

Journalist, Medical Doctor and Newspaper Editor-Proprietor in Bust-Up

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Abstract: This article explores the acrimonious relationship between three high profile, well-known Irishmen—a journalist, a newspaper editor, and a medical doctor—that played out in Buenos Aires newspapers in 1894.

Keywords: *Medicine-men, quacks, Michael Dinneen, William Bulfin, Lovat Ashe Mulcahy, Fr Anthony Fahy O.P., Edward Wallace, The Southern Cross, The Standard & River Plate News, Siege of Buenos Aires 1880.*

Preliminaries

How did a journalist, a medical doctor and a newspaper editor-proprietor become embroiled in conflict in Buenos Aires in 1894? What provoked a medical practitioner to threaten legal action for defamation against a newspaper? What brought journalist Michael Dinneen,² editor-proprietor William Bulfin³ (alias Che Bueno), and Dr Lovat Ashe Mulcahy (Fig. 1) into confrontation? This was a very public spat between three high profile and well-known Irishmen. The dispute went public but curiously was played out in the columns of *The Standard*, an Irish-owned publication with a distinctly British flavour and bias. Bulfin now best remembered for his books *Tales from the Pampas*⁴ and *Rambles in Erin*⁵ penned a series of articles in *The Southern Cross* (TSC) under the title “Sketches of Buenos Aires;” his piece “Medicine Men” appeared on Friday, 2 February 1894. It did not go unnoticed. Mulcahy felt he had been libelled and promptly sought redress. Was there a justified cause for complaint?

The liberty of the press is something for which editors, proprietors and journalists have struggled. As crusading journalist Pete Naughton of the *Daily Telegraph* recently commented, “newspaper lawyers aren’t always the most popular people in the office, so often their job is to tweak, rewrite, or even scrap stories that risk landing the paper in court.... And if something does slip through the net, and a story is found to have broken the law, the consequences can be severe; tarnished reputations, vast legal fees, even jail sentences”.⁶

¹ Edward Walsh MSc has researched and written about nineteenth-century Irish migration history and the Irish people (including Catholic priests) who came to live and work in Argentina. Editor of *South-Eastern Catholic History*, the journal of the Essex Recusant Society, he lives and works in London.

² Michael Dinneen, born Cork 1839. Studied in Dublin and Paris. On graduating from University in Paris he was offered and accepted a teaching position in Chile and remained there until 1880 when he came to Argentina. While working as a teacher he began writing articles for *The Southern Cross* and was editor of the newspaper 1882-1896. See *The Southern Cross, Número Del Centenario*, 1985, p.13.

³ William Bulfin (1863-1910) native of Derringlough, County Offaly, the fourth of ten siblings. Studied at university in Galway and emigrated to Argentina in 1884. Lived initially in the camp from where he started contributing articles to *The Southern Cross* and subsequently teaching English at Colegio San Salvador in Buenos Aires. Columnist and editor/proprietor TSC 1892-1908. Bulfin used the pseudonym Che Bueno. See op. cit. No.2, p.13.

⁴ Published by Thomas Unwin, London, 1900.

⁵ Published by W. H. Gill, Dublin, 1907.

⁶ Pete Naughton, “Expenses podcast: The unsung hero of the scandal”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 2019.

In this instance the *dramatis personae* were Dinneen, editor of *TSC* 1882-1896, Bulfin *TSC* editor-proprietor 1896-1908, and Lovat Ashe Mulcahy (born Dublin 1849), son of Dr John Moore Mulcahy and Margaretta Ashe of County Tipperary. After boarding school in Waterford, Mulcahy spent two years in Germany with Dr Pilgrim at Mainzer Schloss and subsequently should have entered Sandhurst Military Academy but sailed on the *S.S. Córdoba* from Liverpool for Buenos Aires at age eighteen. He very quickly came into contact with the legendary Dominican Fr Anthony Fahy who obtained Mulcahy a position on Edward Wallace's⁷ estancia near San Antonio de Areco. A two-year stay allowed him to learn about sheep farming as well as the Spanish language. On returning to Buenos Aires he was able to teach English, German, French and Spanish. In 1874 he entered the University of Buenos Aires Medical School.



Figure 1: Lovat Ashe Mulcahy and wife, Elena Matilde Dickson.

