

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

A MEDICAL SLANDER CASE IN 1831.

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IN *The Canada Lancet* of January, 1913, appears an account of a medical slander case in Upper Canada in 1827. It was tried before Mr. Justice James Buchanan Macaulay, who was himself the son of a medical man.

Four years afterwards in the same Court House at Niagara, before a different judge, another medical slander case came on for trial, which is of some interest,—perhaps more to the legal than to the medical profession.

Dr. Raymond received from the Governor a licence to practise, November 13th, 1825. As no record appears of his passing the examination of the Medical Board, it is probable that he was otherwise qualified, either by holding a diploma from a British institution or otherwise under the Act of 1827, 8 George IV., c. 3.

He was in June, 1831, called on to attend one John Cain, at Armstrong, near Niagara. He found him suffering from an abscess in the knee, which the doctor treated properly. But the patient had a much more serious trouble, which was diagnosed as pleurisy, and there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the diagnosis. The doctor “bled copiously,” which was “usual in most cases.” John Wesley had recommended a glass of tar-water taken warm every hour, which was at least harmless, while the “Yarb doctor,” Samuel Thomson, prescribed tea of mayweed or summer savory, or a sweetened infusion of horehound leaves, equally innocuous. But with the regular profession then and for long after, the great panacea was bleeding.

The patient grew worse and his brother, in whose care he was, became dissatisfied with the medical man. He had no hesitation in saying openly that “the d——d old scoundrel might just as well take a pistol and blow his brains out as murder him by inches”—“if he dies, I shall always think he murdered him.” The doctor himself was full of hope, and did not think there was any necessity to send for another medical man, and for a time refused to do so. But the friends were insistent and at length Dr. Lafferty was sent for. Dr. Lafferty was one of the best-known men at the time in the district; born in New Jersey, the son of the Attorney-General of that Province, he became an army surgeon. Taking to wife in 1800, a half-breed Indian woman, he settled down to practise his profession at Drummondville. Without much medical learning, he was