizer, A Handbook of Canadian Literature (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1930), p. 150.

[21] Norah Story, The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 232-233.

[22] Sylvestre, Conran, and Klinck, Canadian Writers (Montreal: Editions HMH, 1964), p. 39.

From all this it would appear that Duncan was employed in an adjunct capacity as an English Professor at the University of Kansas. He probably did serve there between 1906 and 1908, as the University records show, but his duties left him free to write and travel extensively. He published two books about Newfoundland in 1907 and 1908,[23] and travelled to the Middle East in the winter of 1907-1908.[24]

In the summer of 1907 Duncan travelled to Bass Island on Lake Rousseau, Muskoka, Ontario, where the family of Robert's wife, the Fosters, had a summer house.[25] Robert, Charlotte Foster, his wife, and their daughter, Elspeth, were there, as well as a number of the Foster children and their young cousins. Duncan was accompanied by his young ward, Marcellus Gray.[26] Mrs. Marjorie Slemin, now resident in Brantford, Ontario, was one of the children present. She remembers how jealous the children were of all the attention given to young Marcellus Gray.[27] He was one of the two known legal wards whom Duncan served as guardian. One of Mrs. Slemin's sisters, Buff Sweet, was looking forward to her

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[23] The Cruise of the Shining Light, 1907 and Every Man for Himself, 1908.

[24] Duncan, Battles Royal, p. 11.

[25] Mrs. Marjorie Slemin, personal interview held in Brantford, Ontario, November, 1976.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

birthday on Bass Island and Duncan composed a rhyme for her when the day arrived:

> A queer old bird with a crooked beak
> Sat on the window and thus did speak
> Little Buff Sweet, little Buff Sweet
> This is the day we have gifts for thee.[28]

Mrs. Slemin recalls how popular Duncan was with the children and what an excellent rapport he maintained with them. All the "kids were crazy about Uncle Norman. He was very generous and had a way with children."[29] Mrs. Slemin remembers Duncan as a very handsome man; not tall but good-looking, with "dark eyes and a very ruddy face."[30]

Duncan undertook the legal guardianship of at least two wards: Marcellus Gray and Arthur Cary. Little is known about the former except that he and Arthur Cary were fellow students at the Hill School in Pottstown, Pa., where Robert Duncan taught in 1898.[31] Duncan arranged for their schooling and was a friend of Cary's parents who lived in California. Cary's mother, Mrs. J.N. Burns, lived in a sumptuous estate called "Montecieto" in Santa Barbara. Her estranged husband lived in Texas.[32] Her romantic designs upon Duncan will be

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[28] _Ibid._

[29] _Ibid._

[30] _Ibid._

[31] Susan Duncan, Interview.

[32] _Ibid._

discussed later, but it is noteworthy here that she was financially able to support her own son at the time that she turned him over to Duncan. Cary was a constant companion of Duncan's, and was with him in Fredonia at the time of the latter's death.[33] Going Down From Jerusalem is dedicated "To/ That Constant Friend/ Marcellus Mills Gray/."[34] It is unknown if Duncan had any other wards than these two, but he was the unofficial patron of a number of young men including Joe Manuel. One such young man whom Duncan befriended while still living in New York City was Gordon Grahame, who refers to their friendship in his book Short Days Ago. Through Duncan's influence, Grahame's father secured a job "on the staff of the New York Commercial Advertizer as a reporter."[35]

> 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 his writing in the quiet of our Brooklyn flat.
>
> I spent several week-ends with him in the Cumberland and these were happy occasions. He took me to all the places of great interest to a curious boy--Grant's Tomb, the small Revolutionary grave near by whose headstone commemorates the "Amiable Child" who

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Duncan, Going Down From Jerusalem, Dedication.

[35] Gordon Grahame, Short Days Ago (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), p. 33.

is buried there.

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. Perhaps I was not unique. Little boys through all the ages have been the prey of sexual deviates. Certainly most of my young companions had been accosted, and I know that some had been willing accomplices in the perpetuation of abnormal practices.[36]

From all available records, including an interview with Josiah Manuel, Duncan's interests in these boys appears to have been "purely fatherly," as Grahame states.

Before leaving for Palestine in late 1907, Duncan visited his brother, Ernest, in North East, Pa. Ernest's wife, Margaret Coon, had died just months after their marriage, and a county document records that Ernest and Norman purchased cemetery plots in North East on August 23, 1907.[37]

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[36] _Ibid._, p. 46.

[37] Susan Duncan, Interview.

CHAPTER VII

EASTERN TRAVEL

Two extensive periods of Duncan's life were involved in travel: 1907-8 and 1912-13. In 1907-8, he travelled to Palestine, Arabia and Egypt as a "special correspondent for Harper's magazine."[1] He began his travels in Palestine in the winter of 1907-8. His descriptions in Finding His Soul and Going Down From Jerusalem would indicate that Duncan was in Palestine at Christmas 1907. The former book is a semi-autobiographical account of a discontented man from New York named James Falcontent. Falcontent had become a heavy drinker, and the spiritual dimensions of his life had shrunken through years of worldliness. The only joy in his life was his son, for whose future he worked to insure, and the boy's sudden death left Falcontent completely shattered.

> Big Jim Falcontent was a broken man. Dragged from a decent seclusion, stated in clear, straightaway, brief, bald terms, which anybody can understand, Falcontent's trouble was this: He was fully aware that he had no God.[2]

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[1] Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918, with an introduction by W.T. Grenfell), p. 11.

[2] Norman Duncan, Finding His Soul (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1913), p. 21.

> Falcontent determined that he must have another beastly brandy-and-soda.[3]

Self-pity and drinking ruined his business as a salesman and his superior recommended a trip to "the Holy Land."[4] Against his own wishes, Falcontent complied and found himself outside Bethlehem on Christmas night.

