

THE FEUD IN HALIFAX.

The disagreement in the profession in Halifax is becoming more acute. The matter is no longer confined within the ranks. It has extended to the public, and is now under full discussion in the news-

papers. The *Eastern Chronicle*, which is published in New Glasgow, prints an editorial on April 17th, in which the facts are fully set forth. The whole affair is discreditable to the profession, none of it more so than the letter to another newspaper from Dr. Hawkins, which we reproduce. The charge, and the method of making it, against Dr. Mackay, is shocking and contrary to all the amenities of the profession which have existed for 2500 years.

We think it proper to print an account of the controversy as an example of what we are constrained to consider as unprofessional conduct. We introduce this subject with regret, but we quote the following paragraphs to explain to our readers the basis upon which we declare that this must stop. We do not know the rights of the question that gave rise to the discussion, but we do know that this is not the way in which it should be treated; by bringing it before the public in this way, the members of the profession concerned have let it to some extent out of their own hands, and we, representing in this the medical profession of Canada declare that they have exceeded their own rights and have infringed upon ours in subjecting us to the indignity of a public spectacle such as this. We believe that every reader of these paragraphs quoted will endorse us in our statement that the medical profession of Canada commands that this making-public of private affairs instantly cease. The editorial reads:—

"Tuesday's Halifax newspapers gave an account of a lurid debate in the House of Assembly on the management of the Provincial Hospital. What led up to the debate was that Chief Justice Weatherbe has a son who studied for a doctor in Halifax. Then he went to London and took a post-graduate course. His father, with a father's partiality for a son, and in this instance, a father who seems to think that the province is his personal estate which owes his family a living, recalled him (the son) from London with the intention of putting him on the medical board of the Victoria General Hospital.

"As is known to the people of Nova Scotia, the doctors of Halifax have generally always been quarrelling over the affairs of the Victoria Hospital. This grew so hot and unbearable that the Government took over the management of the institution and now appoint the medical board. To fill the vacancy the Chief Justice wanted for his son, the Government appointed Dr. Hawkins, who has practiced in Halifax for twenty-three years. This appointment riled the Chief Justice, and he wrote Premier Murray a long and bitter letter, and one or two short ones, filled with vague allusions to mal-practices in the hospital, and pointed references to the superiority of his son. The Chief Justice, should

know that veiled charges are indiscreet and improper; that if he had a charge to make, it should be clear and definite. In this regard the letters are disappointing; indeed, pretty nearly disgusting.

"About the son, Dr. Weatherbe, we know nothing only that he has been a bright student, and apparently has been trying to learn how to do things. But whether he can do medical or surgical things better than any other doctor, or better than Dr. Hawkins, who is a bright man with a long practice, is yet to be shown. We have stated more than once that bright and clever graduates of colleges seem to be imbued with the belief that the toiling masses must provide them with fat offices just as soon as they are through college. As a rule, instead of going to work at whatever they can find to do, as an ordinary college graduate is compelled to do, they become a public charge and must at once be elevated over members of the same profession, who have borne the burden and heat of the day and who, by application and faithful service, have earned the right to some little honour, or there will be a great clamour. Just now Dr. Weatherbe is one of these and is backed up by a prominent, but indiscreet father.

"On Monday, Dr. McMillan, of Inverness, brought the subject up in the House of Assembly. Mr. Tanner was, of course, drawn into the debate, and read all the letters written by the Chief Justice about the college and about his son. On the side of the Government, the Premier, Commission of Mines and Works, and Drs. Bisset and Kendall defended. The two members of government merely, but ably, defended their actions. The doctors poured shot and shell into the aspirations of other doctors and into the Weatherbe family. However, the details we will leave to our Halifax correspondent.

"Regarding the management of Victoria Hospital it may not be perfect. What public institution, where two parties are struggling to keep on top, is perfectly managed? On the whole, being run partly as a political institution, this hospital is well managed. Anyway, the Government is responsible, and that the Government does its best is shown by several of its bitterest political opponents being on the medical board of the Hospital. In addition, Dr. John Stewart, one of the leading doctors of the Province, was offered a place on the medical board, but declined to serve. Among the members of the medical board is Dr. N. E. McKay, an able and skilful surgeon, but a man who is afflicted with an infirmity that leads him to look with contempt on any other surgeon who can perform operations probably as well as he can. Dr. McKay has generally been found in the midst of every row, and they are legion, that has taken place in that hospital during many years.

He may be always right, but his domineering temper puts him often in the wrong.

"It is well known that operations are being constantly performed in all hospitals that do not lead to the recovery of the patient. It may be that some of these have not been performed by as skilful a surgeon as others. It may be, too, that some patients would die even if operated on by the most renowned of surgeons. Indeed, it may as well be admitted, that the skill of the most renowned physicians and surgeons cannot always triumph over a malady, even when the cause is removed by the knife. As we understand the work of the Victoria General Hospital, one lot of doctors or surgeons have always been ready to condemn the work of another lot. There has been too much of that condemnation. It is unreasonable to believe that, where two or three, or more, surgeons decide after due deliberation on a serious operation as being necessary, or the only means to save a person's life, these surgeons do not exercise all the precaution known to their school. To believe that they do not is to believe that they are regardless of human life,—this we absolutely refuse to believe. In Halifax such accusations from one coterie and from another have been rife. To add to the confusion, fathers and families high in official life, have striven to get their sons on the hospital board over the heads of others that may reasonably claim a turn. The latest of these is the one under discussion, and it may be said to be the more provoking because the father is no less a personage than Sir Robert Weatherbe, Chief Justice of the Province. In our opinion, it would be far more becoming for this great man, who has been so highly honoured by country and King, to say to his son,—'You have had the best education that money and influence could provide you with. But, my son, in Canada there is no royal road to success. You must now turn your attention to work, and it depends on your own efforts whether the promise of your natural abilities and scientific education will be fulfilled. You have been taught the best methods in surgery. Show the people that you have profited thereby, and thus win their confidence.' Instead of that, he withdraws him from London; from college, and seeks to place him, a mere stripling in his profession, over his fellow professionals who have had a score of years of practice, and if the Government did not appoint his son he would write them a long letter full of veiled allusions but not one direct charge. The performance is disappointing and provoking, and we are pleased to find Doctors Bisset and Kendall condemn it, as, in our opinion, it deserves to be condemned."

