

THOMSONIAN MEDICAL LITERATURE AND REFORMIST DISCOURSE IN UPPER CANADA

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FROM THE 1830S TO THE 1850S, the political scene in Upper Canada was dominated by issues of reform. Reinforcing this trend were the activities of reform-minded medical practitioners, including various medical sects. In particular, sectarian practitioners known as Thomsonians were especially active during this period, both to promote their form of medicine and to effect change in the practice of medicine in the province. (Connor) A significant aspect of this sect was its published discourse, which preempted the mainstream medical doctors in its appearance. Remarkably, three separate editions of this American sect's main medical manual, Samuel Thomson's *New Guide to Health, or Botanic Family Physician*, appeared in Upper Canada in Brockville (1831), Hamilton (1832), and Hallowell (now Picton) (1833), respectively. (Fleming) And beginning in 1849, indigenous Thomsonian publications appeared, notably the shortlived journal, *The Unfettered Canadian*. These works constitute the first medical literature published in the province.

Analysis of Thomsonian literature reveals that it represented much more than the advocacy of a single medical sect. As this article will show, much of the republican rhetoric of the American founder of the sect, Samuel Thomson, and his followers, was transplanted wholesale to the province of Upper Canada, where it reflected, supported, and disseminated reformist ideology in general.

The brief flurry of publishing activity in Upper Canada resembled that of the United States, where Thomsonianism had its origins and a wide popular following since about the 1820s. Briefly, Samuel Thomson (1769-1843), a New Hampshire farmer, devised a system of medical treatment to overcome the coldness which he believed was the cause of disease. His system was a reaction against the perceived harsh medical treatments of his day, treatments which could include excessive and debilitating measures such as bleeding and purging the patient. Thomson advocated

Nature's medicines to cure a variety of ailments, and he based his system on two main botanical remedies: lobelia (Indian tobacco) and cayenne pepper. Believing that all ailments derive from the body's loss of life-giving heat, he used these remedies primarily to increase the heat and thereby restore health. (Thomson, *Narrative*; Kett)

Thomson practised his system in New England during the first few decades of the 1800s. By the 1820s he had published several items to outline his system for ordinary Americans, whom he believed should treat themselves in a gentle manner and not be beholden — or indebted financially — to mainstream doctors. His *A Narrative of the Life and Medical Discoveries of Samuel Thomson* was often printed and bound with his *New Guide to Health*, and both were issued together in Upper Canada in the Brockville edition of 1831.

Thomson's publications in general reflect a fundamentally republican outlook. In the opening statement of his *New Guide to Health*, Thomson observes:

There are three things which have in a greater or less degree called the attention of men, viz: Religion, Government and Medicine. In ages past, these things were thought by millions to belong to three classes of men, Priests, Lawyers and Physicians. . . . Government was once considered as belonging to a few, who thought themselves 'born only to rule.' The common people have now become acquainted with the great secret of government; and know that 'all men are born free and equal,' and that Magistrates are put in authority, or out by the voice of the people who choose them for their public servants. (1831 ed. [5])

For Thomson, physicians held similar views, but were really "ignorant pretenders" who wrote in a dead language "to deceive and keep the world ignorant of their doings, that they may the better impose upon the credulity of the people." (*Narrative*, 1831 ed., 41-42)

Time and again Thomson aligns himself with his intended audience of common folk. He explains how he frequently sought recourse under the law, including acquiring a patent, to protect himself and, purportedly, the people. His avowed efforts for "the people," however, were sometimes opposed by "the people" as well as mainstream doctors. Yet he managed to portray such popular opposition within his own belief in the people's oppressed condition,

for they have so long been in the habit of being gulled by designing men, and the ostentatious show of pompous [*sic*] declarations and high sounding words, backed by the recommendations of those they have flattered and deceived, that nothing brought forward in a plain and simple dress seems worthy of notice.