> Falcontent was presently rattling over the road to Bethlehem. It was a clear night. There were stars brilliantly shining. A moon was imminent. A shadowy country - waste like a wilderness in the night - was on either side.[5]

Falcontent was awed by the peace and abiding faith of the destitute pilgrims who journeyed far to visit the place.

> Peace was upon all them that adored: such peace . . . as the world can neither give nor take away . . . a faith continuing from generation to generation, comforting, inspiring, peace-bringing, giving hope and courage . . . against the cock-sure philosophies of these new days.[6]

The conclusion of this book is somewhat anticlimatic in that Falcontent discovers "his soul"--a form of spirituality--and he prays, but this seems motivated by his awe and respect for the sincerity of the faith of others rather than by a personal religious experience. The story ends with a brief paragraph:

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[3] Ibid., p. 20.

[4] Ibid., p. 27.

[5] Ibid., p. 54.

[6] Ibid., p. 57.

> Falcontent's soul? Oh yes, Falcontent had a soul - and had in some way established peace with it.[7]

The experience described in the book is vague and unconvincing, written by a man, to use St. Paul's distinction, who seems to have been awed by the forms of religion but who had not experienced its power in his own life.

Duncan's own drinking, except for occasional respites, continued to become more excessive. His voyage to the Holy Land may have been, in part, motivated by a personal desire to discover a spiritual dimension in his life. His former friendship with the New York Syrians probably led him to that country, but most of his stories were about Christian holy places such as Bethlehem, Damascus and Jerusalem. In his collection of travel stories entitled Going Down From Jerusalem, Duncan suddenly asked a Sheik of the El Tih desert a question:

> "Do you believe in God?" I asked.
> "Truly, Khawaja!" Sheik Mirya answered pityingly.
> "There is but one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet," the elders pattered, according to the form.
> . . .
> "Why?" I demanded.
> Sheik Mirya mused. "God willing I will answer you: I look up at the stars."
> It was a good answer.[8]

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[7] Ibid., p. 62.

[8] Norman Duncan, Going Down From Jerusalem (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1909), p. 94.

Duncan's trip to the Middle East had the effect that he was continually awed by the deep faith and spirituality of others. He recorded many of these characters in his stories, such as the Christian missionary referred to in the previous chapter, the Sheik of the El Tih desert, and the Russian pilgrims at Bethlehem.[9] However, Duncan could not share this spiritual peace and except for an expanded repertoire of stories, his religious experience remained unchanged. Going Down From Jerusalem records his journey from Jerusalem to Cairo, along the ancient caravan route. His party, which included Canadian painter Lawren Harris, travelled by camel and pack mule, with a guide, dragoman, cook and assorted hangers-on, including an itinerant poet, Kashid.[10]

Lawren Harris, who was later to become famous as a member of the "Group of Seven" Canadian painters, was then 23 years old, and filled with the exuberance of youth. Harris rode atop a lumbering camel while Duncan preferred a horse, and Mrs. Slemin of Brantford tells how Harris was overwhelmed with the beauty and expanse of the desert, and would at times rend the silence with a frenzied "whoop" from his perch on the camel. He then feigned innocence when the others turned to look and he reverted back to an

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[9] Finding His Soul, p. 56.

[10] Going Down From Jerusalem, p. 46.

expression of tired boredom. Duncan was often embarrassed by this subterfuge of Harris' for the latter would deny having screamed when questioned by their fellow-travellers.[11] Harris had been born in Brantford, Ontario, like Duncan, and his 16 sketches and a frontispiece in color illustrate many of the scenes and characters described in the book, Going Down From Jerusalem. In Going Down From Jerusalem, romantic settings are described with the incisive realism of a weary traveller. The realism and delicate cynicism lend these scenes a credibility and a sense of having been witnessed by the reader, as well as the author:

> We entered Jerusalem from the North - he whom they called the younger khawaja [Harris] and I - having ridden down from Damascus with a small caravan, camping by the way; and a mean black time it was, this last night of our riding, and late of it too, - cold and windy - swept from the northwest, and black dark and wet with a pelting rain of that sour winter. I recall no lights of the city, no warm invitation . . . .[12]

From Jerusalem they journeyed to Beersheba where they made camp and celebrated New Year's Eve.[13] From thence they travelled to Gaza and El Arish over the desert of El Tih:

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[11] Mrs. Marjorie Slemin, personal interview held in Brantford, Ontario, November, 1976.

[12] Going Down From Jerusalem, p. 1.

[13] Ibid., p. 23.

> Here, then, we entered again the old route into Egypt, travelled these ages, but now almost forgotten: a long, voiceless, glowing road, touching the shore of the sea, wandering over blistered salt bottoms, past stagnant, encrusted pools, through deep sand, drifted in hills, smoking in the wind. There is some commerce between Gaza and El Arish . . . brief trains of camels carrying grain and in the season droves of camels pass from the great Arabian Desert to the markets of Egypt.[14]

Along the way they met many and varied characters, from the god-fearing Mohammedan sheiks to nefarious camel thieves like Abdullah the camel trader, who put glass eyes in a blind camel to trick a prospective customer. Duncan demonstrated once again his great ability to empathize with a people foreign to him. He entered into their life style and mannerisms sympathetically in order to describe them intimately for his readers. For example, he described the art of bargaining of these Bedouin camel traders:

> "But," said this woodseller, "I need my two camels, how shall I carry wood to Damascus without them?"
>
> "It is true," I answered, "that you need your camels; let us not buy and sell, but trade, lest some damage be done you. I have here," said I, "a splendid beast with which I hesitate to part, but must, because I love your camels; I will trade him but not easily, because I loved him well before I came to this place and fell in love with your beasts."[15]

El Arish was the halfway point of the caravan route, "a little city of blinding square white houses, built in deep sand, near by the sea."[16] From El Arish they proceeded

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

to Kantara, on the Suez Canal, from where they went by train to Cairo.[17] Along the route Duncan heard many witty and ancient stories which embellish his book, such as "The Canoun and the Angel," "The Magical Match," "The Ugly Writer of Teheran," and the "Camel with the Glass Eyes." All these stories and his own exploits and descriptions of the country, made these most fascinating reading. Many of these stories appeared in _Harper's_ magazine before the publication of the book in 1909.

