

ALUMNI SECTION

DONALD ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

MD., C.M. Dal., L.L.D. Dal

1849 - 1917

Dr. Campbell may be taken as a type of medical practitioner who flourished in the latter part of the nineteenth century and who made a valuable contribution to the period in which he lived. He was born at Truro and had his preliminary education in the common schools and Truro Academy. Grade XI was all that was required for matriculation and he entered the second class of the newly formed Dalhousie Medical School from which he received his degree in 1874 (a member of the second class of graduates). The calendar of those years list him as a prize man in Anatomy and in both the Primary and Final examinations. It was customary in those days to write a thesis and Dr. Campbell wrote on *Delirium Tremens*.

For thirty years he took a share of the teaching in Dalhousie Medical School, having in turn taught in Anatomy; Demonstrator at first and later Associate Professor, 1875-1885. Medical Jurisprudence, 1876, *Materia Medica* and Therapeutics 1888-1889. Medicine and Clinical Medicine for many years. He was appointed physician to the Victoria General Hospital in 1888 and served there until his retirement in 1911.

Dr. Campbell's postgraduate activities consisted of short periods—two

or three weeks each year—at Johns Hopkins where he established friendly relations with the Hopkins Group, Osler, Barker, Welch, Simon, Cullen, Kelly and Finnie. Some of these men summered at Chester and were frequent callers at the Campbell home. During these Hopkins visits he learned the latest in medicine and always brought something worth while back to his patients and colleagues in Halifax.

Dr. Campbell from the start devoted his attention to medical problems and never attempted surgery. He had a large family practice and rapidly won the admiration and confidence of his patients. He was recognized early as a leader in his profession and his consulting practice grew not only in the City but in the province and beyond. While his consulting practice increased he was loathe to relinquish his family practice contacts.

He was a "horse and buggy doctor" and lived before the days of motor cars. It should be remembered that in his early days there were no X-rays nor pathological laboratories and the modern instruments of precision had not yet arrived on the scene. He relied mainly on his eyes, ears and fingers and he handled these instruments in a masterly manner. He was quick to grasp new methods

as they became known and it is of great interest today to know that before the Government Laboratory was established, Campbell had his own private laboratory where he carried out examinations of sputum, blood and pathological fluids. He also cut, stained and examined tissues. He was a good microscopist. Like many physicians of his day he was a botanist. He not only studied and classified the flowering plants but spent much time in the study of sedges and grasses. In his garden he was delighted to show to his medical friends his bed of fox-glove—*Digitalis Purpurea*. In 1890, he became interested in the Pictou County Cattle Disease, one theory of which was that it was caused by eating a poisonous plant called "Stinking Willie" or in botanical terms "*Senecio Jacoboea*." He even took this problem to his friends in Hopkins.

It was my privilege to know Dr. Campbell as a teacher and as a colleague. His busy life prevented him from giving as much time to teaching as his students would like. His clinics were excellent and his system of analysing evidence and coming to conclusions won the admiration of his students. Regarding his personal qualities he was on friendly terms with his colleagues. He was noted for his habit of communicating as little as possible to his patients. When pushed for information he would politely tell them to take his medicine and ask no questions as the answer would serve no useful purpose. He could not get away with this method of handling patients today.

An interesting paragraph in a biography "Tom Cullen of Baltimore" published in 1849 is worth quoting here. Cullen was a Canadian and his reference to his boarding house days contains the following. "The other Canadian boarder had come to do post-graduate work with Osler. He was a medical school professor from Halifax, sixty-five, bald as a bat, and a great favourite with the younger men, for he was a witty, lovable fellow." "Tom Cullen was proud of the other Canadian boarder." While no name is mentioned the reference is to Dr. D. A. Campbell. His age at that time was forty-two, not sixty-five, the discrepancy due to the fact that Campbell has a snow-white beard which gave him a venerable appearance.

Dr. Campbell was a faithful attendant at medical meetings and took a leading part in medical discussions. He contributed many articles to the medical journals, some on medicine and some on historical subjects. His "Pioneers of Medicine in Nova Scotia" and his biographical notes on "Somers, Cogswell, Gilpin and Harding" have been published in the local journals and are worth reading today. After the unfavourable Flexner report on the Medical School, Dr. Campbell wrote a masterly defence. This article was published in the *Maritime Medical News*, 1910.

Dr. Campbell had one son, Dr. Duncan George Joseph Campbell, Dalhousie 1902. After two years of postgraduate work at Hopkins, he settled in Halifax and had good prospects of a brilliant career. He died of pneumonia at the age of thirty.

This was a terrible blow for his father. In memory of his son he made a wonderful contribution to medical education by leaving his whole estate, sixty thousand dollars to Dalhousie University to found a Chair of Anatomy and make possible a full-time professorship, the first

incumbent being Dr. John Cameron. Dr. Campbell was honored with an L.L.D. degree. A memorial tablet has been placed in the Public Health Centre in memory of Dr. Campbell and his son. Dalhousie should never forget the Campbells.

Dr. K. D. MacKenzie.

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