(*Narrative*, 1831 ed., 165)

Thomson was nevertheless heartened in knowing that he had at the very least "been the cause of awakening a spirit of enquiry among the people of this country," which challenged the "interested and monopolizing schemes of the medical faculty" in some states. (*Narrative*, 1831 ed., 165; 170)

Buttressing the view of oppression in his major publications were poetic commentaries originally circulated by Thomson in pamphlet or broadsheet form and later gathered together in a pamphlet called *Learned Quackery Exposed*. His doggerel (Thomson's term) includes verses like the following:

Now we'll defend each privilege,
 Our liberty we'll hold,
 The medicine of our country prize
 Above the finest gold.

...

In spite of slander we'll attend;
 No monarchy is here;
 Some information we shall gain,
 While others stand in fear. (*Learned*, 12)

* * *

TEN miles from Boston is a town,
 Where tyrants bear the sway;
 Law, Physic, and Divinity,
 Blind subjects must obey. (*Learned*, 16)

These republican ideas are explored further in a poem entitled "Three Crafts," which Thomson wrote following "the Hartford Convention, at which time the result was doubtful whether we should remain a Republic or become a Monarchy":

The nests of college-birds are three,
Law, Physic, and Divinity;
 And while these three remain combined,
 They keep the world oppressed and blind.

...

Come freemen all unveil your eyes,
 If you this slavish yoke despise:
 Now is the time to be set free,
 From Priests' and Doctors' slavery.

The craft is three in every stage,
 On tory limbs these monarch's [*sic*] rage;
 Their power is lost, we've spoil'ed the tree,
 Of *Hartford* tory monarchy. (*Learned*, 18; 20)

As all these statements show, then, Thomson deliberately likened the medical profession to tyrannical monarchy, as an artificially elevated elite who oppressed the people and interfered with their liberty. This belief was perhaps so ingrained that Thomson also presented it metaphorically in his own theory of disease. In both his *New Guide to Health* and his poetry, Thomson describes the unseating of the

cause of disease — coldness — by the application of heat, and the induction of fever in more than simple republican terms:

If the heat gains the victory, the cold will be disinherited, and health will be restored: but on the other hand, if cold gains the ascendancy, heat will be dispossessed of its empire, and death will follow of course. . . . When the power of cold is nearly equal to that of heat, the fever or strife between the two parties, may continue. . . . The battle between cold and heat will take place periodically. . . . [W]e must consider whether the fever is a friend or an enemy; if it is a friend, which I hold to be the fact, when the fever fit is on, increase the power of heat, in order to drive off the cold, and life will bear the rule; but, on the contrary, should cold be considered a friend, when the cold fit is on, by increasing its power, you drive off the heat, and death must ensue. (1831 ed., 15)

This war metaphor appears also in his poetry. (Thomson, *Learned*, 13) More significantly, Thomson's metaphor of conflict has definite revolutionary overtones, whether intended by Thomson or not. In an address "To the Public," Thomson's metaphoric understanding of disease becomes more clear:

Instruct the people, and the cause is removed. . . . But should we spend all our time and money to cure the sick, while the cause still continues, — that is, while others are still making sickness, or sowing the seeds of future sickness, in what respect will generations a hundred years hence be benefitted by all our exertions? In no respect whatever. For unless the cause is removed, the effect will not cease. All my discoveries will be bought up and kept from the people, and the whole system revert back into the fashionable mode of doctoring. 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?' No, no, there is no physician; but there are doctors without number!!!! This is the reason why the sons and daughters of this boasted free country are not healed. Nor can they be thoroughly healed, until the cause of their being made sick, is removed. (*Learned*, 43)

Together these passages show that Thomson, perhaps unwittingly, characterized disease in a traditional literary manner that would be familiar to his popular audience: that is, individual ills could reflect the underlying sickness of the body politic. In keeping with this long literary tradition, and for Thomson, individual sickness symbolized an ailing (cold) society oppressed by rulers (doctors) and needing violent means (fever) to remove the cause and restore equilibrium (life and liberty).