The theme of personal and spiritual salvation recurs in much of Duncan's writing. Especially during this period of his life, a number of his books reflect this theme. A small volume entitled _Higgins: A Man's Christian_ described the work of the Rev. Francis Edmund Higgins, a Presbyterian minister, among the lumberjacks of the remote Minnesota forests.[18] For Duncan, spiritual salvation often merged with release from alcohol addiction, and in this book the minister's main function was to use the power and persuasion of religion to deliver men from the curse of excessive drinking. Duncan's description of the "snake-room" where the tavern owners carried drunken men who were too intoxicated to face the elements outside, is reminiscent of some pit of spiritual damnation:

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[17] _Ibid._, p. 51.

[18] Norman Duncan, _Higgins: A Man's Christian_ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1909), p. 11.

> Bartenders and their helpers carry them off to the snake-room when they drop; others stagger in of their own motion and fall upon their reeking fellows. There is no arrangement of the bodies - but a squirming heap of them, from which legs and arms protrude, wherein open-mouthed bearded faces appear in a tangle of contorted limbs. Men moan and laugh and sob and snore; and some cough with early pneumonia, some curse; some sing, some horribly grunt; and some, delirious, pick at spiders in the air, and talk to monkeys, and scream out to be saved from dogs and snakes. Men reel in yelling groups from the bar to watch the spectacle of which they will themselves presently be a part.[19]

Higgins travelled from camp to camp preaching the Christian gospel to the men. He spent much of his time in taverns retrieving his parishoners from snake-rooms and tavern floors. Often they would give him their wages so as not to squander them in the taverns.[20] Sometimes he took money forcibly from wild young men who were intent on wasting their season's wages. Men such as Old Man Johnson, Jones the Cook, Whitey Mooney and other assorted characters were wrestled, cajoled, persuaded or carried from taverns and resuscitated by Higgins.

> Higgins is used to picking over the bodies of drunken men in the snake-room . . . men who have been sorely wounded in brawls, or are taken with pneumonia, or in whom remains hope of regeneration. He carries them off on his back to lodgings - or he wheels them away in a barrow - and he washes them and puts them to bed . . . until their normal minds return.[21]

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[19] Ibid., p. 10.

[20] _Ibid._, p. 18.

[21] _Ibid._, p. 42.

The Measure of a Man, written two years later, in 1911, was a fictional account of a similar figure in the lumber camps of the northwestern United States. Duncan begins this book with the dubious plea that Dr. Luke is not styled on Grenfell, and John Fairmeadow is not styled on Higgins, but the overwhelming coincidences of incident and personality make such a plea preposterous, and Duncan doubtlessly realized this. John Fairmeadow was a missionary who, like Higgins, failed his ordination examinations due to a lack of theological background, and worked among the lumber camps where he was much respected as a "man's Christian." Able to use his fists as well as his oratory, Fairmeadow, like Higgins, often found that his pulpit was a tavern's bar stool. He often had to take the wages of young men and fight with those who objected to his assistance. "Billy the Beast," "Plain Tom Hitch," and "Gingerbread Jenkins," were in turn rescued by Fairmeadow from the agonies of alcoholism. The tavern scenes in this book are similar to those in Higgins: A Man's Christian:

> There was a roaring crowd at the bar but strewn about the floor - and now and again kicked impatiently out of the way - there lay a dozen or more lusty fellows whom the celebrations had utterly overcome. Fairmeadow was not disgusted.[22]

In Duncan's book Finding His Soul, it may also be said, spiritual salvation is seen in terms of a physical

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[22]Norman Duncan, The Measure of a Man (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1911), pp. 60-61.

salvation from a ruined life, melancholy, and excessive drinking.[23] Spiritual awakening and salvation brought worldly happiness, vigor and health rather than piety. This can be observed in James Falcontent after his spiritual renewal in the Holy Lands, where he "found his soul":

> . . . nor could a devoted practitioner, of internal medicine have supplied a need of Falcontent's hearty body. Falcontent was a robust fellow. Falcontent was in vigorous health. What need had Falcontent of a physician or a surgeon?.
> Falcontent's soul? Oh yes, Falcontent had a soul . . . .[24]

Duncan's own health and contentment were being undermined at this time by excessive drinking.[25] He was trying a number of therapies including cabins out in the forests and spiritual renewal. Their purpose was to improve his life and to curb his drinking, but neither succeeded. For Duncan, his personality and the stories he wrote were merging more than ever before, as he moved into the final five unhappy years of his life.

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[23] Finding His Soul, pp. 20-21.

[24] Ibid., p. 62.

[25] Josiah Manuel, personal interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

CHAPTER VIII

FINAL YEARS

In 1911, Jabez Manuel of Exploits, Newfoundland, visited the United States of America. He had for some time been suffering from asthma and he was in search of a home for himself and his family in a more amenable climate.[1] He kept a diary in which he recorded his travels through America and western Canada during the winter months of that year. His entry for January 12 relates that upon his arrival in New York Harbor, he was met by Norman Duncan and taken out to Richmond Hill for the night.[2] Jabez's son Joe was with him and the next day Duncan, his illustrator, George Harding, Jabez and Joe, spent the day together in New York. That night Joe and Duncan went out to East Orange while Harding and Jabez stayed in Duncan's New York apartment.[3] The following day was Saturday, and Duncan took them all to the City Club, of which he was a member.[4] Duncan had

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[1]Josiah Manuel, personal interview held in Innisfail, Alberta, November, 1976.