Mulcahy's renewed Consular declaration No. 6348⁸ made on 25 September 1874 to Interim Consul Ronald Bridgett⁹ describes him as being age twenty-five, "oficio: estudiante de medicina (y

⁷ Edward Wallace (1810-1884) a native of County Westmeath. Arrived in Argentina 1820-1839. In 1855 he bought an estancia at Baradero and handed the administration to his nephew Paul O'Neil. He also owned land near Carmen de Areco and Arrecifes. In his will he left his goods and chattels to seven inheritors including all his nieces and nephews. A wealthy man who never married he also left generous legacies to the Hampton Carmelite Convent, Drumcondra, Dublin, as well as to the Irish Convent, Buenos Aires. See *Arbol Genealógico Edward Wallace* webmaster@irishgenealogy.com.ar accessed 11 February 2020.

⁸ This plaque is a Mulcahy family heirloom.

⁹ Ronald Bridgett (1839-1899), Acting British Consul Buenos Aires 1873-1874. Appointed Consul to the Argentine Republic 1884. Acting Consul General at Buenos Aires, 1885. Retired on pension January 1899, living at Martinez

professor), nacido: en Irlanda, estatura: 6 pies, pelo: oscuro, ojos: azules”. That was the very year Mulcahy entered Medical School at the University of Buenos Aires.

On graduating in 1880 his thesis “Historia de la Ovariectomía en la República Argentina” caught the attention of the local press. This surgery he had undertaken. His thesis, printed by M. Biedma of 133-135 Calle Belgrano, consisted of 102 pages and was dedicated “To My Friends – Pedro Murray and José García Fernández – Friendship”. To the faculty he wrote as follows:

Señor Presidente: [Doctor Don Guillermo Rawson]
Señores Académicos:

Hoy por primera vez cabe a un hijo de la Gran Bretaña, el alto honor de presentar una Tesis con el fin de optar el grado de Doctor en Medicina de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas de Buenos Aires; y debo manifestar aquí con este motivo, como una pálida demostración de gratitud, que las distinciones inmerecidas que siempre me dispensaron mis catedráticos en los seis años que he asistido a la Facultad, y el afecto verdaderamente fraternal que siempre me profesaron mis condiscípulos, mas de una vez me hicieron olvidar por momentos, que era extranjero, creyéndome mas bien uno de los hijos de esta hospitalaria tierra.

The Standard's Editor's Table column of 20 April 1880 commented as follows: “We have pleasure in congratulating our talented countryman Dr Lovat Mulcahy on the brilliant exam he passed last week for his diploma as Doctor of Medicine. His thesis was on ‘Ovariology’ and it is worthy to remark that Dr Mulcahy is the first Englishman that has ever presented a thesis to the Faculty of Buenos Aires on taking the diploma of medical doctor.” On 9 May the same newspaper noted that he had set up consulting rooms at 320 Calle Maipu. Note that in his letter to the Faculty of Medicine, Mulcahy describes himself as “a son of Great Britain” (“un hijo de la Gran Bretaña”) rather than Irish, and *The Standard* then refers to him as an Englishman.



Figure 2: Mulcahy's door plaque, 320 Calle Maipu.

(FCCA); death due to drowning on 16 February 1889. See *Foreign Office List, 1900*; Harrison, London, 1900, p. 235c.

Mulcahy's first appointment after graduation was at the British Hospital and subsequently with the Army. Scarcely a month after graduating on 22 May 1880, *The Standard* reported that "we understand that Dr Mulcahy has been appointed house surgeon of the British Hospital. No better man could have been selected. We are requested to state that his appointment will in no way interfere with Dr Mulcahy's private practice, and he will attend his consulting rooms as normal".

At that time the old British Hospital stood in front of the Parque Lezama. The resident medical officer Dr Thomas Carylton,¹⁰ being ill, led to Mulcahy's appointment as physician and surgeon. And when revolution broke out that same year he promptly volunteered his services to the defending army. His offer accepted, Mulcahy was appointed regimental surgeon to the regiment commanded by Colonel Sebastián N. Casares¹¹ by letter of 21 June 1880 addressed to "Al Señor Médico Director del Hospital Inglés, Dr Lovat Mulcahy", advising him that the "Cuerpo de Sanidad de las Fuerzas de la Defensa de Buenos Aires" was pleased to name him as their representative in that hospital.



Figure 3: Signed autograph photo portrait of Colonel Sebastián Nicomedes Casares.

