

## IN RETROSPECT<sup>1</sup>

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*Satmonier, Newfoundland*

What is it like to look back on a lifetime of practicing medicine? To find out, I interviewed Dr. Cluny Macpherson of St. John's, Newfoundland. . . .

"I did my Pre-Medical education at the Methodist College in St. John's. In 1897, I wrote the London Matriculation examination and was accepted at the McGill Medical School.

"Though some sixty-nine years ago, that first year still remains strong in my memory. Every Monday morning we had a lecture in Anatomy from Professor Shepp, and, afterwards we went to the dissecting room where there were twelve students per cadaver. Our other courses that year were Physiology, Chemistry, Electricity and a little Histology. In second year, we continued Anatomy and started Pathology, which we carried into our third year. The third year was the really big one, for we started Medicine and saw the inside of a hospital for the first time.

"In fourth year, we did Obstetrics. In this course, we had to see some abnormal deliveries before we were given a pass mark. Internships went to the top three or four students in the class. The rest of us started practice immediately.

"In the summer of 1901, I went down to Battle Harbour and had full charge of a hospital and a hospital ship for a couple of weeks.

"During 1902 I was in Edinburgh, in charge of the Dispensary while the incumbent went for exams. Here I got all sorts of cases. One night at about two o'clock some students got me out to help them with a difficult delivery. They told me they had a patient whom they could not deliver with "high" forceps. I bicycled down to the patient's house and there using my "Cameron" forceps, I easily delivered the baby. The mother

was grateful, and the students gaped in surprise. That was my first forceps delivery. . . I guess while I was on the bicycle the mother must have pushed the baby further down.

"Before another year had passed I was back in Labrador - this time there was a smallpox epidemic, and to suppress this, I was made Justice of the Peace, and given charge of the Police Detachment. By the way, I am the oldest J.P. alive in Newfoundland today. As you might well imagine, this was a very difficult task. Once, I had to quarantine a fishing captain and his entire crew for two weeks. Still with captains, another one refused to carry my reports and letters to St. John's, even though I had sterilized the envelopes. So wrapping up the letters, I threw them on board his ship. Then I told him if he destroyed them, I would have him arrested for "Tampering" with His Majesty's mail, and if he landed, to put them on shore, I would quarantine him. Having no legal background, the office of J.P. presented me with many problems. One perplexing case was that of a young man who claimed he had no Religion. Now since he believed in no Supreme Being, how could I swear him in?

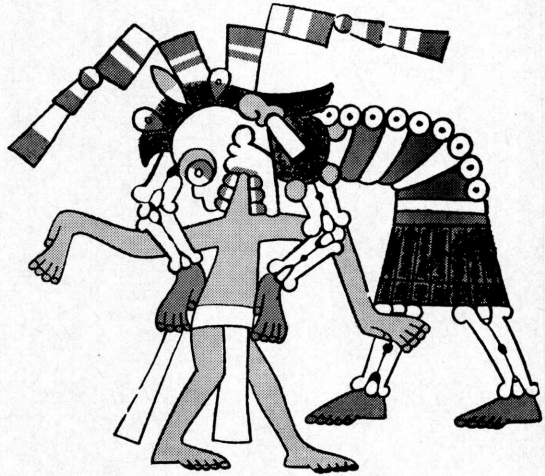
"Sometime around 1904, a fishing vessel from the Grand Banks landed four very sick Norwegian fishermen; I examined them, and found I could not fit their symptoms to any disease. Taking down my "Osler", I confirmed my suspicions that I was dealing with Beri-beri. The next day, my chief, Dr. Grenfell, visited me. He said "What's new, Mac?" I told him I had four cases of Beri-beri. He laughed at me. A little later, after examining three of the patients, (one had died) he said that he was forced to agree with me. I did a post-mortem on the dead patient and sent some of his nerve endings to the Pathologist at McGill. A little later, the report came back, stating that this, indeed, was Beri-beri. This was probably the earliest discovery of Beri-beri in Canada (Canadian Medical Association Journal, August 6, 1966).

<sup>1</sup>A report of an interview with Dr. Macpherson before his death.

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The illustration (1400 A.D.) shows the demise of an Aztec warrior who, having endured fear and pain, is finally devoured by the Death God . . .

Nowadays, there are available very valuable drugs to combat pain, anxiety, depression and psychotic conditions.



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"I was in St. John's when the First World War broke out in 1914. With the Royal Newfoundland Regiment I arrived in London. On April 22, 1915, the Germans used chlorine gas for the first time. It's effectiveness was proved by the fact that five thousand were killed and ten thousand out of action, due to respiratory injury. All during the summer of 1915, I flew back and forth from London to the Front, on special work for the Defense Department. Finally, with help, I perfected the gas helmet as protection from chlorine gas. Back in London, I had the job of organizing the women to around-the-clock work to help the men on the Front. Before the war was over, I had served in France, Belgium, Gallipoli, and Egypt.

"Back home in St. John's, I re-opened my office and re-started my practice. . . .

"All cuts and lacerations were handled in our office. What makes me mad, is that you fellows with all your antibiotics have lost most of our skills.

"Operations were routinely done on the kitchen table. I remember, in College Square, tackling an abdominal operation with the help of a nurse who was on vacation from New York and an anaesthetist. From this fourteen-year old girl, we removed a large tumor. Not so long ago, a forty-year old woman came in and said "Do you remember me?" I am the little girl you operated on in College Square".

"By now, I had been appointed to the staff of the newly-opened General Hospital. I was the first physician in St. John's to hold this post.

"One of the happiest moments of my life came when I was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. Every year, this honor was bestowed upon deserving members of the Medical profession in the Commonwealth. I went to London for the confirmation of this Degree. Another one of the highlights in my life was when I was elected president

of the Medical Council of Canada in 1954.

"One of my earliest psychiatry patients is, today, one of the foremost men in Atomic Research in Rochester. This lad was being pushed very hard in school, and his teachers made him a nervous wreck. They would not listen to me, so I went to the Archbishop, and had them "lay-off".

"Speaking of my friend, the Archbishop, reminds me of the time when I delivered an anencephalic monster. When the parents saw it, they insisted that the priest be called. When the young priest arrived, and saw the baby, he said, "My, oh my, what an awful thing". Six months later, my nurse and I had a similar case in the White Hills. Strangely enough, the same young priest saw this baby, also. He said "The same doctor and the same nurse - might have something to do with it". I went back to bed pondering this new theory in Genetics.

"Last year, one of the Pediatricians here phoned me. He said he had a case of the Whooping Cough and had tried all the available forms of treatment without success. Now he wondered whether or not the mother would go insane due to lack of sleep before the baby succumbed. He had heard of a treatment that I had worked out for the Whooping Cough. Well, this happened after I had caught the Whooping Cough from my daughter. I had it bad. I got out "Squires" and read the physiological effects of tobacco. Unfortunately, I had never smoked, so that by the time I had finished the cigar, I was all through. I discovered that to benefit from this treatment, one had to be a non-smoker. I put a sheet over the infant's cot and made a mixture of three-quarters tobacco and one-quarter Stremonium. Then, I made a fire and let the baby breath it.

"The next day, the Pediatrician phoned and told me that both mother and baby had spent a peaceful night. . . ."

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