[2]Ruby Diary for 1911 of Jabez Manuel, entry for January 12, 1911, in the collection of Josiah Manuel, Innisfail, Alberta.

[3]*Ibid.*, January 13.

[4]*Ibid.*, January 14.

intended to accompany Jabez and Joe on their trip south into Florida, but for some reason which Jabez does not mention, Duncan could not travel on the appointed day, January 17.[5] The following day was similarly spent waiting for Duncan and, finally, on January 19, Jabez and Joe left without Duncan, the latter having promised to follow them with Harding on the next day.[6] Jabez continued on to Florida with his son, and on February 6 he received a letter from Duncan who wrote that he would not be arriving in Florida until after February 15.[7] However, on February 13 Jabez wrote in his diary, "Mr. Duncan turned up this morning. Jolly glad to see him,"[8] and the party went to Ocola for Duncan's trunks. They journeyed up the river Oklawaha, to Palatka, Florida, by riverboat and Jabez recorded that "Mr. Duncan enjoyed his day."[9] Duncan apparently decided to discontinue the trip, for on February 16 he took his trunks once more and returned north to New York.[10] Jabez was obliged to stay in Daytona for a week, as Joe was scheduled to return to Newfoundland. Duncan had promised to make the necessary

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[5]<u>Ibid.</u>, January 17.

[6]<u>Ibid.</u>, January 19.

[7]<u>Ibid.</u>, February 6.

[8]<u>Ibid.</u>, February 13.

[9]<u>Ibid.</u>, February 15.

[10]<u>Ibid.</u>, February 16.

arrangements. On February 24, Jabez received a letter from Duncan informing him of another delay and suggesting that Joe stay in Florida for the time being.[11] The last entry relating to this matter is February 27, when Jabez put Joe on the train for New York and he himself departed for Chicago.[12]

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.[13]

The following year, 1912, Duncan received an honorary doctoral degree in literature from the University of Pittsburgh.[14] He had not taught there, but his brother, Robert, had founded the Mellon Institute for Industrial Research at the University. It may have been partly through Robert's influence that Duncan was granted the degree, as this would

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[11] Ibid., February 24.

[12] Ibid., February 27.

[13] Josiah Manuel, personal interview.

[14] Susan Duncan, personal interview held in New York City, November, 1976.

be in keeping with the solidarity shared by the three Duncan brothers. On February 18, 1914, Robert died and was brought to Brantford, Ontario, for burial.[15] Duncan went home for his brother's funeral and some residents of Brantford still remember Duncan from this visit, just two years before his death. Mr. R.K. Ruddy, who was a child at the time, remembers how sad everyone in the family was, especially the children, for Robert had been a favorite of his young nephews and nieces.[16] Mr. Ruddy recalls that Duncan called all the children to him and gathered them around him on the living room floor. He took their minds off the terrible loss with spellbinding stories of the Orient, Newfoundland and Australia.[17] Duncan told them many stories, and by ignoring his own grief he helped them forget theirs. Duncan's kindness and selfless generosity are remembered by Ernest Duncan's children also. Duncan lived with them between his periods of travel, at Willoughby, Ohio, and constantly showered them with gifts from his travels.[18] Ernest's daughter, Susan, now resident in New York City, describes the exotic toys from many countries

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[15] Ibid.

[16] R.K. Ruddy, personal interview held in Brantford, Ontario, November, 1976.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Susan Duncan, personal interview.

with which they were too young to play until after Duncan's death. Harriott Duncan, Susan's mother, wrote in her diary that on the occasion of her son Robbie's birthday, Duncan had sent her "five suits of clothes with hats to match, a sweater and stockings."[19] Susan remarked that at times his generosity overrode the bounds of common sense. Duncan constantly sent Susan and her brother, Bobbie, gifts, cards and letters from his varied destinations around the world. Many of these letters are still extant and they exemplify a sincere rapport with young children, without the artifice or condescension of most adults when attempting to communicate with juveniles. The following letter was sent to Susan from Duncan, who was then in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1915:

> Dearest little Sue, who is Mama's little girl, and Daddy's little girl, and Uncle's little girl.
>
> 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 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. Uncle sends the letter, you know. Do you know who Uncle is? Well, Uncle is speaking to you. Uncle is on the Great Big Train. The Great Big Train goes Choo-choo-choo-choo! Sometimes it goes Whoo-whoo-whoo! Sometimes it goes Whoo-oo-oo-oo-oo, whoo-whoo! And all the time it goes Choo-choo-choo-choo! You go on the Great Big Train when you go to see Grandpa. Pretty soon Uncle will be back in your house. And then he will give Sue a great big hug and a great big kiss - just exactly as big a hug and kiss as he will give Bobbie.
>
> Uncle sends his love to little Sue,
>
> Uncle[20]

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[19] Diary of Harriott Duncan, entry for February 10, 1915, in the Susan Duncan collection, New York City.

[20] Letter, Norman Duncan to Susan Duncan, his niece, December 19, 1915.

Susan at the time was not quite three years old. She has one clear memory of Duncan creeping silently behind her and putting his hands over her eyes until she guessed who he was.[21]

As was observed by Joe Manuel in 1911, Duncan's drinking was becoming progressively worse. His brother, Ernest, was as accommodating as possible during Duncan's bouts of drinking. These often accompanied "writer's block," when Duncan was having difficulty with a story. Once when Ernest's profession took him outside Willoughby, he telephoned home to inquire about Duncan. His wife, Harriott, informed him that Duncan had locked himself in his room as soon as Ernest had left, and she feared for the worst. Ernest was then in Ashtabula, Ohio, but immediately returned to Willoughby in order to tend to his brother.[22]

Duncan was still writing actively and published eight books after 1910. One of these books, Australian By-Ways, was written during the second of Duncan's two major travel expeditions for Harper's magazine. In 1912 and the early part of 1913, Duncan "was sent by the same magazine to Australia, New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies and the Malay States."[23] There are postcards and letters in Susan Duncan's

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[21]Susan Duncan, personal interview.