¹⁰ Dr Thomas Baxter Carlyon, Surgeon and Resident Medical Officer at the British Hospital from 1880 to 1881. See Jeremy Howat www.argbrit.org, *Doctors in Practice with the English-Speaking Community in Argentina during the 19th and early 20th centuries*, accessed 20 February 2020.

¹¹ Colonel Sebastián Nicomedes Casares, 1846-1918; Fig. 3.

Casares' forces held the line in Lezama Park and the British Hospital was just across the way. While duty called Mulcahy hither and thither, the enemy was watching with strict orders to shoot anyone who attempted to cross no man's land. A contemporary account in *The Standard* told how "once, on returning to the lines from the Hospital the Doctor was spotted and sniped at by a sergeant and two men of the attacking force. He had to speak to Col. Casares, and a little danger more or less was all in the day's work. When the three riflemen appeared 100 yards away and opened fire the doctor stood quite still. Not deeming it good for to be bowled over running as if he were a rabbit. But the men of his regiment saw no objection to running—to his rescue! A platoon came up at the double and were about to treat the trio to a volley when Dr Mulcahy stopped them, saying 'Don't fire, they will not hit me, and I do not want to be the cause of their death!' When the trouble ended Colonel Casares brought the regimental surgeon before the troops on parade and thanked him for having shown before the enemy an example of courage, coolness and humanity worth of all praise. The gallant officer subsequently sent him an autograph portrait with the following inscription 'Al distinguido Médico de la Segunda División de Bs As en 1880, Dr Lovat Mulcahy, por su abnegación y valor. Su Jefe, S. N. Casares'".¹²

Normality returned to everyday life and Mulcahy wrote to the British Hospital giving notice of his resignation and an insight into his time in charge:¹³

Buenos Aires
August 26th 1880
To the Señores of [the] British Hospital

I beg to give notice that I have retired from the B. Hospital after a term of 3 months & 3 days, Mr Carlyon¹⁴ having returned. At the same time I wish to express my thanks to the Committee for their kindness to me during my term of office, & especially to Messrs Tucker,¹⁵ Salisbury & Wanklyn¹⁶ of the visiting committee for the kind manner in which they expressed their satisfaction with the internal arrangement of the hospital, also to Doctors Alston¹⁷ & Peacan¹⁸ for their prompt assistance when called by me.

Without entering into details I will give a brief statement of what passed during my time as House surgeon.

When I entered, the nurses newly arrived from England were sick, one only being on duty, there were several hired nurses who although good & willing to work were not to

¹² Photo portrait of Colonel Sebastián N. Casares with signed hand-written inscription; photo from the Mulcahy family private papers.

¹³ 26 August 1880 letter, Mulcahy to the Señores of the British Hospital from the Mulcahy family private papers.

¹⁴ Dr Thomas Baxter Carylton, Resident Medical Officer at the British Hospital, 1880-1881. See Jeremy Howat op. cit. No. 10, accessed 5 March 2020.

¹⁵ This is possibly George H. Tucker, an accountant of 188 Calle Reconquista, Buenos Aires. See Mulhall *Handbook of the River Plate*, 1885.

¹⁶ This is probably Fredrick Wanklyn, Managing Director of the Mercantile Bank of the River Plate Ltd., 85 Reconquista, Buenos Aires. See Mulhall, *Handbook of the River Plate Republics*, 1875.

¹⁷ Dr John Alston, 1839-1901, native of Glasgow; a medical doctor who arrived in Buenos Aires between 1867-1868. Attended the British Hospital between 1861 and 1881. Memorial in his memory in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Buenos Aires. See Jeremy Howat op. cit. No. 10, accessed 5 March 2020.

¹⁸ Dr Luke Bartholomew Peacan, 1848-1926, native of Galway who practised medicine in London before moving to Argentina in 1875. See Jeremy Howat op. cit. No.10., accessed 5 March 2020.

be compared to the present staff. My first duty was to get rid of them which I succeeded in doing in a short time, I also noted, that some of the servants were completely unfit for duty especially the night watch, who was habitually drunk, these I took the first opportunity of sending away & am happy to say replaced them by excellent men; from this moment the Hospital, gave, no further trouble, the newly arrived nurses went on duty, they certainly are a credit to the hospital, capable, kind & hardworking with their patients, keeping the wards thoroughly clean & making the sick feel comfortable & happy.

There was not a single complaint during my time of office with the exception of Mr Younger the Committee is already aware that Mr Younger apologised for his mistake; this is rather surprising because during the revolution we all know the difficulties there were in getting things from town, the hospital never felt the siege I think I may say partly through my influence in passing what I wanted through the trenches.

