

# Lady Aberdeen Opens the Tuberculosis Exhibition at Cashel in 1908

by Seamus J. King

Lady Aberdeen, the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, travelled to Cashel in July 1908 in order to open the Tuberculosis Exhibition, which was touring Ireland at the time.

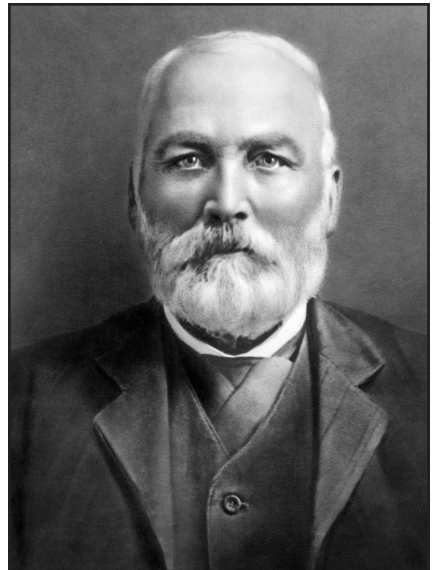
In preparation for her visit a committee was appointed in connection with the event, chairman, Very Rev. Dean Kinane, Very Rev. Dean Day, Rev. Fr. Ryan, C.C., Rev. Fr. Byrne, C.C., Brother L. D. Maher, Dr. Laffan, Dr. Coyle, Messrs James Kelly, Thomas Walsh, U.C., C. M. Barry, solicitor, J. J. Chadwick, C.P.S., J. J. Spears, Michael Devitt, C.U.C., and the secretaries, J. F. McDonald and Dr. Wood. Later Dr. Wood became sole secretary and one of the most important members of the committee.<sup>1</sup>

The committee confirmed the dates of 10 and 11 July for the exhibition, with the City Hall as venue. The Hon. Sec. was directed through the local Press to invite the ladies of Cashel and surrounding district to attend a preliminary meeting in the City Hall, Cashel on Thursday the 18th inst, at 3 o'clock for the purpose of forming a Branch of the Women's National Health Association of Ireland. There were communications with Lady Aberdeen, who informed the committee that she would be arriving in Cashel by train. Lectures had to be organised in conjunction with the exhibition. The final item was the agreement of those present to guarantee the expenses of the event. A subscription list was opened and Messrs M. Devitt and C. M. Barry were appointed collectors.

## **Tuberculosis – The White Plague**

According to research by the Irish Red Cross Journal, 12,000 young Irish adults died of tuberculosis in 1904. The average for the earlier years in the decade was about 10,000 annually. It was one of two leading causes of death in those years, the other was pneumonia.

Consumption was the more common name for the illness in Ireland, because the victim was 'consumed' by weight loss and breathlessness. It consumed



*Michael Devitt 'Mickey the Chairman'*

the lives of thousands in Ireland. It was contagious and it thrived in crowded tenements in cities and in poorly ventilated cottages in the countryside. Spitting, a common practice in Ireland, spread the disease.

What made the disease more deadly was that the average age of the victims was thirty-one years, which made the loss of life to the nation much greater than the mere numerical death rate suggests. It meant that it was not the infirm and decrepit that the disease chose but rather those in the full bloom of 'manhood, womanhood and only too often of motherhood too. Indeed, the backbone of the country'.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary reports on the disease showed that in other civilized countries the death-rate from tuberculosis was steadily on the decline, but not in Ireland. Here the ravages of the disease were steadily increasing. At the early stage no cure was available. Sanatoria were built in the clear air of the mountains of Switzerland, Germany and Austria to treat the disease. Wealthy people from Ireland suffering from tuberculosis travelled to these places to be treated. It took a long time before a suitable treatment place was built in Ireland. The first National Hospital for Consumption was opened at Newcastle. County Wicklow about 1912. There was considerable local opposition to its construction. One of the pavilions was burned down before the opening! The idea behind TB Sanatoria was no physical activity, total bed rest, two pints of Guinness daily and nutritious food was the prescription. During the daytime patients were encouraged to put their heads out the windows and breathe the fresh air. Hospital beds were wheeled out to sunny verandas regardless of season.