[22]*Ibid.*

[23]Norman Duncan, Battles Royal Down North (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918, with an introduction by Sir Wilfred Grenfell), p. 11.

collection from Duncan in Tasmania, Australia, Tangiers, Gibraltar, and Madeira. A collection of Duncan's maps of Australia and charts of the surrounding seas has been donated by Susan Duncan to Yale University.[24] Duncan's propensity to immerse himself in the culture about which he was writing can be seen again in his Australian travels. He became quite conversant with the geography, history and sociology of the land. He journeyed, with his illustrator, George Harding, to the interior of the island and wrote a vast array of interesting articles and stories on everything he saw. He visited the Australian lumberjacks of the "Jarrah Bush" and was dismayed by their excessive drinking, as he had been dismayed by the same excesses in America.

> These men with whom we rested were like lumberjacks the world over - physically fine, hearty fellows, but hard rogues and wastrels. Their diversion was a furious debauch, from which, having "knocked down" their checks in the first public house, they crawled back to long periods of healthful labor.
>
> It being now shortly after Christmas, the talk had something to do with the long Christmas absence.
>
> "Fined me a pound in Jarrahdale," said Scotty.
>
> "A pound for bein' drunk!" cried the hook man, indignantly.
>
> "Ah, well," said Scotty, in honorable defense of the magistrate, "I was usin' profane languitch."
>
> "Dad-blime me!" the hook-man protested, "they only charge ten bob for that in Perth!"
>
> "Ah, well," said Scotty, "I got my money's worth!"[25]

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[24] Susan Duncan, personal interview.

[25] Norman Duncan, Australian By-Ways (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915), p. 43.

Like many of Duncan's books, Australian By-Ways is spiced with many unusual characters, such as Ol' Man Dougherty, who periodically dressed in his best, cleaned his tent, put out his best spread, and entertained himself with impeccable taste. He would carry on polite conversation with himself for most of the evening, and then he would finish the affair by drinking himself drunk to his own health.[26]

Duncan described his fellow travellers and their modes of transport, both by sea and by land. He describes the gold mining fields and the farming areas. He discusses the aboriginal inhabitants of the island and their casual attitude to violence and murder, as well as their relationship with the white settlers.[27] He describes their skills as trackers and busmen. These descriptions are interspersed with exciting stories of life and death in the Australian wilds.

In 1914, Duncan published The Bird-Store Man, perhaps the most insignificant of all his books. It is a children's story aimed at the juvenile market, about a pet show owner, Mr. Thomas Twitter:

> Mr. Twitter was a spare lean old fellow, with a lean, shaven face, furnished with pleasantly snapping gray eyes, fun-loving lips, much used to pursing, and a long agreeably curved nose, like a beak of

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[26] Ibid., p. 49.

[27] Ibid., p. 236.

> engaging proportions. He was jaunty and rosy and nimble; and he sparkled with genial friendliness . . . . Never before, indeed, was a man fashioned so nearly in the image of a bird.[28]

The novel is about a little girl and her sick dog, Alexander, whom Mr. Twitter cares for and trains as a circus dog. As a novel by Duncan, it may be studied as one of his children's books, but even in this category it is an anomaly for it is without the religious overtones of The Suitable Child, and is not set Newfoundland as is the remainder of Duncan's children's books. Billy Topsail and Company, 1910, and Billy Topsail, M.D., 1916, were both sequels to the popular Adventures of Billy Topsail, 1906. These adventure stories for young people involve young Billy Topsail, from Newfoundland, in life and death adventures indigenous to those coasts. The characters of these stories include Doctor Luke and Billy's Newfoundland dog, "Skipper." The three-volume Billy Topsail series was well received and provided Duncan with some of his most loyal readers. The three remaining volumes: Best of a Bad Job, 1912, Battles Royal Down North, 1918, and Harbor Tales Down North, 1918, were collections of Duncan's Newfoundland stories, the last two having been published posthumously. Duncan's publisher, Revell, edited and compiled these last two collections two years after the

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[28] Norman Duncan, The Bird-Store Man (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), p. 13.

author's sudden death. Revell added an introduction and brief biography by Sir Wilfred Grenfell for these stories which Duncan had never published in a collection. Many of these stories were weak, sentimental and moralistic, but the popular audience of the day reacted favorably to the adventurous plot line and lucid style which Duncan had mastered.

Duncan spent his last years in foreign travel; in Willoughby with his brother, Ernest; in Brantford, Ontario, visiting relatives; and in California pursuing a relationship which will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. Many of the magazines which were publishing his stories had their offices in New York City, e.g, McClure's, Outlook, and Harper's. Both his publishers, Fleming H. Revell and Harper and Brothers, were based in New York City, and consequently Duncan spent much of his time in New York between 1910 and 1916. When Jabez Manuel visited from Newfoundland in 1911, he stayed at Duncan's apartment in New York City.[29]

In April of 1911, Duncan was contacted by his agent, Beatrice DeMille, sister of the film producer, who informed him that the famous Broadway producer, David Belasco, was interested in adapting Duncan's book, The Mother, to a Broadway play:

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[29] Ruby Diary for 1911 of Jabez Manuel, January 13.

April 10, 1911.

Mr. Norman Duncan,
4715 Wallingford St.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

My dear Mr. Duncan:-

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. I give you verbatim his telegraphic answer. He is now in North Carolina.

"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. David Belasco."

If you knew Mr. Belasco as well as I do, you would realize that the battle is already won although it needs steady work from the dramatist from now until October. The play of course will have to be renamed as Mr. Brady has used "MOTHER" all over the country. In view of this the offer I make to you will be as follows:

Name of Star
in
Name of Play
by
The Dramatizer
based on The Mother by Norman Duncan
Personally produced by
David Belasco

You will have no further trouble of any kind and will receive one quarter of all royalties paid by Mr. Belasco to the dramatizer.