I found it necessary to give orders for many things which were wanting for the establishment, the servants always complaining that they could not fulfil their duties for want of some utensil or other.

The last two months the patients increased and towards the end of my second month there were 47 in hospital.

Four patients died, 3 of them having entered in a dying state, living only a few days.

This Sir is a brief sketch of what passed in the British Hospital during my time of office; if the Committees need any further details from me, I will be only too happy to meet their wishes.

I remain

Yours sincerely

L. Mulcahy M.D.

Mulcahy was not one of those doctors, dentists, physicians, surgeons and other professionals who advertised their services on page two of *The Standard*. He attended the rich and poor, the humble and the powerful. He married Elena Matilde Dickson at St John's Church in 1888, and they had five children. Mulcahy's father-in-law, George Dickson, was a farmer in the 25 de Mayo area in the west of the Province of Buenos Aires; agriculture now became an integral part of family life and he would eventually take over the running of the estancia. Subsequently he would donate part of the land for the railway line, for a station named "Mulcahy" as well as the nearby town also named in his honor. He died in 1934 aged eighty-three and was buried at the Chacarita British Cemetery. There is a wooden tablet dedicated to his memory in St John's Cathedral.

The Spat

The bust-up that played out in the pages of *The Standard* began with the following entry titled "Medicine-men" by Bulfin, aka Che Bueno:

Sketches of Buenos Aires. Medicine Men¹⁹

According to the "guías" and other sources of information such as signboards, brass and iron door plates,²⁰ and the advertisement columns of newspapers there cannot be much less than a thousand people in Buenos Aires who write themselves down as doctors of

¹⁹ *The Southern Cross*, Friday, 2 February 1894.

²⁰ Dr Mulcahy's brass door plate is still in possession of the Mulcahy family. See attached illustration, Fig. 2.

medicine or surgery, or both. Amongst these there are some very eminent men, and many of all ages and nationalities who are conscientious, worthy, and enthusiastic practitioners. There are also a good many shams—professional individuals with and without diplomas, who should be safely stowed away under lock and key—individuals with abilities of a transcendental order in the way of bluff—individuals who do much damage to the public and bring disgrace upon what we must all look upon as one of the noblest and most useful of professions. You can call these folks anything you like: quacks, imposters, beasts of prey, or any other combination of your spare adjectives that seems most suitable to you. For my part, I call them Medicine-Men. The name is far-fetched in a way, but it covers all the ground that is necessary. A Medicine-Man in his pristine splendour was, according to Fenimore Cooper²¹ and well-informed writers, a public character of much notoriety and influence, a blatant imposter, a brazen-faced quack, a criminal of much distinction who was regarded by many foolish people as an oracle, and by a few sensible people as something between a devil and a ballad singer, a person with the pretensions of Satan and the ignorance of an owl; with the sententiousness of a stork relieved by the peculiarities of the catamount and the skunk. My medicine-men are, of course a degenerate race. Their system is less imposing, their rites less ceremonious. Instead of smoking you like a haddock they feel your pulse and look down your throat. Instead of sending you to the hell of the white man, they send you to the “botica.”²² But they kill you all the same.

Here are some particulars about them—some stray happenings on the trail of the Medicine-Men. These statements about to be made are guaranteed. I can prove them all to be solid facts. If any medicine-man wishes to take up the cudgels for his tribe and all is works and pomps, he is welcome to do so. He will come off second best, no matter where he presents himself with his cudgel, whether at law, or to the press, or at the private or public address of the present writer.

There is an able bodied medicine-man here who sports the door plate of a medical surgeon in Calle Maipu. He is an evolution. He once used the birch in the capacity of dominie, I believe, but threw it aside for the scalping knife of his present baneful calling. If a child is taken to him with diphtheria he will most likely treat it for “empacha.”²³ The “empacha” will be effectively combatted, but the diphtheria will walk off with the child meanwhile. Once a man of my acquaintance came in to him from the camp with something wrong with his lungs. This particular medicine-man examined him and said it was indigestion. He gave him drugs for the care of indigestion and, of course, the poor fellow’s stomach got all wrong in a short time. He came into town again, and the medicine-man having examined him, declared that it was a combination of the liver and heart. Drugs to put both of these organs right were accordingly administered. The patient accordingly got worse, and came into town again. The medicine-men then called in one or two physicians, or genuine doctors, and held a consultation. Result: the patient was far beyond hope. The lung disease had been allowed to work its way unchecked for two years and more, while the rest of the man’s vitality had been undermined by being unnecessarily tampered with. What was an able bodied and energetic medicine-man to do under such circumstances? Cave in? Nothing of the kind. He laughed to scorn the dictum of the physicians—of the accredited scientists—and serenely proceeded with his quackery. He told his patient,

²¹ James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), American writer of the first half of the nineteenth century.

