

# A LIFE SKETCH OF O. R. AVISON, M. D., L. L. D.

by

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Dr. Avison was born in England but reared and educated in Canada from the time he was six years old.

While a student at Toronto University from which he graduated in 1887 he became acquainted with the work of Rev. J. S. Gale in Korea and in 1890 helped the Medical College Y. M. C. A. to send Dr. R. A. Hardie to Korea.

In 1892 Rev. H. G. Underwood, from Korea, visited Toronto and spoke before the students and impressed Dr. Avison with the needs of Korea and made him consider the possibility of himself being helpful in that land.

By that time Dr. Avison had become an honored teacher in the Departments of Pharmacy and Medicine of the University of Toronto and had built up a good practice in the city, but like Abram of old he gladly went out into a country that he knew not.

At that time one of the Professors of the University declared that if Dr. Avison could go to backward Korea and there inspire ten young men to become efficient doctors like himself it would far outweigh any success possible in an old established community like Toronto. Leaving his home in April 1893 he arrived in Fusan on July the 16th and was advised to stay there for the summer. At the end of August they reached Seoul and started house-keeping under the difficult conditions prevailing in Seoul at that time.

Dr. Avison at once started to study the language of the country and the regulations and laws under which they must live. The Royal Korean Hospital, which had been running for about seven years, was needing a doctor to care for foreign residents and conduct the clinic for Koreans. In addition he was asked to become physician to the King which necessitated frequent trips to the Palace in full dress at all hours of the day and night.

In the summer of 1895 after the Sino-Japanese war, cholera broke out and every one from King to coolie was terrified. The Minister of the Interior asked Dr. Avison to take charge of plans for the safety of

the city. Buildings, voluntary workers and soldiers were placed at his disposal and quarantine regulations were enforced but the epidemic was not stayed until cool weather arrived.

An attempt was made to teach medical students. But eligible young men were hard to find and there were absolutely no medical text-books of any kind in the Korean language and no scientific terminology. The translation of Gray's Anatomy was first attempted and the results as produced were used in teaching the student helpers. Slowly text-books of Physiology, Chemistry, and Pathology were translated for use and the students got practical work in the pharmacy, dispensary and hospital. The progress for a time came to a standstill due to illness and furlough in 1899 and while he was away the translation of Gray's Anatomy disappeared.

While in New York Dr. Avison read a paper before the Ecumenical Missionary Conference on the subject of "Comity in Medical Mission Work" which was heard by Mr. L. H. Severance of Cleveland who was at that very time contemplating the erection of a small memorial Mission Hospital somewhere. He conferred with Dr. Avison who said "I have in my pocket right now a plan for such a hospital." Before the hospital plant was all finished three times the original gift of \$10,000 had been spent to obtain necessary ground and add three residences.

Just as the new hospital was ready for dedication in 1904 a second doctor from America appeared on the scene, sent out by the Mission Board at Mr. Severance's expense. This greatly encouraged Doctor Avison, for if he alone could teach a class of students as well as conduct the hospital work and private practice, then two doctors should accomplish far better results.

Without the language the new doctor could do no didactic teaching but he could lift some of the load connected with hospital supervision, medical and surgical work, out-patient clinics, private practice and even palace visitation.

These arrangements being consummated Doctor Avison was able to conduct routine class-work with the young men who, for ten years more or less, had been getting very irregular attention. Even with this improvement four years went by before the first group of seven men was considered ready to assume professional standing. When a graduation was decided upon it was thought wise to signalize the event by making the ceremony as prominent as possible. It was therefore heralded widely over the country. Government Officials took part in it! The rapidly growing Christian Church took a deep interest in it! The general public assembled in a vast crowd to honor the occasion! It was surely a trium-

phant day for the man who had achieved so much in so short a time. Beginning only fifteen years before, with no knowledge of the country or its language, to carry the professional load he had done and still bring seven promising young men up to the level of knowledge and skill which these displayed was truly wonderful.

These seven were the "First Fruits" of the host which is now at work in all parts of this once hermit kingdom! Three of those seven were immediately added to the teaching force and helped to bring the next group to graduation in 1911.

The third group came up for graduation in 1913 and from then onward there has been a graduating class each year until now. The total number of men graduated up to the present is 327.

Mention should also be made of the fact that a school for nurses was established at the hospital in 1906 and its graduates to date number 125.

Looking backward to the time when his old professor set a goal of ten as the reward of a life-work and reviewing the present situation we see a success measured by thirty fold greater than the anticipation.

To-day, 1933, Severance Union Medical College is compelled to contemplate the approaching retirement of the man who has been its inspiration through these years of development. How fares the outlook? There are now fourteen fully qualified Korean physicians in the faculty all of whom have had some foreign training after graduation; some in Europe, some in America and the others in Japan. One of them is Vice-President of the institution and responsible for the general oversight of the entire plant.

With such an organization there is no question but that the institution has made for itself a permanent position in the educational life for the country.

Brilliant as the above record is, it does not comprise all the activities of the versatile genius whom we are describing. In 1916, upon the death of his friend the Rev. Dr. H. G. Underwood the Chosen Christian College was left without a leader. The trustees of that institution turned instinctively to the man who had already reared one noble institution of learning. Seeing the need, and knowing intimately the ambitions of his friend he felt compelled to accept the new responsibility in spite of the fact that he was already well occupied. He thus became president of the sister institution-The Chosen Christian College. What he has been able to do in that connection is exemplified in the splendid body of students now under tuition at that place. The present enrollment is nearly double that of the medical college.

Thus we see two outstanding Christian Institutions sending forth year by year a stream of young men trained morally, intellectually and professionally to become the efficient stabilizing core of the great indigenous Christian Church which slowly but surely is renovating this ancient civilization of Korea.

Dr. Avison is nearing the completion of his labors here on earth. Rulers of three earthy nations, Korean, British and Japanese, have seen fit to recognize his achievements and signalize them by appropriate decorations. Finally, in the words of Holy Writ "He has seen of the travail of his soul and is satisfied."

May his remaining years be enriched by the love and gratitude of the ever increasing host which in these two institutions receive instruction and inspiration for the journey through life to the Home Beyond.