

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

GEORGE ARMSTRONG PETERS

IN the death of Dr. George Armstrong Peters, in the prime of life, and at the zenith of his professional career, Canada lost one of her most brilliant surgeons, and one of the very best of her clinical teachers. George Peters had the very fortunate fate to be born of sturdy yeomanry parents in a country section. It is to be noted that he is one of many professional men in this young country who have worked their way to eminence with the wonderful heritage derived from this simple life, together with a high ambition, indomitable courage, and a willingness to work.

He had a good high school education, matriculated at the University of Toronto and entered the study of medicine in the old Toronto School of Medicine, graduating from the University of Toronto in 1886 with honors, winning the Gold Medal of the University and the Starr Gold Medal of that year. He was an interne in the Toronto General Hospital for one year, and afterward appointed demonstrator of anatomy, University of Toronto. Then followed a very short period of study in England, where he successfully passed the examinations of the Royal College of Surgeons and had the distinction of being the first Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Canada. On his return he was appointed associate professor of surgery and clinical surgery, and after a most efficient service of eleven years, he was appointed professor of surgery and clinical surgery, a post which he filled with great distinction until his death.

Socially he was "an easy man to meet." He was genial and straightforward in his nature, and would not tolerate deceit or hypocrisy in his companions.

Professionally he was a master in his own work, of sterling character and rugged honesty, and fearless in his condemnation of whatever was unworthy of the highest traditions of the profession. As a surgeon he was distinguished for a combination of qualities which easily placed him in the first rank of Canadian surgeons and enabled him to take his place on an equality with the best in the profession the world over. He brought to each case a knowledge and ability gained by study, observation, and research which made him a keen and safe diagnostician. His mechanical ability and ingenuity combined with his artistic temperament made him a surgeon perfect in technique. He had developed very highly also the surgical instinct which is possessed by those who are born for the

task. These same characteristics showed to advantage especially in the plastic types of operation, and in his results in hare-lip and cleft palate he excelled all of his colleagues. He perfected many technical points in operative procedure which were never published, and are known and practised only among his immediate colleagues, or handed on personally through the same channel. It is a source of regret to many of his students that no permanent memorial volume was prepared when his memory was still green, and the touch of his spirit still upon us, so as to preserve for surgery generally, the valuable ideas known to so few. Certainly it is not known generally that the inflamed abdomen transmits both breath and heart sounds very clearly to the lowest part of the abdomen, quite to the symphysis.¹ Quite recently this point has been rediscovered, as noted in *Zentralblatt fuer Chirurgie*, Leipzig, where Hoefer recounts that the pulse is audible over the entire abdomen in cases of intestinal obstruction.

Many new devices, on the other hand, were published, notably his "New Operation for Procidencia," "The Extra-Peritoneal Transplantation of the Ureters for Ectopia Vesicae," "A New Wrench for the Correction of Stubborn Deformities," "A New and Original Method of Making Casts," and "A New Method of Cutting Urinary Calculi." He also made a fair contribution to the advanced surgical literature of the day which showed his general knowledge of the work of others. He contributed articles on the "Surgery of the Rectum and Anus" to the *International Text Book of Surgery*, by Gould and Warren, and on "Inflammatory Affections of Bone," in Bryant and Buck's *System of Surgery*.

It was probably as a clinical teacher that Peters excelled, and only those who had the opportunity of sitting at his feet know the heritage he was able to transmit to posterity through his students. His clinics were noted for the clear cut and forcible method of expression which characterized his work, and his wealth of illustration and aptitude with chalk fixed on the mind and memory of his students lessons which never will be forgotten.

Peters insisted that every surgeon should have a hobby outside his work, and he practised this doctrine in his own life in several ways. He was an ardent military man, and after a service of some years as lieutenant and afterward as captain in the Governor General's Body Guard, he organized the Toronto Light Horse, and was appointed officer commanding with rank of lieutenant colonel. He was one of the best military riders in the country, and won many prizes for "tent pegging." His mechanical ability showed itself, outside his professional work, in his invention of a wonderfully ingenious, self-registering target for rifle practice, which received the greatest praise both in Canada and in England. He was a lover of horses and always kept a stable of excellent drivers and hunters. He was a member of the Hunt Club and a daring cross country rider.

He died March 13, 1907, at the age of 47, of angina pectoris. Even when he knew the end was approaching, he showed his indomitable courage and his

¹The telephonic properties of the inflamed abdomen. Canadian J. M. & S., Toronto, 1902, December.

keenness for his professional work by dictating to his stenographer the character of the radiating pains of this dread disease as exemplified in his own case, and showed where they differed from the ordinarily accepted ideas. He was buried with full military honors, and as the "Last Post" sounded over his open grave, all those who mourned the loss of friend and colleague thought of his life rather than his death.

"His life was gentle; and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'this was a man!'"

CLARENCE L. STARR.