### **Women's National Health Foundation**

This organisation was founded by Lady Aberdeen<sup>3</sup>, the wife of the Lord Lieutenant, on 13 March 1907 with the object of eliminating, as far as possible, the scourge of tuberculosis, and to bring about a reduction in the high infant mortality rate in Ireland. Over 170 local branches were formed throughout Ireland. The work of the organisation began with an exhibition on health matters, which was part of the Irish International Exhibition held in Dublin from early October to 7 November 1907.

When the Exhibition closed in Dublin, the committee purchased a horse-drawn caravan, name Eire, to carry it around the country and it travelled to Belfast on 7 December, Lisburn 18 December and Lurgan on 11 January 1908 . The caravan was burned at Lifford in February but by April 'Phoenix' replaced it and it set off from Fintona to complete its round of the country. Hence, Cashel became one of the stops as the Exhibition travelled around Ireland.

### **Perfecting Arrangements**

There was a great flurry of activity in Cashel as arrangements for the Exhibition were perfected. Having a major figure to open the event was extremely important and the committee decided on Sr. William Butler of Bansha Castle. A reply was received from him on 11 June 'intimating the pleasure it would give him to deliver the opening address.'

This meeting to form a branch of the Women's National Health Association of Ireland was well attended and a committee was formed, with Fr. Dunne elected president. The following

ladies were appointed joint hon. secretaries – Mrs L. P. Power, Cashel and Miss Ward, Garrane, Cashel. It held a number of meetings and there was great enthusiasm expressed and the ladies were reported ‘to be taking a great interest in the matter’. A series of lectures was organised in connection with the Exhibition. They were to be delivered by Drs. Laffan and Russell, and Professor Corby of Queen’s College, Cork. The latter was related to the Cashel family. There was also a veterinary lecture by Mr. Gregg, V.S., which was to be delivered ‘at 1 o’clock, on Saturday, the 11th (Market Day) for the purpose of giving farmers an opportunity of being present.’ The admission to these lectures, which were to be illustrated by lantern slides<sup>4</sup>, was to be free and it was hoped ‘that all who can would attend and thereby learn the best means available for checking the ravages of the ‘White Scourge’

One such lecture by Dr. Robert T. Heron from county Armagh, which was delivered at Nenagh on 4 July in connection with the visit of the Exhibition there, spelled out the causes of lowering of human resistance to tuberculosis. He called them the ‘Ten Ds’: dirt, dust, damp, dark, draughts, drains, drink, deficient food, deficient clothing, deficient ventilation. According to his figures, the disease killed 12,000 per year, and was responsible for the maiming of 120,000 others.<sup>5</sup>

It was also announced that Cashel Urban Council intended to present Lady Aberdeen with an appropriate address on her arrival on 10 July, and that she would speak at a public meeting of the Women’s Branch of the National Health Association. One of the problems the committee had to solve was the transport of Lady Aberdeen to the City Hall and her return to the station after the event. Mr. Grubb of Ardmayle was one of the few owners of a car in the area and he agreed to provide transport for Her Excellency. He was requested to be at the station at 1 pm and to be available to transport her back there later.

### **Arrival of lady Aberdeen**

Lady Aberdeen travelled to Cashel by special train for the opening of the Tuberculosis Exhibition, which was part of the national anti-consumption crusade. She was met at Gouldscross station by the Ballagh War Pipers’ Band, who also accompanied her to Cashel.

The band was under the charge of Mr. Thomas Dwyer, D.O. She travelled on the 1.20 pm train, ‘occupying a saloon carriage’, and accompanied by Sr. William Thompson, her private secretary. Sir William Butler also happened to travel by the same train.

On arrival at Cashel station, a large number of representative citizens were on the platform. The reception party included the following members of the Corporation: Messrs Michael Devitt, chairman, Thomas Walsh (*Cashel Sentinel*), Thomas Harty, Cornelius Carroll and Christopher Connors. These representatives entered the saloon carriage and, having been introduced to her Excellency, the chairman read the address from the Urban Council:

*On behalf of the people of our ancient City we bid you welcome amongst us. We recognise your strenuous efforts for many years past to revive and help the languishing industries of our country and to find a market in other lands for the produce of our mills and workshops. Your efforts on behalf of Irish manufactures entitle you to the highest praise and we gladly give honour where honour is due. Your visit today is in the interests of the health of the nation, and while we cordially join in your benevolent*