²² Pharmacy.

²³ Indigestion.

“P’shaw man, there’s nothing at all the matter with you. All you want is change of air. We’ll take a special train, or a pair of special sleeping coaches and go up country.” This was of course plain philanthropy. A medicine-man with a small and constantly decreasing practice proposes to take a special pair of sleeping coaches, or a whole special train, if necessary, and go up to Cosquín, or Alta Gracia, or even to Rosario de la Frontera, and have a good time, and get nice cool air, and in general live on the fat of the land—all at the expense of the man whom at least two respectable and experienced doctors of medicine had pronounced past care!

This was disinterested—medicine-men have always been and are disinterested. They will either take payment in money or scalps. Sometimes, nay often, they get the money, but they generally always get the scalps as well.

The patient of whom I am speaking now did not go up country. He was not able. His friends took him out to the camp to die at home. He died within a few days after going out. The medicine-men said “I told you so. If he had taken that special pair of coaches as I suggested he would have ___”

Well, I suppose for my part, he would have died the other side of Rosario, if he lived to reach so far. All this happened not so very long ago; perhaps not quite 10 years ago, perhaps not quite 10 weeks ago.

There is another medicine-man here who is supposed to know a great deal about surgery, who is said by himself and others to be a wonderful man at bone-setting. He has a door plate too, and waiting rooms, and cases of instruments, and a broadcloth double-breasted coat, and other external significations of science and respectability. A little boy that I know fell over a rug and injured his arm. He was taken to this medicine-man’s study in the Calle 25 de Mayo, if I remember rightly. The arm was examined and the medicine-man said that the wrist was injured. The wrist was therefore bandaged up with a slice of half inch board and some calico. The fee was paid. Come back in 10 days; thank you; good day. In 10 days more the bandages were taken off and the arm pronounced sound. But it was no such thing. The arm remained swollen and the boy could not use it at all to his satisfaction. He was then taken to Dr Pirovano.²⁴ This really eminent yet modest and unpretentious specialist found that the arm had been broken half way between the elbow and wrist, that it had knitted of its own accord, that it was crooked, and that it would more than likely break again, which it did and in the same place. Dr Pirovano then set the bone as well as he could, but it will never be perfectly straight. It was the right arm too.

Now, the medicine-man responsible for this criminal blunder is an Englishman and, save the mark, is a Consulting Surgeon or assistant medicine-man to an important British institution here. What is wrong with him? Let us see.

When the mother of the child called his attention to the arm, he said:-

“Yes, yes, we’ll examine it!”

“Now then, I see all that is wrong.”

“But doctor, I was only going to suggest that ___”

“Now my good madam, I would suggest that you leave this to me.”

“Yes, but I wanted to tell you about how his arm pains him here.”

²⁴ Dr Ignacio Pirovano, 1844-1895, was an eminent and much revered doctor known as “the father of Argentine surgery”. The Hospital General de Agudos “Dr Ignacio Pirovano”, named in his honour, is located at Avenida Monroe 3555, Coghlan, Buenos Aires.

“Positively, my good lady, this is irritating. Have I not said that I have examined the arm?”

“Yes, but ___”

“Well then the wrist and the wrist only is injured. I suppose I ought to know!”

What is wrong, I repeat, with this man? Snobbishness, ignorance, carelessness, or whiskey—or an accumulation of all these evils condensed into a solid bump of dangerous self-sufficiency?

