

XII.—*George Mercer Dawson.*

By R. J. HARRINGTON.

(Read May 26, 1902.)

Twenty years have elapsed since the inauguration of the Royal Society of Canada, and in that time many of those who were wont to gather with us have been called to the majority. Sir William Dawson, our first President, died in 1899, ripe in knowledge and in years, but no one then thought that he would so soon be followed by his distinguished son, Dr. G. M. Dawson. To the latter, years of usefulness and honour seemed to remain; but how little do we know of what lies before us! Life is ever uncertain, and Dr. Dawson realized this when he wrote:

"Life is a bubble on the sea,
The ocean of eternity;
It floats awhile in glittering pride,
It may o'er many billows ride.
There comes a moment, none knows why,
No cloud o'erspreads the summer sky,
Some little breath, some hidden thing,
Perhaps a spirit on the wing,
Touches the orb—it melts away,
The sea receives its little spray;—
No mark, no memory left behind.
The everlasting sea, the wind—flow on."

Dr. Dawson was the second son of the late Sir J. W. Dawson, and was born on the 1st of August, 1849, in Pictou, Nova Scotia. In 1855 his father, who had for some years been acting as Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, received the appointment of Principal of McGill University, Montreal, and with his family took up his residence there. Instead of the magnificent structures of to-day, there were then on the college grounds only two "unfinished and partly ruinous buildings, standing amid a wilderness of excavators' and masons' rubbish, overgrown with weeds and bushes. The grounds were unfenced and pastured at will by herds of cattle, which not only cropped the grass, but browsed on the shrubs, leaving unhurt only one great elm, which still stands as the 'founder's tree,' and a few old oaks and butternut trees"¹. Surroundings of this kind were not ideal from a university point of view, but made an instructive environment for an intelligent boy. The numerous wild flowers, the birds' nests, the fossil

¹ Fifty Years of Work in Canada—Autobiographical Notes by Sir William Dawson, p. 98.