Please wire immediate answer to above address as if this goes through it must be on the instant as we all have all we can do to get it into the right shape in time.

Yours faithfully,

Beatrice DeMille

Mrs. H.C.[30]

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[30]Letter, Beatrice DeMille to Norman Duncan, April 10, 1911, collection of Susan Duncan, New York City.

This letter proved to be the harbinger of what was probably the bitterest disappointment in Duncan's life. As a result of it, his drinking became uncontrollable and his health was broken. At first, Duncan was ecstatic that one of his books would be played on Broadway, and began immediately the arduous task of rewriting the novel as a five act play.[31] He began submitting the completed drafts of the play to Belasco through DeMille. However, the former would not comment on the play until Duncan had completed all five acts:

May 20, 1911.

Dear Mr. Duncan
Mr. Belasco's wire reached me yesterday afternoon - forwarded from New York. I copy it here. He will not give any of his ideas till he gets the whole first draft from you. But he is well pleased.

copy of telegram

"Act received. Has great stuff in it with big possibility. Delighted with it. I won't attempt to criticize or offer suggestions until I read the next two acts, as first I wish to know the author's purpose and I am afraid I might upset what he has in mind so keep your shoulders to the wheel and forge ahead. David Belasco"

So you see dear Mr. Duncan we must rush along and finish our part before the real work with him can take place. I shall be ready for work with you Wednesday 24th. If the fourth act is not typed will you send it to the office and the girls will have it all ready for us when we want it. Same with third act. I love it and can hardly wait for Wednesday to come. Pittsburgh is boiling but reports from New York make it just as bad there so -!

Faithfully,

Beatrice DeMille[32]

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[31] Susan Duncan, personal interview.

[32] Letter, Beatrice DeMille to Norman Duncan, May 20, 1911, collection of Susan Duncan, New York City.

Duncan was not a businessman and depended on the good intentions of his business asociates, who were with few exceptions scrupulous. In his jubilation, Duncan had accepted a $500.00 advance from Belasco which legally bound him [Duncan] to the project on the terms that Belasco would stipulate.[33] When the play was completed, Duncan went to Syracuse, New York, to meet with Belasco and DeMille to arrange the final contract. Duncan had consulted no lawyer about this transaction, and found himself bound to a contract that was not what he had been led to believe.[34] Susan Duncan says that Belasco wanted his own name affixed to the play instead of Duncan's. Another indication is that Belasco wanted the name of his own dramatist, who was to re-work the play, affixed instead of Duncan's.[35] In any case, Duncan would not comply unless the proper credits were used with the play as was originally stipulated. Belasco insisted on his rights within their agreement, for Duncan had taken the advance of $500.00. Duncan tried in vain to repay the $500.00 and seek another producer, but Belasco would not rescind the original agreement. This betrayal hurt Duncan much more than the financial loss, and his family at that time noticed the ill effects it had on his health. Ernest's

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[33]Susan Duncan, personal interview.

[34]*Ibid.*

[35]*Ibid.*

wife, Harriott, often said that this "Belasco affair broke Norman's heart."[36] Duncan pursued the matter with lawyers, and Edgar Briggs, of Fleming H. Revell, assisted in the dispute, but to no avail. Duncan's brother, Ernest, struggled with the legal matter nearly until his death, hoping to free the play from Belasco's control, but he also failed. The play was never produced or published, and remains in the Susan Duncan collection in New York City.

Owing no doubt to the "Belasco fiasco," Duncan aged prematurely and his once thick hair turned a dull white. His drinking escalated alarmingly as he struggled with his last stories, several of which were never published in either magazines or collections. The three hitherto unpublished stories deal with an explicit and common theme--abject alcoholism.[37]

The first, entitled <u>The Mastery</u>,[38] is the story of two young men, relegated to a life of destitution on Skid Row by alcoholism. As morning broke in New York City, they shook themselves awake and immediately felt the familiar thirst for alcohol. As was their custom, they alternately accosted passers-by to solicit money. One of the young men

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[36]<u>Ibid</u>.

[37]<u>Ibid</u>.

[38]Norman Duncan, "The Mastery," an unpublished story in the Susan Duncan collection, New York City.

stopped a pretty young lady who took pity on him and gave him some money. As the money changed hands, her fingers touched his, and at the same instant he was jolted by a shock of recognition--she was his sister. Immediately, he was filled with a sorrow for his condition, and a resolve to gain mastery over the addiction which was keeping him there. His sister did not recognize him and passed on, but the young man found his companion and told him he was leaving to pursue a better life, free of alcohol. His friend wished him well, doubtfully. As night fell, the friend was sleeping in a shed, intoxicated, and the young man returned, in the same state. He told his friend that he had no will power remaining, "only the memory of a will,"[39] and instead of gaining mastery over his addiction, alcoholism gained complete mastery over him.

Duncan was battling with alcoholism in an age which did not have the same understanding of the complaint as is had today. Institutions such as Alcoholics Anonymous were still in the offing, and the alcoholic's struggle in 1914 was a lonely one, filled with fears and misunderstandings, for alcoholism was still considered to be a lack of personal restraint.

The second of the three unpublished stories is an article seemingly intended for magazine publication. It is

[39] *Ibid.*

lucidly written, as is the former story, and concerns a health resort for alcoholics. The "Self-Masters' Colony near by the town of Union, New Jersey, a quiet place to which any troubled man may withdraw until his trouble passes--where, having entered penniless and distressed, he may yet maintain himself in self-respect."[40]

> . . . wayward sons of the rich, intemperate young men trying to control themselves, men disgusted with dissipation, men whose courage has departed . . .[41]

> He may confess or contain his trouble: 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.[42]

Duncan's familiarity with the colony suggests first hand experience, which, considering the location and his condition, is most likely. He seems quite familiar with the physical layout of the colony:

> The farm is of fifty rolling acres, green and sweet-smelling after rain, lying beside a main-travelled road; the house - a spacious pillared old mansion, set in a shady grove, back from the thoroughfare peeps towards the city, over all the fields between, and is not reached by the dust and noise of a world passing by.[43]

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[40] Norman Duncan, an untitled, unpublished article concerning "The Self-Masters' Colony," in the Susan Duncan collection, New York City, p. 1.