There are amongst us also medicine-men who write books on various diseases. I know such an author personally, and I know such a book. It is a book that has been puffed in some of the newspapers as likewise has been the author, and by the most inveterate and bombastic puffer on the Continent of America. This book can be read on a railway journey or in bed, or at any place or time that a mortal could devote two or three hours to it. The effect of its pages upon the mind *are* startling. When you have laid it down you are, no matter how healthy you may be, more than half convinced that you have heart disease, or are verging towards paralysis, or are in the beginning of consumption, or that your liver and all other digestive machinery is out of gear, or that you may be laid up tomorrow or after with hopeless indigestion, or blue devils, or hydrophobia, or a good average dangerous insanity. This book is very eloquent on symptoms. Any time you compare notes between yourself and this book you are sure to find a few dangerous symptoms scattered about your person waiting only for the proper opportunity to lay you in your grave. No matter at what time of the day or night you make a general survey of yourself with the aid of this wonderful catalogue you are sure to find out that you are in a fair way of going to pieces unless you set about putting into practice what the book suggests. And what does the book suggest? After much circumlocution and word fencing it suggests that you take the first train that passes and go to have a consultation with the learned specialist who wrote it.

Once a Salvation Army Captainess put a tract into my hand which had the pretentious heading “Do you know you are going straight to Hell?” As I was on my way with ‘copy’ to *The Southern Cross* office I thought that this question was irrelevant, but I studied up the tract a little in search of explanations. The tract said that I was bound for Styx sure enough. But that if I looked up the Salvation Army Head Quarters at such and such a place my marching orders would be satisfactorily modified. I did not do so, and as I am here now writing these lines it is, I suppose, unnecessary to say that neither did I go to the other place. But that is not the point. What I wanted to show was and is, that the pamphlet of symptoms written, published and circulated by the medicine-man answers the same purpose as the blood curdling tract give me by the young person with the horrible looking bonnet and the Cockney twang. The pamphlet says with merciless plainness:-

“Look here” you’re just going to burst in some awful manner, and burst you will, friend, if you don’t go right away and have a talk with Dr So and So.”

I know two cases regarding this book. One man read it here in town, went to his author and got physic. He took the physic going to bed. Half an hour afterwards he became twisted into the fourth power of a double-tied bow knot, so he sent for the medicine-man. “What is it?” said the specialist and author when he arrived.

“Sir,” said the suffering patient, “that stuff of yours has knotted me up like a tangle of fence wire. Have you got any medicine about that would untie me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean d__ you, do you know, of anything that would thaw me out? If you do fetch it along.”

The medicine-man took a note of the situation and went on his way. He had no key to unlock the mystery, no antidote. The patient however had a bottle of Scotch whisky, the which he emptied into himself with much benefit. He was around to interview the specialist next morning, but fortune did not favour him. The medicine-man is still alive.

Last week, another man read his book on the way down to Mar del Plata. When he arrived there he felt sure that he was dangerously ill, so he posted back to town. The physician to whom he applied for relief on this arrival here is an able and distinguished man, and destined to go ahead in his profession. He saw at once how the affair stood. The sufferer had lowered his system by overwork. Too much brain exertion had left him nervous. In this condition it was his misfortune to consult the medicine-man who gave him his pamphlet, the which he earnestly exhorted him to read. The result was that the physician of whom I made mention just now had the greatest difficulty in persuading the unhappy patient that there was really nothing seriously amiss with him—that he was merely suffering the natural consequences of have read, pondered over, and inwardly digested the nefarious literature of the medicine-man. He was alright in two days. He would be in an asylum, or in his grave now had he given himself over to the hands of the literary hoax, as that specious scoundrel meant that he should do.

There is another medicine-man of much notoriety here whom I should place in my pillory—but I refrain from doing so on account of what might be termed personal reasons. He set one man’s arm so badly that he had subsequently to cut it open two or three times in order to extract splinters of bone that he had neglected to place in position. With another man he did what was more culpable still—cut open his neck, probed it once a week for nearly two years, injecting all sorts of burning liquids into it, kept him in bed for six weeks, opened the wound and re-opened it again and again, and all to do what a genuine doctor, to whom he went when tired of the torture inflicted on him by the medicine-man, effected in one month by means of a simple ointment.

I forebear going closer to this man’s individuality, because his two victims of whom I have spoken are of the newspaper craft, like myself. They are two of the best newspaper foremen in Buenos Aires, and hold responsible positions. Anybody who knows that the worry of a newspaper printing office is—how many annoyances arise from careless printers, defective grammar, badly written copy etc., will appreciate the magnitude of this medicine-man’s cruelty in sending these man back to their work under the conditions I have described. Anybody who knows the merits of the case will, I am confident, assert, that it would have been less unfeeling to saw them to pieces and finish them off at one sitting. The printer who tries to work with a broken arm or inflamed throat is simply torturing himself to death.