In addition, Thomson's semantic choices themselves — liberty, freedom, tyranny, oppression, slavery — were part and parcel of the political vocabulary used in revolutionary times. Moreover, they had resonances in earlier religious (Puritan) discourse in the United States. During Thomson's lifetime, this politically charged vocabulary had suffused almost every genre of American writing, from sermons and poetry to scientific reports. (Stout; Weber; Batschelet) By his later writing in the 1830s, such implicit references to war and revolution became explicit in Thomsonian discourse: he hoped "the learned, as well as the unlearned, shall join to

revolutionize the medical world" (*Narrative*, 1832 ed., 216); while his followers A. Curtis referred to "we *Revolutionists*" (186), and Horton Howard anointed Thomson as "the first individual who commenced the present revolution in medicine." (468)

In sum, Thomsonian discourse in the United States during the 1820s and 1830s drew a sharp contrast between the learned and lay cultures. In this respect, Thomson was merely following the well established tradition of self-help medical manuals, written for the people in simplified, direct language. But his writings were infused with calls for freedom from oppression, and ultimately for active resistance to tyrants, both medical and civil. Moreover, Thomson's views were grounded in the contemporaneous American context of Jacksonian democracy, which emphasized the right of the individual to challenge authority. (Kett, 110-11)

THOMSONIAN LITERATURE WAS VERY much at home in the United States, where it reached a populace already attuned to revolutionary and pulpit rhetoric, and already convinced about the rights of the individual and the democratic will of the people. In Upper Canada, a province having political control centred in the hands of a few appointed elite, the so-called Family Compact, with the ultimate authority vested in a distant monarch; where religious power was seen to be monopolized by the church of an elite minority, the Church of England; and where physicians seemed to cater to the upper classes and align themselves with the ruling Family Compact, Thomsonian literature would be more than a little out of keeping with the norm. Indeed, the three separate editions of Thomson's *New Guide to Health*, with its criticism of government "belonging to a few," are remarkable not only in their number, but in their very existence.

The fact that Thomson's book was brought out by three particular publishers in Upper Canada between 1831 and 1833 is significant, however. In effect, it may have provided those seeking moderate reform in the government — wanting more accountability to the people — with a covert means for raising public awareness. The three editions appeared in the period of unrest which culminated in the 1837 Rebellion against the Family Compact by radical Upper Canadians, and they were published by known populists and reformers. Joseph Wilson, who printed the Hallowell 1833 edition, published almanacs and a few religious works (Fleming, 553), all intended for the common reader. The other two printers, William Smith for the Hamilton edition, and William Buell, Jr., for the Brockville edition, were particularly outspoken members of the Reform movement in Upper Canada. Smith edited the Reformist *Hamilton Free Press* newspaper from 1831 to 1837. ("Smith," 184) Smith's partner, an American printer, George H. Hackstaff, also helped print the *Hamilton Free Press*, and later moved to Toronto where he published the

Commercial Herald from 1837 to 1839; the *Herald* was the organ of the Orange body in Toronto, and during the Sydenham years, it was the only Toronto newspaper to criticize the government. (Hulse, 114; Firth, 13; Fleming, 427, 443) William Buell, Jr. was in fact a Reform member of parliament from 1828 to 1836, as well as the owner and editor of the Reformist *Brockville Recorder* newspaper, in which he advertised Thomson's *New Guide to Health* for sale. (MacPherson, *Matters*; Fleming, 153) Finally, Buell's edition of Thomson was actually published for "W. Willes," whose reformist leaning can be surmised from circumstantial evidence. For it is not unlikely that "Willes" is William A. Welles, publisher/printer of the *Anglo-Canadian* in Belleville in 1831: this paper had as its motto "Faction is the combination of a few to insult the privileges 'of many'." Just before this, Welles was briefly the editor for the *Hallowell Free Press*, under Joseph Wilson as publisher. (Fleming, 421; 436) Thus the two editions of Thomson's work in eastern Ontario — Brockville and Hallowell — relate directly to reformist editor/printer/publishers who not only knew one another, but who had worked together.