[41] _Ibid._, p. 13.

[42] _Ibid._, p. 2.

[43] _Ibid._, p. 9.

In his references to alcoholism as a disease rather than an over-indulgence, Duncan anticipates some of the attitudes and therapies of more recent organizations. One other unpublished story is entitled the Forgiveness of Sin, but it has been misplaced among the Susan Duncan collection of manuscripts in New York, and therefore cannot be included in this study. These were the final writings of Norman Duncan as his brief but furious life sped to a close. Two final incidents during those last years remain to be discussed:

CHAPTER IX

FREDONIA, N.Y.

The nearest approximation to a romance in Duncan's life occurred in the final few years. The lady was a Mrs. J.N. Burns, a wealthy divorcee who lived on a sumptuous estate in California names "Montecieto." Mrs. Burns was the mother of Arthur Cary, one of Duncan's legal wards. The boy's natural father, Mr. E.H. Cary, was then resident in Dallas, Texas. The certificate of guardianship was signed between Duncan and Mrs. Burns on December 31, 1915, for the stated purpose of "the furtherance of his [Arthur's] education."[1] Arthur was 15 years old at the time, and Duncan arranged for his high school education at "The Hill" school in Pottstown, Pa.

Mrs. Burns "wanted to marry Norman, but he was too busy travelling,"[2] and Duncan's drinking may also have had some influence in quenching their relationship. Mrs. Burns visited the Duncans in either Willoughby or Fredonia at least once, and brought gifts for the family including a very expensive doll for Susan which was an exact replica of

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[1]Official guardianship papers for Arthur Cary, Susan Duncan collection, New York City.

[2]Susan Duncan, personal interview held in New York City, November, 1976.

a human baby.[3] She also set up a trust fund to finance the university education of Bobbie Duncan, Ernest's son.[4] This may have been because Duncan would accept no money for his services with Arthur Cary. Photos of the Burns estate, "Montecieto," showed swimming pools and marble statues elegantly set in formal gardens.[5]

The diary of Ernest's wife, Harriott, shows that Duncan spent much time in California during the last two years of his life. Harriott's entry for July 18, 1915 states "Uncle Norman went to California . . ." and later adds "returned September 5."[6] The guardianship papers show that Norman was probably in California for Christmas, or at least on December 5, 1915.[7] The exact nature of the relationship between Duncan and Mrs. J.N. Burns cannot be ascertained from these incomplete pieces of information, but her intentions to claim Duncan's affections appear to have been common knowledge in the Duncan family.[8] Duncan was, even in 1915, a very attractive man with an arresting

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Diary of Harriott Duncan, Susan Duncan collection, New York City, July 18, 1915.

[7] Guardianship papers for Arthur Cary.

[8] Susan Duncan, personal interview.

charm and wit. He was very popular, especially with ladies, as Susan Duncan remarked: "The women were crazy about Norman."[9] However, Duncan did not marry Mrs. Burns or anyone during his life.

In March, 1916, Ernest moved his family from Willoughby, Ohio, to Fredonia, New York. Fredonia was a university town and very suitable to Norman's temperament. There were many university people as well as artists and writers living in Fredonia at the time.[10] Next door to the Duncans lived the sister of Mark Twain.[11] Jean Webster, whose "Daddy Long Legs" became a movie and a Broadway play, lived nearby. Jean Webster was one of Harriott Duncan's best friends.[12] Grace Richards, a then famous actress, was also a friend of Duncan's.[13] Duncan was a friend of fellow New York writers such as Carl and Mark Van Doren and Henry Van Dyke. Among his last effects were autographed copies of many of their works, as well as the works of Jack London, W.T. Grenfell, and others.[14] This last summer, 1916, appears to have been an enjoyable one for Duncan. His reputation was

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[9] _Ibid._

[10] _Ibid._

[11] _Ibid._

[12] _Ibid._

[13] _Ibid._

[14] _Ibid._

at its peak, as he had 17 books and numerous periodical publications to his credit. He was living in an environment of fellow artists and surrounded by a loving family. Publication was underway for his next book <u>Billy Topsail, M.D.</u>

On October 18, 1916, Harriott Duncan wrote the following entry in her diary:

> Uncle Norman went to Country Club with Mr. Gray [Marcellus Gray] and Mr. MacManus in Mr. MacManus's new auto to play golf. He was taken ill and died about three, suddenly.[15]

William Lyon Mackenzie King wrote the following three letters to Ernest Duncan which discuss the final circumstances of Duncan's death:

COPY OF LETTER OF Mackenzie King's from Ottawa, Canada - to Dr. Ernest Duncan (brother of Norman Duncan). (It is on black edged stationery. Has envelope of same).

THE ROXBOROUGH
Ottawa

October 23, 1916.

> My dear Dr. Duncan:
> I cannot express the grief it has been to me to read of the sudden death of my old and very dear friend, Norman. You may know that many years ago we shared lodgings together on Fremantle St., in Toronto, and we have been the closest of friends ever since. When I saw him last in New York, he made a promise to come and spend a few days with me here. Do give me particulars of his doings of late. It was the spring of the year when I saw him last.
> I cannot express too sincerely my sympathy with you, and with those who were most dear to him, and

[15]Diary of Harriott Duncan, October 18, 1916.

to whom he meant so much. 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!

Where has he been buried? I hope in our country in which his name has brought so much deserved lustre. I have nothing but the press despatch - a very brief one, mentioning his death on the golf links, and of his being with you - to guide me hence this note and its confused expressions.