*movement to stamp out the dread disease of Tuberculosis, which is working havoc in our beloved country, we offer you our grateful thanks for giving a lead in this philanthropic work, which is of vital necessity in the interests of Ireland.*

Her Excellency, in reply, said: 'It was a pleasure to her to be in Cashel for the first time and see the famous Rock (hear, hear). She had travelled over a beautiful country as she came to Cashel. She was delighted to the co-operation of Cashel in the movement which she had the honour to represent, and she hoped that the Women's Health Association would give help to the people.'<sup>6</sup>

Lady Aberdeen then proceeded by motor car to the City Hall. As she left the station the War Pipers' Band gave her a rendition. At the City Hall, which was full of overflowing 'by an audience comprising all creeds and classes' she received quite an ovation, when she was introduced by Rev. Thomas Dunne, President of the Cashel Branch of the Women's Health Association. He welcomed her to Cashel on the noble mission in which she was engaged. A bouquet of flowers was presented to her by Miss Barry, Cashel. Following this Her excellency had a meeting with the committee.

Lady Aberdeen then adjourned to the Deanery (Cashel Palace Hotel) where she had lunch with Dean Day, whose guest she was during her stay, and returned to the City Hall at 3 pm for the opening of the Exhibition. In the course of her instructive lecture 'she urged the uses of health foods, such as stirabout'. She was followed in a similar strain by Sr. William Butler.

Before her departure Lady Aberdeen visited the Presentation Convent and Industrial School, 'where she was graciously received.' After an address and the presentation of a bouquet of flowers by two of the girls. Lady Aberdeen returned by special train at 5 o'clock, the War Pipers' Band accompanying her to the station.

Later, the *Cashel Sentinel* reported that the Sisters received a most gracious letter from Lady Aberdeen stating, how pleased she was with her visit. She included two silver thimbles for the two girls who presented her with the address and bouquet. They were inscribed with the motto: Fortuna Sequatur (May the wish be fulfilled). (Miss Barry, daughter of C. M. Barry, solicitor, who presented Lady Aberdeen with a bouquet of flowers on the occasion of the opening of the Exhibition in the City Hall, was the recipient of another silver thimble.)<sup>7</sup>

Over the two days of the Exhibition a number of lectures were delivered, the most prestigious that by Professor Henry Corby of Queen's College, Cork, who spoke on bacteria, its causes, etc. He dwelt strongly on the fact that a good way to prevent consumption in Ireland was to have the poor of the country better housed and better fed. At present the bone and sinew of their land was emigrating because they had no industry and it was only the helpless who were left behind. He urged that everything possible should be done to stem the tide of emigration and prevent consumption, which didn't spare either the old man with drooping shoulders, the young man, nor the comely maiden. 'In conclusion he thanked the audience for the kind hearing they had given him. He went on to say that when he was asked to come to Cashel, he considered it as a command not a request, and therefore he could not refuse because he was a Cashel man. (Applause)<sup>8</sup>

## Financial Success

The organisation of the Exhibition was a financial success. A meeting of the committee was held in the City Hall on July 23 with Rev. P. C. Ryan, C.C. in the chair. Also present were Very Rev. Dean Day, Rev. T. Dunne, C.C., Messrs James Costello, C. M. Barry, solicitor, James J. Chadwick, and Thomas Harty, U.C. The secretary, Dr. T. Wood, submitted in detail the accounts, which were duly passed and signed. The receipts by subscriptions amounted to £211 6s and the expenses were £17 8s 5d, leaving a balance to credit of £4 7s 7d, which amount it was decided to hand over to the secretaries of the Cashel branch of the Women's National Health Association.<sup>9</sup> Some of the items in the breakdown of expenses were printing, £2 7s 6d, train fare for Mr. Greggs, V.S £2 10s 0d, carpet & rosettes for committee, railway rate £1 12s 4d, etc. The committee thanked Dr. Wood for the manner in which he discharged his painstaking duties as hon. secretary.<sup>10</sup>

Incidental expenses incurred by the secretary between 12 May and 11 July are detailed in the minute book and they provide interesting information on the cost of basic things like postage and stationery at the time. The total amount came to £1 15s 8d. A number of the items were as follows: book for minutes 2d, telegram to her Excellency 8d, postage and circulation of circulars 4s 6d, post cards 6d, foolscap 3d. In the days before telephones, loudspeakers, radio, etc broadcasting information was an important occupation and involved the employment of a Bell man, who went around shouting, hear ye, hear ye! During the visit of Lady Aberdeen he was paid 1s for his services.<sup>11</sup>



