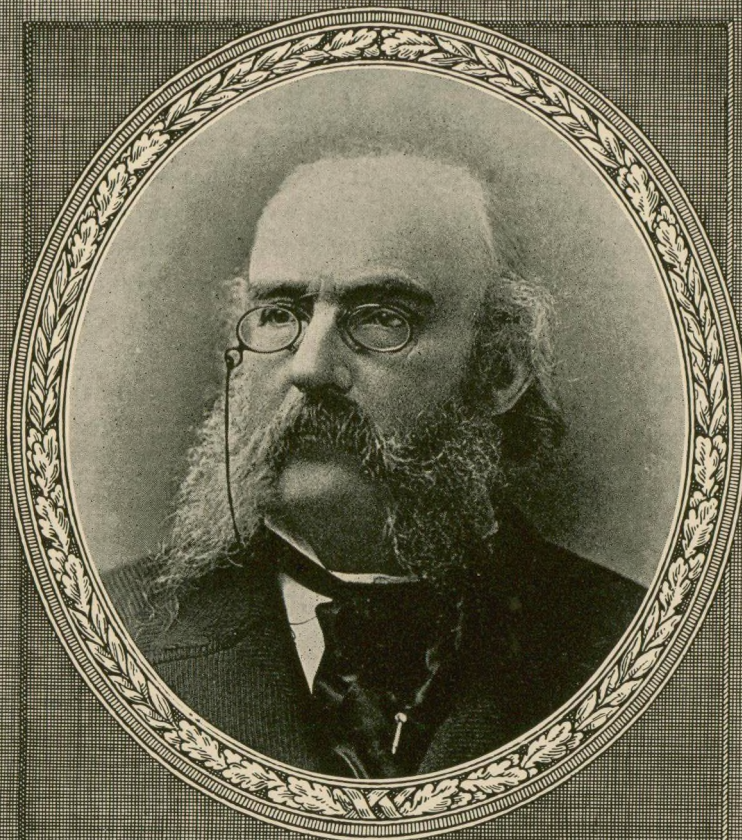




MOSES GUNN
1822-1887

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

MOSES GUNN

DR. GUNN was born in East Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York, April 20, 1822, and was the youngest of four children. He died in Chicago, November 4, 1887. His father, Linus Gunn, a prosperous and well-to-do farmer, and his mother, Esther (Bronson) Gunn, were born in Massachusetts, of Scotch Laird ancestry. They were of strong character, efficient, and were Protestant Christians.

At an early age Dr. Gunn attended the schools of his neighborhood. At the age of 12 he was placed under a tutor, a theological student, who continued to teach him for three years. After that he entered the Bloomfield Academy which he attended until he became ill with pleurisy and empyema, which made him an invalid for several years. He told me the story of this early illness with elaborate details when he was quite sixty years old. After a long time, he said, the pus "pointed" in the side, broke through a minute opening—surprised him one day by wetting his side—where it thereafter drained into dressings for many months. It finally healed but his side was sunken and his shoulder dropped. Although he lacked productive cough, he was said at one time to have consumption and to be slowly approaching death. In spite of this he spent years with hard work and laborious exercises to straighten his body, which he finally succeeded in doing, and when I first saw him at Ann Arbor in 1866 he was a perfect Apollo in appearance, and so continued until his final sickness.

He must have begun the study of medicine about 1842, and was doubtless moved to do so by his precarious health. He had a preceptor in Dr. Edson Carr, of Canandaigua, New York.

In 1844 he entered the Medical Institution of Geneva, New York¹; and was graduated in 1846 after two courses of lectures of seven months each. During his second year he assisted the demonstrator of anatomy, Dr. Corydon L. Ford, acquiring a great fancy for practical anatomy.

He was prevented from going to college by his protracted sickness; but he was a universal student through life. He received two honorary degrees: the master of arts from Geneva College in 1856, and the doctor of laws from the Chicago University in 1877.

¹In 1861 this school became the "Geneva Medical College." It was closed finally in 1872. Later it became the Medical Department of the Syracuse University.

His enthusiasm for anatomy and surgery and his personal ambition and personal force were such that in a week after his graduation he started, in February, 1846, for Ann Arbor, Michigan, and at once began a private course of lectures on anatomy to two dozen students of the young state university and a few medical practitioners. He had brought with him from Geneva a huge cadaver. These were the first lectures of the sort in the State of Michigan.