My own father's death within the past two months, 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.

Yours very sincerely,

Mackenzie King[16]

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COPY OF LETTER OF MacKenzie King's on stationery of Haddon Hall, Atlantic City, N.J. - to Dr. Ernest Duncan, brother of Norman Duncan. There is no envelope.

(CREST)

Haddon Hall
Atlantic City, N.J.

Nov. 13-16

Dear Dr. Duncan:

I was in the hospital at Baltimore (John Hopkins) undergoing a slight operation for an infected antrum when your kind letter and its enclosed cutting was received. Otherwise, I should have written to thank you at once. I am now on my way back to Ottawa, having stopped over here, to get the benefit of a day by the sea after the fortnight in the hospital before getting back into New York.

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[16]Letter, William Lyon Mackenzie King to Ernest Duncan, October 23, 1916, collection of Susan Duncan, New York City.

I cannot get over the sense of loss in Norman's death, which must be very very great to you, being as you say, the only one now left of the family. Fortunately you have wife and family of your own. How glad for your sake, I am of that. It has comforted me somewhat to know that Norman has been brought back to his own country, though this country was good to him, as it has been to you and me, and many another Canadian. I must see if in some way we cannot get some national recognition to his work in Canada. I should like to see some appropriate memorial to him, at the University of Toronto: at Brantford or some place else. Just now while the War is on it is difficult to get any movement of this kind under-way, but it may be managed when our class has a reunion or in some other way. His own works will live, but the nation must care for its own.

Your mention of Norman's affection for me is also a consolation. I certainly was deeply fond of him and we were much to each other.

Again with very sincere sympathy I am, yours very sincerely,

Mackenzie King.[17]

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W.L. Mackenzie King
The Roxborough
Ottawa

November 27, 1916.

My dear Dr. Duncan:

I have been again absent from Ottawa, or I should have written ere this to thank you for your much prized letter of the 15th instant, and also for the photograph of Norman and the letter accompanying it, which I received on my return yesterday.

I more than thank you for your kindness in sending me so recent a photograph. It is, I doubt not, a splendid one, but it makes Norman appear to me much older than he did the last time I saw him, which was in the early part of this year. That, however, I find is the way with photographs. If we want to discover how old we are, it does not do to go by the appearance of a face as animated in conversation; it requires the kind of exact

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[17] Letter, William Lyon Mackenzie King to Ernest Duncan, November 13, 1916, Susan Duncan collection, New York City.

delineation which a portrait affords. How fortunate you are to have had so recent a picture, and one so entirely to your liking.

I had not known of the remarkable coincidence of Norman's death being at the same age as that of your brother Robert. The circumstance to my mind is singularly significant. 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.

I have already spoken to one or two about a memorial, but I can see that it will be best to wait until we have a class re-union to effect what I have in view. Possibly the class to which Robert belonged would consider joining with our year in the erection of a tablet in the University which would unite their names in the one memorial and be expressive of the service to humanity, science and letters which they have rendered. Such a tribute should be a real inspiration to undergraduates of the University. I shall continue to take up the subject with different friends as opportunity presents. Meanwhile, if you come across any reviews of the life and work of either of your brothers, which you feel are in any way adequately appreciative, I hope you will let me know of them, that I may have at hand material which will be useful in furthering this object.

With kindest regards and with renewed thanks for the photograph and your letter, Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

W.L. Mackenzie King.[18]

Dr. E.H. Duncan,
Fredonia, N.Y.

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King's plan to erect a monument to Duncan in Canada was never completed, and today there is no monument to Duncan's memory anywhere. In the 1920's, a vast amount of

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[18] Letter, William Lyon Mackenzie King to Ernest Duncan, November 27, 1916, Susan Duncan collection, New York City.

Duncan's papers, stories, letters, and miscellaneous material were sent to the National Archives in Ottawa and other materials were sent by Ernest Duncan to the University of Toronto.[19] Both collections have been misplaced and a search is currently underway to find them. An extensive collection of Duncan's papers as well as three unpublished stories are located in the Susan Duncan collection in New York City; another valuable collection is preserved by Mr. Norman Duncan Manuel in Innisfail, Alberta. No extensive biography has been written on Duncan before this present paper. Perhaps the best brief biography is the one prepared in 1918 by Sir Wilfred T. Grenfell.

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[19] Susan Duncan, personal interview.

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NOTE: The problem of collecting Duncan's periodical articles and his newspaper writings has proved immense and ~~will~~ be part of my continuing scholarly work on Duncan. Initial inquiries have revealed that he published 59 articles in *Harper's* between 1903 and 1915; 20 articles in *Youth's Companion* between 1902 and 1910; 6 articles in *McClure's* between 1900 and 1903; 7 articles in *Atlantic* between 1900 and 1912; 5 articles in *Outing* between 1901 and 1908; an article in *World's Work* in 1903; 4 articles in *Century* between 1907 and 1913; 3 articles in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1916; 4 articles in the *Delineator* between 1916 and 1917; an article in *Cosmopolitan* in 1906; an article in *Pictorial Review* in 1917; 4 articles in *Canadian Magazine* in 1905; 3 articles in *Outlook* between 1904 and 1911; 2 articles in *Red Book* between 1905 and 1916; and 5 articles in *Saturday Evening Post* in 1916.

Duncan's extensive newspaper writings include articles for the Stratford (Ontario) *Beacon* and the Windsor (Ontario) *Daily Record* between 1889 and 1901; the University of Toronto's *Varsity* magazine between 1891 and 1895; the Auburn (New York) *Bulletin* between 1895 and 1897; and the (New York) *Saturday Evening Post* between 1897 and 1901. I have no doubt that Duncan wrote in other magazines and newspapers. Many, but by no means all, of Duncan's periodicals and articles were included in his printed books. I hope over the next two or three years to compile a complete list of Duncan's fugitive publications.

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