There is a medicine-man here also who graduated for his profession on the English race course and attended lectures on the green lawn around the stable doors of Ascot. Most likely Nature intended him for a veterinary surgeon, but with perversity characteristic of the turf he did not respond to his vocation. He came to this country. Up in Córdoba they gave him a diploma and let him loose upon this republic with what a humorous man might call a game licence. Carrying the sporting metaphor a little further it might be said that he has potted a fairly good bag. To give a history of his cures would be to write a book. He

has cured, in an almost miraculous manner, cancers, consumption, apoplexy, heart disease, and successfully amputated for broken back and broken neck.

Of all our medicine-men he is the most distinguished. He has more honours on his roof tree than nearly all his colleagues put together.

Medicine-men! Medicine-men. This city swarms with them. Today one man—a sailor gets drunk, dead drunk; sleeps in the sun, and when he wakes up, he finds that some medicine-man accuses him of having yellow fever. A horse kicks another man, and retires into private life to get better. He gets a bit feverish, and raves a little, and forthwith along comes a medicine-man to report that it is a case of yellow fever.

A cabin boy on board ship gets a sore throat and a medicine-man is called in, who gets a pen-handle with which he churns around in the poor lad's throat until his mouth is full of blood. Then he pours in coarse salt and vinegar. The ship's captain objecting to this brutality throws the quack overboard—who of course not drowned—who of course lives to come to dry land take an action against the captain for knowing more than a—medicine-man.

A man falls from his horse and breaks his neck. He is stone dead when the medicine-man arrives. That functionary examines the corpse, feels its pulse, its poor dead heart, takes off its boots, twists its nose, opens its eyes, and solemnly states, "Can't do anything with him. He's in a state of *comma*." Would that this and all other medicine-men were not only in a state of comma, but still more emphatically punctuated. Would that they were all at a Full Stop!

Medicine-men! Medicine-men. Ex-parsons, ex-fifth class shop assistants, ex-jockeys from London, ex-bummers; why, at any rate we are going ex-shoe-blacks, ex-'basura'-men, ex-tramcar drivers, and even retired cart horses will shortly put up door plates with a view to ending their days in the interesting pastime of counting up their dead.

It is painfully evident that the Municipal authorities, or the National Municipal Medical Board, or somebody high in power, is to blame for all this. Let it not be supposed that I object to people developing from 'basura' men into doctors. Nothing of the kind. All I say is, let merit find its level. Let it be not talked down by imposters. If the shoeblack or jockey has brains enough let him give up shining boots and riding races, and study medicine if he can. Intellect is the only true criterion of caste, and, as Buckle²⁵ says so say I: "The hall of science is the temple of democracy." But let it not be sham science. If the shoeblack or jockey go practice medicine, let their science be genuine. If not, and when they are convicted of quackery, let them be tied up by the necks to the nearest lamp posts. Adopt this measure and see how our stock of medicine men will decrease; adopt it and see how many lamp posts will be ornamented with a medicine-man each. —My own idea.

There is more to be said upon this subject yet. Whether it will be said or not depends altogether on the medicine-men themselves.

Che Bueno.

Clearly annoyed, believing his reputation to be impugned, Mulcahy took up the cudgels; his letter appeared in *The Standard*, Sunday 18 February 1894:

Buenos Ayres, Feb. 17th To the Editor of *The Standard*
Sir,

²⁵ Henry Thomas Buckle (1820-1862). English historian and author of the unfinished *History of Civilisation*.

Medicine Men

In *The Southern Cross* of Feb. 2nd an article appeared under the title “Medicine Men,” and signed “Che Bueno,” attacking several doctors in this town, and I believe myself to be one of those alluded to, but *The Southern Cross* of Feb. 16th publishes another letter signed “Che Bueno” which contains the following:

To the Editor of *The Southern Cross*

Dear Sir,

Permit me to make a few remarks in reference to an article contributed by me to your columns, and which appeared under the heading of “Medicine-Men” in your issue of the 2nd inst.

In the first place, I learn that Dr Mulcahy, of Calle Maipu, accuses me of alluding to him in said article. I do not know Dr Mulcahy, even by sight, and if he has found a cap to fit himself in my article that is no affair of mine. I reiterate that a man, now dead, was treated for indigestion while the ailment was lung disease, but wish at the same time to place on record that the case cited, by me in my article of the 2nd did not refer to Dr Mulcahy.”