That the political overtones of Thomsonianism and related botanical practices were recognized at the time supports the inference that Upper Canadian publishers must have had some motive, other than an economic one, for completely reprinting an American sectarian medical book. As early as 1816 the *Kingston Gazette* had published a letter decrying the presence of "quack spies who . . . go from house to house . . . dealing out their poisonous pills and herbs, and holding out to the gaping ignorant the advantages of a republican government." (qtd. in Gibson, 699) Similarly, an 1838 editorial of the *Toronto Patriot* related how "Yankee Doctors" preached republicanism at the "bedsides of their patients"; and when the province's reform movement was strengthening, Lieutenant-Governor Maitland implicated "American Quack Doctors." (Craig, 295-96; 194)

Perhaps epitomizing the reform motives of the publishers were the beliefs of William Buell, Jr., for as local historian Ian MacPherson has shown, Buell grounded his reformist ideas in the British aristocratic tradition and monarchy; in the Puritan ethic's emphasis on worldly success; in the Enlightenment's emphasis on intellectual attainments; and in the Christian's emphasis on a moral code. ("Code," 17-18) Buell had a sense of obligation for the unfortunate, greatly revered the home and family, and supported various organizations including temperance, botanical, agricultural and natural history societies. (MacPherson, *Matters*, 23; 28) In his newspaper, the *Brockville Recorder*, Buell published items which supported farmers while they denigrated the learned professions:

in Upper Canada, . . . the owner and producer descends to a secondary station, while the Lawyer, Doctor and other professional men, presuming upon the ignorance of the farmer, take the lead in making or mending laws, ostensibly for his benefit, but always bearing in mind that their own interests and the fancied dignity and importance of their several professions stands first, and his second; thus keeping the social

structure tottering to its fall, by striving to make it stand on its smallest end; hence laws are framed to incorporate the members of these several professions into monopolizing associations, whose enormous charges thus legalised drain the farmer's pockets, and not infrequently ruin those who have the misfortune to require their services.
(Wiltse et al., 17 October 1839, 3)

These sentiments of John G. Booth (who would later become prominent in local Thomsonian activities) and others demonstrate the affinity between reformist and Thomsonian thinking in spite of the otherwise wide political and cultural differences between Upper Canadians and Thomson. Buell not only endorsed Booth's views, but wished to publish more from such men of practical experience.

In sum then, the publication in Upper Canada of three editions of Thomson's *New Guide to Health*, including one of his *Narrative*, probably resulted from a confluence of various reform movements in the province in the 1830s. Moderate reformers like William Buell, Jr. would have found in Thomson's books the desired emphasis on the common people, the family, self-help, religious and educational self-reliance, and responsible government. Thus, Thomson's republican discourse in the 1830s provided an additional avenue for disseminating reformist views to a popular readership in Upper Canada.

THE DECADE FOLLOWING PUBLICATION of Thomson's books saw many changes in the province: the Rebellion of 1837 by radical reformers, Lord Durham's Report, the Act of Union of 1841, the development of responsible government, the disassembling of the Family Compact, and the erosion of Tory power. (Careless) Ultimately, there was less fear of Yankee or republican influence than in earlier years. All these changes meant a new province, Canada West, in which Thomsonians could more easily become established. Organized activities did indeed take place, such as submission of petitions to the Legislative Assembly to modify or repeal the laws regulating the medical profession. Although their main goal was for Thomsonian practitioners to achieve legal status, petitioners firmly believed that the province's legislation interfered with the rights and liberties of its citizens in choosing their own form of medical treatment. Their petitions were unsuccessful, but with thousands of signatures, they attest to the popularity of the aims of Thomsonian medicine in the province.

Part of the organization of the sect involved serialized publications. In 1847 the Cobourg *Canada Christian Advocate* published a prospectus for a new (Thomsonian) journal entitled *Canada Botanic Medical Examiner*. ("Canada") This journal does not seem to have appeared; but in 1849, *The Unfettered Canadian*, edited by Rev. Robert Dick, did appear, first (perhaps significantly) in Brockville, later moving to Toronto with its editor.¹ At first glance, this journal presents a

curious mélange of disparate topics, focusing on Thomsonian activities, but also ranging from items on tight lacing, bathing and alcohol, to monarchy, duelling, war and universal brotherhood. Yet, when viewed from the reformist perspective of earlier Thomsonian literature and its supporters, the seemingly disconnected topics of the *Unfettered Canadian* form a remarkably consistent and coherent whole. Together these items show that the editor sought social reform in general. In fact, as the unusual title implies, the journal basically opposed fetters in every sphere of human existence; medical, as well as physical, intellectual, civil or political, spiritual/religious, or legal fetters. This sweeping reformist approach is not unique for Thomsonians, for at least one Thomsonian publication in the United States contained similarly disparate topics. Indeed, there are sufficient resonances between Reuben Chambers' *The Thomsonian Practice of Medicine* and the content of the *Unfettered Canadian* as to suggest that Robert Dick was familiar with it. For instance, Chambers discusses tight lacing, claiming that "The unfettered Indian, and even our country girls in the interior, are strangers to that deformity of figure and flaccidity of flesh, so common among the females of our cities. . . ." (170) Chambers also describes the problems of drinking tea and coffee in terms of tyranny and reform:

