

Lombe Atthill

Born: 1827
President: 1888-1890
Died: 1910

Lombe Atthill, the son of Rev William Atthill, was born in County Tyrone. In 1844, when sixteen years old, he was apprenticed to Maurice Collis, surgeon at the Meath Hospital in Dublin. Having completed the curriculum, and been successful in the examinations of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of both Ireland and England, Atthill became a qualified surgeon at the age of 19. Collis supported his entry to Trinity College, and Atthill graduated in arts and medicine in 1849.

Atthill's first appointment was as Dispensary Officer to Geashill in Kings County (now County Offaly). Despite an initial dislike for midwifery, he took up a position as assistant to the Master of the Rotunda Hospital from 1851 to 1854.

In 1868, he was invited to take charge of a five-bedded ward at the Adelaide Hospital for the treatment of diseases peculiar to women. This was the first time a gynaecologist was appointed to a Dublin general hospital. Atthill soon had a large external 'clinique' and his clinical lectures were much appreciated by colleagues and students. These lectures were, by request, published in the *Dublin Medical Press*, from which they were reprinted as a textbook under the title *Clinical Lectures on Diseases Peculiar to Women* (Dublin, 1871). A reviewer found the work 'the result of large and accurate clinical observation, recorded in an admirably terse and perspicacious style; and remarkable for the best qualities of a practical guide to the student and practitioner'.¹ The book proved most popular with the 7th edition published in 1882, and it was reprinted in the USA and translated into French and Spanish.

In 1875, Lombe Atthill was elected as Master by a large majority of the governors of the Rotunda Hospital. During his seven-year term as Master, he introduced blood transfusion in the treatment of postpartum haemorrhage, commenced an out-patient department and an extern (domiciliary visiting) maternity service. He employed fully trained and competent midwives, supported the routine use of carbolic for hand washing, introduced a pressure water system, and replaced the wooden beds and straw pallises with iron bedsteads and mattresses. He also introduced the clinical thermometer, although aware that taking their temperatures worried patients.

In 1860, Lombe Atthill was elected a Fellow of the College. As the years went by, he was chosen to fill every office of trust culminating in his unanimous election as President of the College in

¹ Review of *Clinical Lectures on Diseases Peculiar to Women* by Lombe Atthill, *British Medical Journal*, May 11, 1872.



LIVES OF THE PRESIDENTS

1888. He was a man of strong opinions and a ready speaker who had the highest ideal of professional honour and was considered to have exercised great and beneficent influence on the College. For many years, he represented the College on the General Medical Council, actively supporting the reform of medical education.

Athill retired from clinical practice in 1898. In 1910 at the age of 84, while visiting relatives in Kent, he died suddenly as he hurried to catch a train. Only a few months earlier he had published an acclaimed series of articles 'Recollection of a Long Professional Life', in the *British Medical Journal*. A longer version was published posthumously as *Recollections of an Irish Doctor* (London, 1911).

MBH



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