

(March 17th, 1913.)

## Dr. William Henry Drummond: Poet and Man.

BY MR. THOS. O'HAGAN, M.A., PH.D.\*

AT a regular luncheon of the Canadian Club held on the 17th March, Dr. O'Hagan said:

*Mr. President, and Members of the Canadian Club,*—I assure you that it is in no conventional manner that I express to you the great pleasure I have in being present here to-day as your guest. Living under alien stars I have not, I hope, lost my love for my native land, and while I have been treated with the utmost kindness by the people of the Republic to the south, yet my heart travels back in memory and gratitude to the land where I was cradled.

You will be pleased to know that in Chicago we have organized a Canadian Club. (Applause.) Not only, Mr. President, have we nearly all the cities of Canada represented there by their own Canadian Clubs, such as the Belleville Club, the Kingston Club, the London Club, and the Stratford Club, but we have one united organization, formed a little more than a year ago, and it is succeeding admirably. Of course you understand that there is a difficulty which you have not here, because it is easy in such surroundings for men to forget that they are Canadians; but I am pleased to say they do not do it. Yet it is difficult to hold them together, because of the fact of their environment. We have pleasant quarters, and we get speakers, sometimes Toronto men, such as Mr. George Tait Blackstock, who delivered an address at our annual dinner last year, and we had Sir Mackenzie Bowell, that veteran Canadian statesman, whom we caught "on the fly" while passing through Chicago; also Mr. Villeneuve, President of the Cartier Club of Montreal. We had hoped to get Sir Wilfrid Laurier, too, but they are so busy at Ottawa that he could not come. I understand that so many of the politicians are "at sea" there that they are preparing to become admirals when the Navy is launched! (Laughter.)

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Well, all these things are extremely encouraging. A man said to me one day, "By the way, you Canadians are very ambitious." "Yes," I replied, "and we deliver the goods!" "I believe you do," he answered. So Canadians are occupying very prominent positions in the commercial world over there, in the industrial world, and even on the stock exchange. (Hear, hear.)

I think I have a certain right, by the way, and privilege to address a Canadian Club, for I was a charter member of the first Canadian Club established in Canada. This Club was organized in Hamilton in 1892. (Hear, hear.) I was then Principal of a High School hard by, and they invited me to join the Club, because they knew I was deeply interested in everything Canadian, and I attended the first annual banquet and replied to the toast of Canadian literature. The next year I was a graduate student of Cornell University, and was invited by the Club to read a poem at the annual banquet. So, my Canadian brothers, I can assure you that I feel at home with you. (Applause.)

Now, I am to speak to you to-day upon the life and work of one who was a guest at your tables, who broke bread with you, and holds a place of large esteem in every Canadian heart—I mean Dr. Drummond. Of course it is impossible to give an account of the man or of his work as a poet without taking notice of the form in which he wrote most of his work. As regards dialect poetry, in the broad sense of the word it means the language spoken by a section of the people, in contrast with that spoken by the whole people. When you go across the line to the Republic in which I have been living for a few years, you will find a good deal of dialect poetry has blossomed from the soil, a good deal more than in our own land. The reason is, that there is great localization and differentiation there, but in our own country of Canada localities are not so sharply differentiated. There is quite a difference between the language of the people of Vermont or Indiana and that of those out on the Pacific coast; but there is not much difference between the Nova Scotia man and the British Columbian, and there is but little difference between the Provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, save for the wider vision of the prairies and the stronger ozone that one breathes there. But there is one part of Canada where dialect poetry has blossomed, for there are the conditions for its growth, the soil and the atmosphere, and that is in the home of Bateese (Baptiste).