This letter was inserted in consequence of my having called personally at the office of *The Southern Cross* and afterwards sent my lawyer there to demand retraction of what I consider to be a libel on me, or otherwise a statement that I was not the medical man referred to, which the public would be led to suppose from the personal description given in the original article.

To that extent the cap *did* fit me; but as to the medical part of the article it was, as far as I am concerned, false in all its details.

Dr Mulcahy.

Dinneen’s rather withering rejoinder to Mulcahy was by way of a letter published in *The Standard* on Tuesday 20 February; and there the matter seems to have to come to an end as there was no further correspondence or comment about the matter in the newspapers:

Buenos Ayres, February 17th 1894

To the Editor of *The Standard*

Sirs,

Medicine Men

Will you kindly allow me as Editor of *The Southern Cross* to occupy a small portion of your space in reply to Dr Mulcahy’s letter, which appeared in *The Standard* of yesterday.

In the first place, it surpasses my comprehension, as it must that of any rational being how Dr Mulcahy could refer to “Che Bueno’s” letter in *The Southern Cross* of last Friday as a retraction. In that letter “Che Bueno” simply reiterated what he had already stated. If he had said “I do not reiterate,” etc., then Dr Mulcahy to be logical should put it down as reiteration.

In the next place, though it is evident from “Che Bueno’s” letter that the medical case in question did not refer to Dr Mulcahy, still, even if it were otherwise, “Che Bueno” would have been perfectly justified in my opinion in standing on the defensive as he has

done, according to the legal principle so commonly quoted by Jurists: “accusare nemo se debet nisi coram Deo” – [no man is obliged to accuse himself except before God.]

In the third place, I am certain that “Che Bueno’s” letter of Friday was not written through any terror of the law or its consequences. Dr Mulcahy and his lawyer called on me, it is true. I received them most courteously, and I promised to do all in my power that Dr Mulcahy would not suffer through any publication that may have appeared in *The Southern Cross*. “Che Bueno’s” letter was written in fulfilment of that promise.

I would take our contributor’s word even if an empire were at stake, but I have corroborative evidence of two or three honourable witnesses that the case stated by him is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Anybody calling at my office may satisfy himself of the accuracy of this declaration, provided he will undertake to make no further use of the information received.

Finally, I am afraid that Dr Mulcahy is a little too sensitive in regards of the matter in dispute. You and I and many other editors in Buenos Ayres are referred to as literary “chambones.”²⁶ We go out and laugh heartily over the matter. At least, I do and I hope you to do the same.

Yours very truly
Michael Dinneen.

Back home in Ireland all three protagonists would have been familiar with quacks, bone setters and medicine men. And I don’t subscribe to the view that the differences were due to sectarianism. In fact a few years later, on 3 January 1896, the editor of *The Southern Cross* was unequivocal in commenting that it was neither a religious paper nor the church organ and unashamedly declared “*The Southern Cross* is perfectly independent”.

Was this a storm in a tea cup? No. Certainly what Bulfin wrote was incendiary and potentially libellous and so it is not difficult to understand why Mulcahy reacted as he did. Maybe, just maybe, as Dinneen suggested, the medic was a tad touchy. Perhaps Dr Mulcahy was indeed extra sensitive but in those days there were many quacks in populated cities such as Buenos Aires and London. It was imperious then for Mulcahy to preserve his prestige at all costs, even if the damage came from an “honest and renowned professional” who apparently meant no ill. In any case I am not convinced that “Che Bueno” was totally innocent. He must have known Dr Mulcahy had his consulting rooms in the Calle Maipu, and enjoyed mentioning it, leaving the remark lingering and creating suspicion even if he wasn’t the man he was criticising.

But then those were other times. And why was this whole episode played out in the columns of *The Standard* rather than in *TSC*? Probably because *The Standard*, a daily broadsheet published Tuesday to Sunday had a significantly wider and greater circulation than the weekly *TSC*.

I am indebted to Nicolás and Viviana Mulcahy for providing me with a photo portrait of Dr Mulcahy with his wife taken by A. S. Witcomb. Englishman Alexander Spiers Witcomb (1838-1905) was the famed Porteño society photographer of the day, whose collection of 500,000 negatives became part of the Archivo General de la Nación. I am also indebted to Nicolás and Viviana Mulcahy for the copy of the signed autograph photo portrait of Colonel Sebastián Nicomedes Casares.

²⁶ Chambones: clumsy, cack-handed.

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