

Obituary

A. E. CUMBERBATCH.

THE death of Mr A. E. Cumberbatch, Consulting Aural Surgeon to St Bartholomew's Hospital, reminds us how far Otolgy has travelled during his life time. The outstanding names of the generation before he began work were Toynbee, Hinton, and Dalby. They conducted their practice on lines far other than those now adopted. When Toynbee died in 1866, after having read papers at the Royal Society, Hinton bought the house, and with it the practice, from his executors, and when he died, Dalby, who had acted as his assistant, took over the house in Savile Row, and with it the valuable connection that Hinton had built up. Such a method of acquiring a consulting practice is no longer possible, and Cumberbatch started from a wider basis and made his position by sheer hard work.

Cumberbatch was born at Barbados on 11th April 1847. Educated at Grosvenor College, Bath, he entered St Bartholomew's Hospital as a medical student and soon showed himself a skilful anatomist. In due course he won the Kirkes gold medal, took the M.R.C.S. on 2nd June 1870, and was appointed house surgeon to Mr Holmes Coote in the following October. The position was not an easy one to fill. It was held for a year, there was no junior, and if operations were comparatively few, seven days of duty every fourth week usually meant a sequence of laborious days followed by broken nights. There was also the added responsibility of having to put the details of an emergency case on paper and send it by a porter in a cab to the surgeon's house. Neither was the surgeon pleased if, having been thus brought out of his bed on a snowy night, the strangulated hernia was easily reduced under an anæsthetic.

Having finished his year of office, Cumberbatch took the London M.B. in 1871 and the F.R.C.S. Eng. on 13th June 1872. He served a long apprenticeship, first as assistant and afterwards as full demonstrator in the dissecting rooms, and for ten years was teaching there from 10 to 4 daily, with an average attendance of 100 to 150 students. His demonstrations were greatly appreciated, for he always taught the broad outlines and asked straightforward questions which had a practical bearing. He thus obtained good results at the College examinations and trained up Walsham, Shuter, Bruce, Clark, and Lockwood, to be practical anatomists.

In 1869 the Governors of St Bartholomew's Hospital determined amongst other changes to establish a separate department for the treatment of diseases of the ear and (Sir) Thomas Smith as the available assistant surgeon was placed in charge. He was succeeded in 1873 by Mr John Langton, and Cumberbatch acted as his assistant, in what after all was an out-patient department, at such times as his scanty leisure from the dissecting room allowed him. Langton retired on becoming full

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surgeon and Cumberbatch was appointed in his place with the higher-sounding title of "Aural Surgeon." The accommodation remained unchanged. The allotted floor space would have seated three persons comfortably; it had to provide for seven, and it was a part of "the duty room" facing Smithfield which was then paved with granite setts. Cumberbatch once complained that "hearing tests are handicapped by the re-echoing din of the surgery; babies are screaming in the hollow distance; through the open doors comes the crash and rattle of traffic, whilst in the male 'cross-box' a house surgeon is making urgent efforts to pass a silver catheter through a seemingly impermeable stricture to a running accompaniment of groans and interjections from the patient." The work too had to be done standing, and there were only two lamps and two wash-basins. In spite of this Cumberbatch managed to train the few students who were interested in diseases of the ear; but it was not until some years later that dressers were regularly appointed. He was fortunate in having as his assistant Mr Laurie A. Lawrence. The two friends worked together until 1907 when Cumberbatch resigned and was appointed Consulting Aural Surgeon to the Hospital, the department having by this time just come into its own and being housed palatially in the new block. He devoted himself for a time entirely to the large private practice he had acquired first in Queen Anne Street and afterwards in Park Crescent, Portland Place, until the War came. He then volunteered with Mr Lawrence to resume their old places at the Hospital, and they carried on the work under more favourable conditions than they had ever before known. He was also Aural Surgeon to the National Hospital, Queen Square.

He retired to Great Sarratt Hall near Rickmansworth, where he died of pneumonia on 25th March 1929, and was buried in the East Finchley Cemetery. He married Alice Lucy Moffatt in 1881, who died before him, leaving one son and three daughters.

Alphonso Elkin Cumberbatch was one of the founders of the Otological Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1899; he served as Treasurer in 1899 and was President in 1905. He wrote no book but contributed many articles on diseases of the ear to the Society and to the various medical periodicals. He became wealthy by his marriage, independently of his practice, so that he never had the stimulus to make public the knowledge he had amassed in the course of years. As a man he had many hobbies; he played golf, tennis, and billiards more than creditably; he collected stamps and oriental china and was an authority on both. He always had a grievance on some minor point but he aired it with humour and his friends never took it seriously or were bored by it because it changed almost daily.

D'ARCY POWER.