There you find a people living a quiet, ideal, beautiful, peaceful life, a life reaching back to the old regime, untouched by the torch and the trumpet of the French Revolution, faithful to the religion of their fathers and to the Curé. Surely people living this ideal life would be fit subjects for poetic characterization. When Dr. Drummond found these people he discovered a field for dialect poetry. He went amongst them with open and sympathetic mind, ever ready to find the fragrance of virtue where the flower grew. It is easy, my good friends, to ridicule a people, but it requires genius in touch with the lowly and divine to gather up the spiritual facts in a people's lives, and give these facts such setting that poet and people shall live forever. Dr. Drummond has done this.

I remember well being his guest three times, and on one occasion I said to him, "I am exceedingly glad to know that you are big enough, honest and sympathetic enough, not to have ridiculed these people." He replied, "I would rather cut off my right hand than ridicule these people!" That was the kind of man he was! (Applause.) Dr. Fréchette, in pointing out how Dr. Drummond does not ridicule the people, says he paints them as they are, as a Millet would, or a Jules Breton. His point of view is always spiritual. In the broad sense of the word, it is neither earthly nor intellectual but always spiritual. Therefore Drummond's judgments have about them something of the accuracy of heaven.

Now I shall say something of his work. Later on I shall touch on the man as I knew him. Taking up his work, as to the chronological production of his poems, the first poem which brought him fame was the well known little poem, "The Wreck of the Julie Plante." It has been recited everywhere in the lumbermen's camps of Michigan and Wisconsin, by the cowboys out on the plains, and by the members of the exclusive clubs of New York and Boston. Dr. Drummond could almost be said to have awakened one morning and found himself famous when he had written the "Wreck of the Julie Plante."

As to the origin of the poem: the St. Lawrence, as you all know, expands some distance below Montreal into Lac St. Pierre, which like all small lakes is subject to violent storms; in one of these occurred the wreck of the "Julie Plante," a little wood scow. The humor of it lies in the high dramatic key in which it is narrated: never did ocean liner, not even the Titanic, go down to its grave amid such footlights of tragedy as sank "the Julie Plante" in the waters of Lac St. Pierre. I will recite the poem for you and so let the author tell you the story.

THE WRECK OF THE "JULIE PLANTE"  
A LEGEND OF LAC ST. PIERRE.

On wan dark night on Lac St. Pierre,  
De win' she blow, blow, blow,  
An' de crew of de wood scow 'Julie Plante'  
Got scar't an' run below—  
For de win' she blow lak hurricane  
Bimeby she blow some more,  
An' de scow bus' up on Lac St. Pierre  
Wan arpent from de shore.

De captinne walk on de fronte deck,  
An' walk de hin' deck too—  
He call de crew from up de hole,  
He call de cook also.  
De cook she's name was Rosie,  
She come from Montreal,  
Was chambre maid on lumber barge,  
On de Grande Lachine Canal.

De win' she blow from nor'-eas'-wes',—  
De sout' win' she blow too,  
W'en Rosie cry "Mon cher captinne,  
Mon cher, w'at I shall do?"  
Den de Captinne t'row de big ankerre,  
But still the scow she dreef,  
De crew he can't pass on de shore,  
Becos' he los' hees skeef.

De night was dark lak' wan black cat,  
De wave run high an' fas',  
W'en de captinne tak' de Rosie girl  
An' tie her to de mas'.  
Den he also tak' de life preserve,  
An' jump off on de lak',  
An' say, "Good-bye, ma Rosie dear,  
I go drown for your sak'."

Nex' morning very early,  
'Bout ha'f-pas' two—t'ree—four—  
De captinne—scow—an' poor Rosie  
Was corpses on de shore.  
For de win' she blow like hurricane,  
Bimeby she blow some more,  
An' de scow bus' up on Lac St. Pierre,  
Wan arpent from de shore.

MORAL

Now all good wood scow sailor man  
Tak' warning by dat storm  
An' go an' marry some nice french girl  
An' leev on wan beeg farm.  
De win' can blow lak' hurricane,  
An' s'pose she blow some more,  
You can't get drown on Lac St. Pierre  
So long you stay on shore.