He did some practice and continued private lectures on anatomy and surgery until 1849, when the nascent medical department of the university needed a professor of anatomy. He had already developed such a reputation for scholarship and teaching that over strong competition he won the place. In January, 1850, the chair of surgery was founded, and he was appointed to that likewise. In the winter of 1849 and 1850, before beginning his lectures on surgery he made inspection visits to the medical schools and hospitals of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. His first class in surgery at Ann Arbor numbered 92; his last class (in 1866-1867) 525. In 1854 he resigned the chair of anatomy to Dr. Ford, of wide fame as a teacher of anatomy for a quarter of a century at Ann Arbor and elsewhere, but he continued in surgery until he went to Chicago, in 1867.

He was married to Miss Jane Ferry in 1848. He moved his residence to Detroit in 1853, but journeyed to Ann Arbor twice a week thereafter during term time to lecture. In Detroit he engaged in general practice for a number of years, to confine himself to surgery later.

He was a regimental surgeon in the Army of the Potomac in 1861-1862, and was at the battle of Williamsburg. General McClellan was his hero, in whom he could see no fault. His partizanship was shown in numerous letters to his wife, which she published in a worthy book of memoirs of Dr. Gunn, after his death. His army service was severe on his health, and he returned a thin and debilitated man.

He went to Europe with doctor friends in 1879 better to recuperate from an attack of septicæmia from an arm infection. Accompanied by his wife he visited Europe again in 1881 for a pleasure trip.

In 1867 he resigned from the University of Michigan and accepted the professorship of surgery in Rush Medical College, where he remained until his death. He gave here twenty years of brilliant service in didactic and clinical surgery. He was a teacher born—his lectures were brilliant and would have made good literature if printed exactly as uttered.

He was a man of striking personality and character. Tall, erect, straight, and well proportioned, graceful in movement, fastidious in taste and action—and in clothes—it was all accentuated by his Burnside beard and long hair, made into ample ringlets each morning by the insistent fingers of his devoted wife. He frequently rode horseback to his lectures; and was a striking figure mounted on the handsomest horse procurable. He never boasted, and was not vain, although

some who did not know him guessed that he was. He was a consistent churchman (Episcopalian), a cheerful Christian, and something of an optimist.

He had many of the best traits. He was meticulously truthful and exact in his words, and absolutely clean in speech. He was fair to others, true to his character and profession, and too full of the business of life to indulge in jealousy or the disparagement of others.

He was a man of great industry and study. He was a fine general scholar—a speaking German scholar, and a fair French one. He had much joy in amateur astronomy, and had a telescope mounted in his house. One of his cardinal virtues was that of punctuality in all appointments. No doctor ever charged him with tardiness at a consultation.

He was an elegant operator, and in every way a superb surgeon. He studied his cases, and his work was singularly free from unexpected incidents, and he had no ornamental gestures or unnecessary talk or actions at his operations. To him the body of his patient was sacred, and an operation was a serious business.

His one or two prolonged clinics each week at the College meant a great surgical service. He operated regularly at the Cook County Hospital and the Presbyterian Hospital, and occasionally at other hospitals in Chicago.

For a man of his age in the profession when aseptic surgery came into vogue, he adjusted himself to it with surprising facility and faith—and great satisfaction.

On occasion at Detroit he was an editor of medical journals. His writings and occasional addresses were scholarly utterances without verbiage or excessive statements. His lectures were all exercises in general culture.

His teachings always ennobled medicine and surgery; they were never allowed to lag in dignity or intense interest to his classes. He made many minor and one great contribution to the science of surgery. This was his work on dislocations of the hip and shoulder joints. The reduction of these dislocations had always been to surgeons a melancholy source of great labor, failures, and awful, sometimes brutal, treatments by great force. By laborious and painstaking work in dissections and manipulations, he showed that by putting the bone in the exact position that it had at the moment of dislocation and then exercising moderate reverse force the bone passed into normal position easily, without great strain or suffering. This doctrine is so logical and self-evident, and has proved so true and satisfactory in actual practice that it has stood substantially without challenge. He announced his theory before the Detroit Medical Society in 1853, thus early in his career. He reaffirmed it in 1859 with amplifications; and he restated it with ampler illustrations in 1884, only three years before his death.¹

NORMAN BRIDGE.

¹ Chicago M. J. & Examiner, 1884, No. 5.