The habit of drinking hot, strong tea and coffee, which has been acquired by the people of this country, experience hath abundantly shown to be an evil which calls loudly for a reform. . . . [For] tyrant *Fashion* steps forward and bears rule in so many families, at the expense of health and happiness. (70)

The allusions in the *Unfettered Canadian's* various reprinted items to forms of tyranny — including something as abstract as fashion — are made more explicit by Dick in his own writing in the journal. In one of the many articles on temperance and its organization in the province, Dick enjoined his readers

In the midst of reproaches, let us continue to increase our exertions against the thralldom of Alcohol, till the last chain of the Tyrant is broken — till every man can see in his brother the Free — the Unfettered Canadian, emancipated *forever* from the brutalizing influences of men, who shout for temperance, as they stone her ministers — who bow at her shrine, as they qualify [*sic*, quaff?] the pollutions of Bacchus. (19)

He also wrote poetry espousing these same views, adopting Thomsonian metaphors and style. (19)

For Dick, as with other Thomsonians, alcohol was a tyrant; so too was the group of medical practitioners who threatened to oppress the people. Dick opened his Introduction and Prospectus to the journal, this "Banner of Liberty and Reform," by appealing to the "Freemen of Canada" (compare Thomson's "Come freemen all unveil your eyes"):

Can we be pronounced rash or precipitate in sounding the alarm, when we see the chains of an infamous bondage already forged, and waiting only the sanction of

Parliament, to entwine, shackle, and gall the limbs of freemen? Can you believe it, Freemen of Canada! that a portion of our M.D.'s., embodying the selfishness and arrogance of the sect, are laboring indefatigably to urge through the present House of Parliament, a bill of such appalling atrocity . . . ! (iii)

The first of eight aims of his journal, therefore, was to obtain for every man "the liberty of selecting his own physician . . . to carry out his *own* views of the philosophy and means of health, without subjecting himself, or his assistants to the slavish dread of a Medical Inquisition." (iv) Although a proposed medical bill, which would effectively outlaw Thomsonian practitioners, provided the impetus for the journal, Dick declared his seventh aim was "To advocate, and promote, social, intellectual and moral Reforms in general"; and he concludes his introduction by suggesting the journal would hold up to "universal execration, the loathsome fetters of ignorance, of arrogance, of error and of vice." (v)

In the opening pages of the first issue, Dick gave an outraged explication of the proposed medical bill, comparing the oppression of this medical sect with that of non-Anglican churches in Upper Canada. Letter writers to the *Unfettered Canadian* also attacked the bill, and a similar one in Lower Canada, in typically Thomsonian style: "I pray that we may never see that day, when this atrocious law shall be in force, but shall ever pray to have religious liberty, political liberty, and medical liberty, for each and every inhabitant" (28); "*Medical Reform and Freedom* are as necessary to the people's welfare as is political and religious liberty." This last writer further suggested that if reason and argument fail to convince the "aristocratical loving members of the Legislature" of this fact, the people would through their votes and public lectures; but until this is done, "the great favored Medical class, will, as heretofore, be more distinguished for their proficiency in the science of *Haughty culture than in that of any other science." (57) These writers not only drew on Thomson's own metaphorical style, but on that of other American Thomsonians as well. In fact, they show some indebtedness to Samuel Robinson, a fervently enthusiastic disciple of Thomson who published rousing lectures on Thomson's system. Emphasizing the familiar theme of oppression and revolt, Robinson refers to the "voice of the people," who were "dear to every land of liberty." (19) The human soul, he wrote, "cannot be trampled down forever. . . . Religious liberty, civil liberty[,] the diffusion of science, the equity of laws, and the amelioration of the condition of the miserable, all, all, proclaim her [the soul's] bright and rapid progress to the uncreated splendors of the eternal day!" (Robinson 39) Alluding to the fight for various liberties Robinson concludes