*Tom Wood and Josephine Higgins,  
Wedding Day 1912.*

## Postscript

The Tuberculosis Exhibition also visited Clonmel, Tipperary Town and Nenagh, and it generated quite a bit of interest in the 'fell disease' and on ways to develop an antidote to it. In a letter to the *Nationalist* on May 27, Wm H. Smith, CLK. had this to say. He was speaking to a lady well-known in social circles, who took a deep interest in everything which concerned the well-being of the community. He continued that she had been to the Tuberculosis Exhibition in a neighbouring county, and held a prominent position in connection with the Women's Health Association. She informed him that goats were entirely free from tubercular disease, and that goat's milk, especially for the young was, for that reason, much superior to that derived from cows. She had attended most of the lectures delivered during the recent Exhibition in Clonmel but did not hear this fact alluded to. Possible some of the experts who delivered the lectures would be good enough to say if it was true that goats are immune from tuberculosis, as, if they are, surely the use of goat's milk would be a cheap and simple safeguard against the fell disease.<sup>12</sup>

## References

- 1 Dr. Thomas Wood (1848-1935: Born in Cashel at 27 Main Street in 1848, Thomas Wood was the only child of Richard Wood, Apothecary, and Anne Lea. Richard was one of 21 inhabitants elected as Town Commissioners in 1840, following the abolition of the old Cashel Corporation. Having qualified as a doctor and apothecary, Dr. Thomas Wood, LAH, joined his father's practice at the Medical Hall on Main Street in the 1870s, and for nearly fifty years compounded medicines for the County Home and County Infirmary on the Green. In 1886 he married Anne Haskins, who involved herself in many aspects of life in Cashel. She died from pneumonia in 1910. They had no children. In 1912 Dr. Wood married Josephine Higgins from Ballykelly and over the next twelve years they parented 9 children, 7 boys and 2 girls. Dr. Wood died in 1935 at the age of 87 years and Josephine passed away in April 1958. During his long life, Dr. Wood was actively involved in many aspects of life in Cashel and, like his father was elected to the Town Commissioners using his role to highlight the necessity of securing an extension of the railway line from Gouldscross to Cashel for commercial purposes. In 1888 he chaired a fourth attempt to establish a G.A.A. club in the town. He was a member of the local horse racing club, the committee of the Reading Room and Art Union and the Amateur Dramatic Society and Shaughraun Company. Much of his time was given to the St. Vincent de Paul Society and due to his medical experience over many decades, he was secretary of the committee promoting the Tuberculosis Exhibition in the City Hall in 1908.
- 2 *The Cashel Sentinel*, May 16, 1908
- 3 Lady Aberdeen's (1857-1939) husband was appointed viceroy of Ireland by Gladstone in 1886. From a Liberal party background, Lady Aberdeen was highly experienced at working with those, who were far less privileged. With Home Rule in mind the Aberdeens were determined to bring about an economic revival in Ireland. Lady Aberdeen hoped to do this through her role as President of the Irish Industries Association inaugurated in May 1886. But, they had to leave the Dublin position when Parliament was dissolved in July 1886, and they weren't re-appointed until 1906. In the meantime Lady Aberdeen kept in touch with Ireland and turned her attention to one of the greatest health issue of the time, tuberculosis. Soon after her return to Ireland, she was approached by the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis (NAPT)' to take part in its program. In response she chose TB as a major cause for her help and attention. As a result, she founded the Women's National Health Association (WNHA), the first meeting of which was held in the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park on 12 April 1906.
- 4 The cost of the Lantern Slides plus the operator and travel expenses amounted to £4 10s
- 5 *Nenagh Guardian*, July 11, 1908
- 6 *The Cashel Sentinel*, July 18, 1908
- 7 *The Cashel Sentinel*, July 25, 1908
- 8 *ibid*
- 9 *The Nationalist*, July 27, 1908
- 10 *The Cashel Sentinel*, July 25, 1908
- 11 Minute book, pp 114-115
- 12 *The Nationalist*, May 27, 1908