This being the 17th of March, and I bring the evidence with me in this shamrock which I wear, and many of you being of Celtic extraction—either you or your parents having been born and cradled in the land beyond the sea—I think it only proper to refer to the Irish character of Dr. Drummond. He was a Celt to his finger tips, and proud of his race. Many a time he expressed to me in his own drawing room his love for the Irish race. The last poem he read at a banquet, a few weeks before his untimely death, I want to read to you because it voices the loyalty of the man to the blood in his veins. He was twelve years old when he came out to this country. The poem, "We're Irish Yet," was written in the spring of 1907, a very short time before his death. This poem, the last one that Dr. Drummond ever wrote, was read by the author at a St. Patrick's Day banquet in Montreal in 1907.

#### WE'RE IRISH YET.

What means this gathering to-night?  
 What spirit moves along  
 The crowded hall, and touching light  
 Each heart among the throng,  
 Awakes, as tho' a trumpet blast  
 Had sounded in their ears,  
 The recollections of the past,  
 The memories of the years?

Oh! 't is the spirit of the West,  
 'Ehe spirit of the Celt,  
 The breed that spurned the alien breast,  
 And every wrong has felt—  
 And still, tho' far from fatherland,  
 We never can forget  
 To tell ourselves, with heart and hand;  
 We're Irish yet! We're Irish yet!

And they outside the clan of Conn  
 Would understand, but fail,  
 The mystic music played upon  
 The heart-strings of the Gael—  
 His ear, and his alone, can tell  
 The soul that lies within,  
 The music which he knows so well,  
 The voice of Kith and Kin.

He hears the tales of old, old days,  
 Of battle fierce by ford and hill,  
 Of ancient Senachie's martial lays,  
 And race unconquered still.  
 It challenges with mother's pride  
 And dares him to forget  
 That, tho' he cross the ocean wide,  
 He's Irish yet! He's Irish yet!

His eye may never see the blue  
 Of Ireland's April sky,  
 His ear may never listen to  
 The song of lark on high,  
 But deep within his Irish heart  
 Are cloisters, dark and dim,  
 No human hand can wrench apart,  
 And the lark still sings for him.

We've bowed beneath the chastening rod,  
 We've had our griefs and pains,  
 But with them all, we still thank God,  
 The Blood is in our veins,  
 The ancient blood that knows no fear,  
 The Stamp is on us yet,  
 And so, however foes may jeer,  
 We're Irish yet! We're Irish yet!

I have spoken of Drummond as being a Celt to his finger tips; and he had all the characteristics of the Celt. I don't mean to say here, my friends, that the Irish possess all the virtues. There is no *best* race! Not at all. But there are certain races that stand for certain ideals. And I know you will agree with me when I say that no race stands so distinctly as the Celtic race for spirituality. It is the pride of the Celt in every land that he has never given way to atheism and infidelity: he always leans upon Providence; and whilst you will find him brooding over wrongs, you will always find the spiritual element strongest in his character.

Dr. Drummond was a clean-souled man. Let me quote you Dr. Symonds' word: "I believe great men are Sir Galahads. Their strength is as the strength of ten, because their hearts are pure." Dr. Symonds, Dr. Drummond's pastor, paid him the tribute that if in any company where he was any story was told that was not becoming the lips of a clean-minded man, Dr. Drummond got up and left the company in protest. (Applause.) What a beautiful tribute from his pastor!