The tyranny of medicine is running the same career, and usurping the same authority over the rights, and privileges, and understandings of men; or why so much mystery and disguise in the composition of pills, and medicines, and forms of practice? Why has the strong arm of the law been called in to aid the faculty, as if they were a

privileged order, before whom the discoveries, the experience, the common sense, and the understanding of the people must bow, as to a Dagon. (121)

Robinson, perhaps more strongly than Thomson, presented medicine as the last hold out of an oppressive, tyrannical elite (“a privileged order”) that held the people in its complete power.

Clearly, then, Thomsonians in Canada felt as driven to rail against perceived infringements of the rights and freedoms of ordinary people by the elite as did their predecessors and counterparts in the United States: “Being of the people we stand for the people’s rights,” declared Dick, and he later exclaimed, echoing Robinson, “[t]he voice of the people will be heard” (*Unfettered Canadian*, 11; 92). Moreover, the scope of Thomsonian concerns encompassed freedom from alcohol and its effects on society. As one Upper Canadian doctor noted, “Teetotalism, Radicalism, and Thompsonianism [*sic*], all run in the same channel”; although this was probably intended as sarcastic, the Thomsonian who quoted him felt this was “Not a bad compliment indeed, paid to the Botanic.” (*Unfettered Canadian*, 62)

To convey the combined messages of freedom and toleration to readers, Dick often wrote colourfully, evidently drawing on his experience both as Baptist preacher and teacher (at the Brockville Academy). (Dyster) Although he did use rhetorical schemes in his writing such as anaphora and other forms of repetition and parallelism (*Unfettered Canadian*, 11), Dick’s preference lay in the dramatic use of concrete tropes. Dick portrays the mainstream medical profession as various sorts of creatures. First, he compares the doctors to a generic predator, then to an eagle, addressing them directly:

Have you already forgotten the sensations of shame, with which our Queen’s Royal refusal, compelled you to drop from your *too hasty* fangs, the prey [unlicensed practitioners] which writhed convulsively in your detested grasp? That shame was a feast for the freeman! — as when he sees the prowling eagle, spreading his wings and bearing upward a lamb from the fold, suddenly arrested by the swift arrow of the herdsman, he sees the haughty bird compelled to release his quivering victim, and with fallen crest sneak away to hide in the clefts of the mountain! Be assured, gentlemen, another such attempt at oppression and outrage on your part will see you like the wounded eagle, lashing a barbed arrow through the vitals of your present power. (*Unfettered Canadian*, 8)

Then he uses the metaphor of a pygmy to cast further derision on the doctors’ proposed law:

Let them have a law . . . rejecting every man from their fraternity whose stature exceeds four feet nine inches and *three lines*; the capacity of whose cranium exceeds that of *Great Grandma’s China tea cup*. . . . All we ask is, that they be not empowered to *doctor* all men *down* to their pigma [*sic*] standard, nor to whittle our heads down to their China model. (*Unfettered Canadian*, 10)

Later, he develops an extended metaphor of the proposed bill as a patient — in fact, a monster undergoing excision of its horns (i.e., undergoing amendments) by a House committee. That this “hornless elk[?]” would supplant its older progeny “now stretching its neck over the whole of Upper Canada, and tossing on high a splendid set of antlers, designed to terrify all aspiring competitors of our monopoly-loving Drs.” (*Unfettered Canadian*, 50), would not be endured by mainstream doctors.