Dr. A. C. Hawkins, to whom reference is made, continues the controversy in a letter to the *Mail*. We would call especial attention to

the two case-reports, which he thinks he "may be pardoned for publishing." The letter reads:—

"I see Dr. McKay is out again at his old work of disparagement and detraction. This time, for a wonder, he leaves his older colleagues alone, and aims his shafts directly at myself and Dr. Bissett, and, indirectly, at the hospital and local government. In private and in public, in season and out of season, in places of low repute and high repute, he pursues his libelling way, and with it all he manages to make it appear that he is actuated by unselfish and disinterested motives, for the public good. If the truth were known, however, it would be quite apparent that Dr. McKay's motives in trying to shake confidences in the hospital, is that of the very lowest and meanest order.

"Being the oldest surgeon on the staff, and having established a reputation by fair means and foul, it pays him to place and keep his colleagues on the staff, under a cloud of distrust and suspicion. It is grist in his mill to make it appear that he is the only man in Nova Scotia who can be safely trusted with a knife. With this end always uppermost he keeps the alleged inferiority of the hospital always before the public.

"Nero, in quest of pleasure, set fire to Rome, and Norman, in quest of dollars, makes the pages of the *Herald* sizzle with flaming "dolorations." The disgraceful methods by which he strives to accomplish this are too well known to require mention or elaboration. His last attack upon myself from behind Dr. Bissett's shoulders, is quite characteristic of his sly cunning. Were I the only one whose professional reputation he has tried to blacken, I would have more cause to complain, but as it is, I simply fall heir to his selfish malignancy towards the whole surgical staff of the hospital.

"I was house surgeon for Dr. McKay when he was appointed to the Victoria General Hospital. For many years I have been surgeon to the D. A. R. and I. C. R. That, with a large private practice has kept me in touch with the surgery of the day. I did my own operating whenever possible, and when otherwise, I took advantage of the Victoria General Hospital, where, through the courtesy of the staff, I often assisted in cases sent there by myself. I am, therefore, familiar with the record of Dr. McKay and his colleagues, and I can truthfully state that they have been quite as successful, if not more so, than he has. They have had a lower death rate, and led the way in some of the most recent advances in surgery. They were first to perform prostatectomy, and that successfully; they were first to operate for rupture of the stomach, also successfully; they were first to do an end to end anasto-

mosis of the intestines, successfully also, and first with cesarean section, successfully. Last summer, by this operation, at both of which I assisted, they saved two mothers and their children, the first time in the history of the province. But there is this difference, that while Dr. McKay advertises himself and defames his colleagues to the utmost, they go on with their work, saying nothing.

"One would imagine that a man of Dr. McKay's position, with a large practice, and fat salary from the Dominion Government, for doing next to nothing, could afford to let others live unmolested and work without being slandered. He is not in such a strait as to be compelled any longer to float upon the wrecked reputation of others, nor can he by any means shield himself by claiming to be doing dirty work for the public good. In refusing to have anything to do with his colleagues, he has given them a chance to show that they can do equally good work; that they can take charge of the whole as well as a part, and that his presence on the staff is not by any means essential to the success of the hospital. On the other hand, it is well known that he is a hindrance in many ways. His place could be filled very easily by an equally good man, who would work in harmony with the staff and be a source of assistance and strength to it.

"Coming to the charge which Dr. McKay tries to father upon Dr. Bissett, viz., that my appointment to the staff of the hospital was a disgrace. I have to point out that the expression of any opinion in private is not justification for uttering a libel in public. Two wrongs do not make a right. A thrust over another man's shoulders may be as fatal in effect as it is malignant in intention, and cowardly in execution. This is characteristic of Dr. McKay's attacks. They are delivered here, there, and everywhere, but always under sly cover. A man who fights in this way may escape for a time, but sooner or later he becomes an object of universal distrust and contempt.

"I am not afraid to compare the success of my surgical operations with that of Dr. Mackay. Two parallel cases, now come to mind, which under the circumstances I may be pardoned for publishing. One is my own practice—Mrs. K., suffering from pain in the right side, diagnosed as cholelithiasis (stone in the gall-bladder), operated on in the infirmary by myself, Drs. Chisholm and Hogan assisting, stone removed, and patient sent home cured in four weeks.

"The other, Mr. W., also suffering from pain in the right side, diagnosed by Dr. McKay as stone in the gall-bladder, also operated on by him in the hospital. No stone: so much for diagnostic skill; but, worse still, on fumbling around, he discovered an enlarged kidney, and

forthwith removed it. On examination by Dr. Murray it was found to be in such a condition as is often seen in chronic Bright's disease. The other kidney must have been in a worse condition, for the patient died promptly in six days from complete suppression of urine.

So far as I know he has not yet tried to father this mistake of his upon others, but judging from his past record, that is the next thing he will be stooping to do."