Then the tenderness of the man, and his love for his mother, were marked characteristics. We were very close in friendship, and at his death Mrs. Drummond asked me to write an estimate of the man and his work. I was very pleased to do that,—I was delighted to do it, because I loved the man. There is a strong friendship between men; nothing is so lasting: you know the bond of friendship is strong. All down the centuries it has been strong; so when I learned of his death I mourned. People wept over Drummond's death as they did over John Boyd O'Reilly's who passed away in Boston a few years ago,—regardless of race, for we

all love a great man. Drummond was full of tenderness, as shown in his love for his mother and for little children. Now I am going to read you at the close what I think is a gem: it was too sacred to be published when he was living; it touched a sorrow too deep; it was on the death of his little child, a beautiful child. I was away in Europe at the time, but I remember this little boy as one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. He reminded one of the picture by Murillo of "St. John and the Lamb." When the child died, it broke Drummond's heart. He himself called the poem he wrote, "The Dream," but I see in the volume published after his death, containing all his works, it is called, "The Last Portage." It was not published in his lifetime, and now, with your permission I will read this little poem:

#### THE LAST PORTAGE.

Las' night w'en I'm sleepin' I dreamed a dream  
An' a wonderful wan it seem—  
For I'm off on de road I was never see,  
Too long an' hard for a man lak' me,  
So ole he can only wait de call  
Is sooner or later come to all.

De night is dark and de portage dere  
Got plaintee o' log lying ev'ryw'ere,  
Black bush aroun' on de right an' lef',  
A step from de road an' you los' you'se'f,  
De moon an' de star above is gone,  
Yet somet'ing tell me I mus' go on.

An' off in front of me as I go,  
Light as a dreef of de fallin' snow—  
Who is dat leetle boy dancin' dere,  
Can see hees w'ite dress an' curly hair,  
An' almos' touch heem, so near to me,  
In an' out dere among de tree?

An' den I'm hearin' a voice is say,  
"Come along, fader, don't min' de way,  
De boss on de camp he sen' for you,  
So your leetle boy's going to guide you t'roo;  
It's easy for me, for de road I know,  
'Cos I travel it many long year ago."

An' Oh! mon Dieu! w'en he turn hees head,  
I'm seein' de face of my boy is dead—  
Dead wit' de young blood in hees vein—  
An' dere he's comin' wance more again,  
Wit' de curly hair, an' dark-blue eye,  
So lak de blue of de summer sky—

An' now no more for de road I care,  
An' slippery log lyin' ev'ryw'ere—  
De swamp on de valley, de mountain too,  
But climb it jus' as I use to do—  
Don't stop on de road, for I need no res'  
So long as I see de leetle w'ite dress.

An' I foller it on, an' wance in a w'ile  
He turn again wit de baby smile,  
An' say, "Dear fader, I'm here you see—  
We're bote togeder, jus' you an' me—  
Very dark to you, but to me it's light,  
De road we travel so far to-night.

"De boss on de camp w'ere I alway stay  
Since ever de tam I was go away.  
He welcome de poores' man dat call,  
But love de, leetle wan bes' of all,  
So dat's de reason I spik for you  
An' come to-night for to bring you t'roo."

Lak de young Jesu w'en he's here below  
De face of ma leetle son look jus' so—  
Den off beyon', on de bush I see  
De w'ite dress fadin' among de tree—  
Was it a dream I dream las' night  
Is goin' away on de morning light?

I see that the time is about up, for I purposed addressing you for only half an hour. I just want to say in conclusion, as one looking on and watching your progress, that I am always interested in the literary work of Canada. I realize that you have great literary possibilities here. You have great possibilities, east and west, and far to the north, farther north even than Dr. Cook went. (Laughter.) The future of Canadian literature is indeed full of promise. For while the literary firmament of other lands is darkened with the twilight of eve, the literary firmament of Canada is rosy with the promise of dawn. Not yet has come our Canadian Longfellow, our Canadian Tennyson, or our Canadian Browning. When he does come, he shall come dowered with the fullest gift of song, and shall catch up in that song something of the sublimity of our mountains, the light and glow of our northern stars, something of the sweep and dash of our mighty rivers, the music and murmur of our blossoming prairies, the honest manhood of our marts and farms, the strong virtues of our homes and firesides, the tenderness of our mothers' prayers, the sweetness and purity of our maidens' hearts! (Applause.)