Brief commentaries by other Canadians in the *Unfettered Canadian* were also vividly metaphoric. One writer characterized the mainstream doctors variously as Medical Hamans who had prepared gallows (that is, bills) in Montreal and Toronto to hang the “little Mordecai’s [*sic*] of Medical Reform” (the Thomsonians); as medical pharisees, who “frequently claim the right to persecute and destroy every other system of physic, or class of physicians but their own”; and as Medical Watchmakers, “capable of controlling, mending, taking apart, and setting up the human system.” (55-56) Frequently referring to the doctors as a “corporation,” this writer echoes the extended commercial metaphor developed by another Canadian Thomsonian, Thomas Clark. Clark saw the mainstream doctors as factory-produced commodities, especially in Montreal, “where machines can be made for the purpose of manufacturing scientific Doctors.” Moreover, if legislators were to “loose the manacles, and unfetter the Thomsonian system,” it would be vain for them to support mainstream medicine by voting money to the McGill medical school, for “That factory of Allopathic [mainstream] physicians, as such commodities . . . would be so far below par in the market of public sentiment, that it would be a loosing [*sic*] business.” (*Unfettered Canadian*, 51)

As both these writers quote Samuel Robinson, the American who wrote so fervently of Thomsonianism, they thereby provide clear evidence that publications other than Thomson’s circulated in Upper Canada. Perhaps to ensure even wider dissemination, however, Thomas Clark suggested that the *Unfettered Canadian* re-publish Robinson’s lectures. The editor agreed with pleasure to do so, and Robinson’s lectures I to VI were reprinted in their entirety in the remaining issues of the journal. (52; 50) These particular lectures were the ones pertaining to various liberties and the voice of the people, which clearly influenced the writing of both Dick and the readers of his journal.

AS THESE FEATURES OF THE Thomsonian discourse illustrate, the *Unfettered Canadian* was only in part a medical journal concerned with the treatment of disease, as it has been classified. (Roland and Potter) More than this, it was a type of serialized pamphlet advocating social reform for a popular readership, for which the proposed medical monopoly provided the stimulus (and

for which the recent reformist election sweep gave added timeliness). Its editor, a preacher, used this medium to communicate, in his words, to the “backwoods of Canada! . . . by the light of a *log-fire!* in the meanest *log cabin!*” (iv) How effective the journal was in disseminating its reformist views, however, can only be guessed. Dick noted in the April issue (92) that more than 400 subscribers had been added in one month, a fairly large number even by today’s standards. During the summer of 1849, Dick travelled extensively in the province to spread the word, presumably both religious and political, and perhaps distributed copies of the *Unfettered Canadian* along the way; he also indicated that agents had submitted 30 and 41 subscriptions each in one day. (96) Even so, in “The Unfettered Canadian Extra,” an announcement printed on the back of a Thomsonian “Anti-Monopoly Petition,” Dick wrote that he had 1,000 sets of back issues for sale and needed 1,000 more subscribers to “raise the work above embarrassment.”

For his popular audience Robert Dick marshalled a barrage of information — anecdotes, insights and commentaries — in his own attempt to follow Samuel Thomson’s goal of awakening a spirit of enquiry among the people. In so doing, he offered the reader a philosophy of living, one that eschews a fettered existence of any kind. His belief in toleration underlay his sense of outrage at the attempts of a few to control the many. Adapting Thomsonian ideology to the situation in Upper Canada in 1849, these few were for him the elitist doctors (not *all* doctors), members of that haughty culture who sought to monopolize their domain for their own gains, just as their religious counterparts had before them. Although he and many others in the province managed to form themselves into a medical group having its own constitution, when the proposed bill fuelling Dick’s indignation did not become law, the *Unfettered Canadian* stopped appearing. Born of one kind of necessity, it may have died owing to different needs — money and the sustenance gained through adversity.

Following the passing of the *Unfettered Canadian* in 1849, only one other Thomsonian publication appeared in Upper Canada: *The Canadian Herbal* by Rev. Schuyler Stewart. Published in Hamilton in 1851, this book incorporated the Thomsonian concerns with religion, temperance and unfettered dress. However, despite this similarity to earlier Thomsonian literature, Stewart’s book dwells more on anatomy, dietary advice, medicines and plants than on politically charged discourse. Nevertheless, his diction frequently shows its indebtedness to Thomson: “And whenever there is confusion or want of healthy action, *friction* is necessary, by simple remedial agents selected from the Vegetable World, and prepared by the infinite wisdom of God for this purpose.” (Stewart 19) Stewart’s aim throughout is to communicate medical knowledge directly to the general public, and to achieve this end he both limits any editorial comments and relegates discussion of Thomson’s practice to an appendix.

