

MacCallum, Sir Peter (1885-1974)

Sir Peter MacCallum (1885-1974), professor of pathology, was born on 14 July 1885 at Maryhill, Glasgow, Scotland, son of Peter McCallum, master grocer, and his wife Annie, née Morrison. The family emigrated to New Zealand in 1886, his father to become branch manager of the Singer Sewing Machine Co. at Christchurch. Peter attended local state schools until the age of 12 when he began work in an ironmonger's store. His health suffered and, on medical advice, he resumed his schooling, subsequently winning scholarships to Christ's College and thence to Canterbury College (B.Sc., N.Z., 1907; M.Sc., 1908; M.A., 1909). At university he gained an exhibition in biology, and Blues in athletics and Rugby.

His ambition was to study medicine. Having saved some money from part-time teaching, MacCallum worked his passage to England as a coal-trimmer in 1910. He entered the University of Edinburgh (M.B., Ch.B., 1914) where he obtained first-class honours in most subjects and prizes in three. Again awarded a double Blue (athletics and Rugby), he was disappointed not to be capped for Scotland.

Before being called up for service in the Royal Army Medical Corps, MacCallum had six months experience in general practice. On 17 March 1915 he was appointed lieutenant, R.A.M.C. Special Reserve. In October he was promoted captain. For his deeds on the Western Front he won the Military Cross and was twice mentioned in dispatches. In 1918 he was gassed and evacuated to England. He took home leave in New Zealand, then returned to Scotland with his 33-year-old fiancée Bella Dyes Jennings, née Cross; she was a widow and a doctor of science. They were married on 25 August 1919 at St Giles's Church, Edinburgh, with the forms of the Church of Scotland. He became a lecturer in pathology and she in botany. Appointed clinical pathologist at the Royal Infirmary, MacCallum undertook research at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, of which he was elected a member (1934) and fellow (1953). He also taught at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, and obtained its diploma of public health (1923).

In 1924 MacCallum was offered chairs of pathology at Johannesburg, South Africa, and in Melbourne. He chose Melbourne. His arrival was greeted with enthusiasm by the medical profession and the university. Sir Harry Allen, MacCallum's predecessor, had occupied the chair for forty-two years, and Professor Richard Berry and Professor William Osborne had respectively taught anatomy and physiology for almost two decades. New blood was welcome. MacCallum met kindred spirits in Charles Kellaway at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, and William Penfold at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories.

Not a man for rhetoric or display, MacCallum began quietly. Sincere, forthright and pertinacious, he stamped his personality on the department and ran it well. He concentrated on administration more than research, and was fortunate in having as his associates such outstanding future professors as F. L. Apperley, Edgar King and R. D. Wright, for whom he provided a supportive research environment. His teaching was sound and thorough, though more appreciated at postgraduate level; undergraduates were often daunted by his long, unpunctuated sentences. Well known for his interest in non-curricular activities, he was president of the university's sports union and chairman of the grounds committee.

MacCallum strove to bring about change. He supported the proposal for a new medical school, with the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital being relocated closer to the university; and he encouraged the appointment (1934) of Melbourne's first full-time salaried vice-chancellor (Sir) Raymond Priestley. MacCallum was dean (1939-43 and 1947-50) of the faculty of medicine, chairman (1944-46) of the professorial board and a member (1931-50 and 1953-61) of council. He delivered the Halford oration—on population trends—in Canberra in 1938 and the Lady Masson lecture—'Chemistry and Medicine'—in Melbourne in 1951. On his retirement in 1950, the university conferred on him an honorary M.D. and presented him with a *Festschrift*.

As temporary lieutenant colonel, MacCallum had been director of pathology at Army Headquarters, Melbourne, from September 1941 to April 1942. During World War II he 'raised and commanded the Medical Wing of the Melbourne University Rifles', and served on the physiology sub-committee of the chemical warfare experimental and research committee. In 1945 he was a sympathetic and helpful chairman of the Victorian Committee for Post-War Reconstruction which assisted the rehabilitation of ex-service personnel who wanted to resume or begin university studies. In 1946 he reported to the Western Australian government on the establishment of a medical school in that State.

A compulsive organizer and energetic committee-man, MacCallum was involved in community affairs as a foundation fellow (1938) of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, as chairman of the Australian National Research Council (1948-51), the Australian Red Cross Society (1951-58) and the College of Dentistry (1941-63), and as president (1946) of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association. In 1945-62 he was a member of the Medical Board of Victoria. He also chaired (1946-63) the executive-committee of the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, through which, with the support of staunch allies like R. Kaye-Scott, he advocated the foundation and development of a cancer institute. In 1949 the Victorian Cancer Institute was established; in the following year its out-patient sections were named the Peter MacCallum Clinic. Clinical work expanded, research and teaching increased, and the first training school in Australia for radiotherapists was set up. It became one of the world's leading centres for cancer treatment and research, and was named the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute in 1986.

Following his wife's death in 1927, MacCallum had married with Anglican rites Ursula Lillie Grace at the Church of the Holy Nativity, Blenheim, New Zealand, on 15 August 1928. After she died in 1941, he married his former secretary Frieda Maud Davies (d.1953) at Holy Trinity Church, Kew, on 7 June 1946.

In 1953 MacCallum was knighted. Always a keen traveler, he was one of a group of doctors and academics who visited China in 1957 at the invitation of the Chinese Medical Association. On the return journey he visited Japan with his friend Dr Leonard Cox. MacCallum enjoyed golf and walking. For twenty-five years he sailed and fished with another friend, (Sir) Walter Bassett, at Sorrento, Victoria.

Reserved and reticent at times, Sir Peter was admired by his students for his probity, kindness and generosity. Colleagues and friends who knew him more intimately enjoyed his sense of fun, and respected his compassion, tolerance and staunch principles. He had a reputation for sound judgement and, consequently, for his capacity to influence people. Survived by the three daughters

of his first marriage and by the son of his second, he died on 4 March 1974 at Kew and was cremated. A portrait by Max Meldrum hangs in the department of pathology, University of Melbourne; another, by Paul Fitzgerald, is held by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, East Melbourne.

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