The downplaying of Thomsonian ideology in *The Canadian Herbal* reflects the declining status of the sect in the province during the 1850s. After the 1850s, some of the more active Thomsonians aligned themselves with another sect, the new, reformed group of trained medical practitioners known as the Eclectics. (Connor) This direction had actually been foreshadowed in the closing pages of the last issue of the *Unfettered Canadian*, which presented the constitution of the Canadian Eclectic Medical Society. (190-92) The only other notable literary reference to the Thomsonians in this period originated outside the sect itself in the *Anglo-American Magazine*, a periodical aimed at the rising, literate middle class of the province. Its editor, Rev. Robert MacGeorge, sarcastically lampooned the Thomsonian practitioner, describing him as “Dr. Shark . . . one of those herb or yarb empirics, who, like locusts, infest this poor credulous Canada.” Moreover, Shark looked like a “broken-doan field-preacher . . . [and] spoke through his nose, wi’ a twang savouring unwholesomely o’ Dollardom.” (“Editor’s Shanty”) In this caricature, MacGeorge alludes to the features of Thomsonianism portrayed in its literature; that is, Thomsonians, poor themselves, appealed to the common people, they often preached the gospel, and they represented American ways. In a newer, more consolidated province, the Thomsonians were thus out of date, “broken-doan,” and no longer to be feared but pitied by those more “enlightened.”

DESPITE SUCH CRITICISM IN the 1850s, Thomsonian medical literature had served an important function in earlier decades in Upper Canada. Before the change to responsible government in 1841, Thomson’s books *New Guide to Health* and *Narrative* offered moderate provincial reformists another medium for disseminating their views. The pursuit of several kinds of reform — medical, political, religious, and social — is perhaps exemplified best in the publisher of the first edition of Thomson’s book to appear here, William Buell, Jr. In advocating moderate reform, within the framework of the British monarchy and aristocratic tradition, Buell’s ideas clearly contrast with those of American Thomsonians who pursued anti-monarchist, republican goals — and who were prone to using revolutionary discourse. Yet, while pointing up the differences between American and Canadian culture, Buell’s approach parallels Thomson’s in its emphasis on a larger philosophy for living. As MacPherson has discussed, the Buell family represented a way of life; Buell’s main publishing enterprise, the *Brockville Recorder*, shows the “totality of the Buell approach,” by “its continuous examination of the activities — religious, social, economic and political — in which the family members were active.” (*Matters*, 153)

This philosophy for living also framed the Canadian-produced Thomsonian medical literature in 1849. Spurred by the need for medical reform, the preacher-

editor of the *Unfettered Canadian* used this vehicle to disseminate reformist views in general to the people of the province. Against elitism of any kind, he exemplified the Thomsonian contrast between lay and learned cultures, while advocating total freedom of choice and lack of human interference in the private act of conscience "between man and his God." (92) His philosophy therefore encompassed universal tolerance and brotherhood, conscientious objection, and a concomitant conviction that alcohol was the "universal destroyer" of all these things. In reflecting this philosophy, the *Unfettered Canadian* thus represents more than a typical, though partisan, medical journal and becomes a manifesto for an improved, healthful society.

It is impossible to gauge the true impact of Thomsonian medical literature on its readers in Upper Canada. Indeed, as Lucien Febvre has observed, perhaps a book on its own is insufficient to change anybody's mind; yet a book does provide "tangible evidence of convictions held because it embodies and symbolizes them." (288) A similar argument may be made for Thomsonian medical literature in Upper Canada in the 1830s and 1840s, which embodies and symbolizes the reformist convictions of its producers, and to some extent, its readers. Intent on reform of all kinds, Thomsonian discourse, to paraphrase Febvre, furnished arguments to those who were already converts, let them develop and refine their reformist views, and perhaps encouraged the hesitant.

NOTES

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¹ *The Unfettered Canadian* exists today in one extant copy only; however, it has been reproduced on microfiche and made available in Canada by the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine in Toronto. Analysis of *The Unfettered Canadian* for this article was based on both the microfiche copy (which is poor in places) and the original document housed at the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland.

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