

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

JAMES HENRY DUNN

DR. JAMES HENRY DUNN was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on May 29, 1853, and died on June 18, 1904. When he was 3 years old, his father removed from Indiana to Winona County, Minnesota, and engaged in farming. Dr. Dunn received his early education in the public schools, entering Winona Normal School in 1869, at the age of 16, and graduating with honors 3 years later. He then became principal of the public schools at Alexandria and at Sauk Center, Minnesota, respectively. While working in this field, he became interested in school hygiene and decided to study medicine in order to make himself a better teacher. He graduated from the University of New York in 1878 and at once began general practice at Shakopee, Minnesota, a small town located about 20 miles from Minneapolis. Five years later, in 1883, Dr. Dunn went abroad to do postgraduate work, spending most of his time in the teaching universities of Vienna and Berlin. After 2 years he returned home and located in Minneapolis where he began the practice of medicine and surgery. In 1885 he married Miss Agnes MacDonald of Kansas City. They had one son.

A firm grasp of the subject of medicine, combined with the background obtained by a period of teaching and an experience in general practice, laid the foundation for the duties which were to fall to his lot in later years. Dr. Dunn was professor of genito-urinary diseases at the University of Minnesota from 1889 to 1894 when he became professor of clinical surgery. In 1899, he succeeded Dr. Charles A. Wheaton as head of the department of surgery and occupied that position until his death 5 years later. It is the opinion of those who were best acquainted with the accomplishments of Dr. Dunn after he had reached complete development as a surgeon and a teacher, that two factors only interfered with an international appreciation of his exceptional ability. The first of these was the inborn diffidence and modesty of the man; the second, his untimely death at the age of 51. As a teacher, he was to the Northwest what Doctors Senn and Murphy were to Chicago. His clinics were attended with enthusiasm by graduates in medicine, well-known surgeons, and students alike.

If Dr. Dunn's teaching contained any one outstanding characteristic more than another, it was that it embodied the plain statement of the truth as he saw it without regard to any untoward effect it might produce upon himself. What

he considered his own mistakes were most frequently presented in order to bring home the point he wished to make. Honesty in a superlative degree was his beacon light, and this attribute stood out with especial distinctness in relation to his method of teaching.

From a scientific standpoint, Dr. Dunn's abilities were most extensively developed along lines of clinical diagnosis and treatment, combined with clinical and didactic teaching. His personal interest in his clientele placed him at the beck and call of any who desired his services at any time of day or night. Notwithstanding the fact that he was a chronic invalid during his entire adult life, his working capacity was prodigious. His only relaxation was obtained in his attendance at high-class musical entertainments of which he was exceptionally fond. The unremitting fervor with which he threw himself into his work undoubtedly shortened his life.

Looking back over the aids to diagnosis which have been introduced during the last 25 years, his diagnostic ability without such aids stands out in bold relief. As a technician he lacked in some degree the finesse which some other surgeons of his period possessed. This was due perhaps to his anxiety, first, to certify his diagnosis and, second, to institute the proper method of treatment, thus relegating a refined technique to a secondary position.

His knowledge of French and German added greatly to his capacity for familiarizing himself with the literature of his time. His memory in relation to things medical was phenomenal and yet in other matters he was absent-minded to a degree. For instance, it is authoritatively related that 3 months after his marriage, he returned one day to his pre-nuptial residence, entered, and sat down at the dinner table. When some one of his acquaintances asked if Mrs. Dunn were out of the city, he said "Oh—!", jumped up, found his hat, and went on home.

As an example of his intense desire to offer his students the most recent developments in surgery, one might relate that at the time Dr. Bigelow developed a method of producing and reducing dislocations upon the cadaver, Dr. Dunn at once traveled to Boston and familiarized himself with Bigelow's work. Upon his return he had constructed a table similar to that which Bigelow had devised, and dislocations were produced and reduced in the presence of and often by the students. Not infrequently he insisted upon an open dissection being made to show the exact anatomical and pathological conditions which obtained following the dislocation of the various joints. This is only one of many examples of the thoroughness which characterized the work of Dr. Dunn.

After years of overwork and ill-health, Dr. Dunn had the misfortune to develop a lung complication followed by empyema during which he not only nearly lost his life but was incapacitated for about a year. This left him with a severe myocarditis. Upon his return to active practice, he showed renewed vigor, and the esteem in which he was held by doctors and patients alike was demonstrated

by the overwhelming amount of surgery which presented itself almost immediately. It was during these years that his strenuous efforts to meet the demands of his practice aggravated the condition which brought about his untimely death. He worked at high speed many hours of each day without recreation; and being unable to sleep well lying down because of the condition of his heart, he formed the habit of reading far into the night. He finally succumbed to myocarditis while attending a meeting of the American Surgical Association in St. Louis. He was found dead in his hotel room a short time after presenting a paper on the "Treatment of Benign Œsophageal Stricture."

Throughout Dr. Dunn's professional life he was honored by election to many important offices. He was an ex-president of the Hennepin County Medical Society, the Minnesota State Medical Association, and numerous other societies to which he belonged. At the time of his death he was vice-president of the American Medical Association.

Dr. Dunn died as he lived, "in the harness," and from his life two great lessons may be drawn: first, that the love, honor, and respect of our fellows can be gained only by emulating such a life as Dr. Dunn lived; and second, that a more frequent resort to some sort of relaxation might have given the Northwest one of its leading surgeons and the good that he could accomplish for a much longer period, had he not devoted his energies quite so strenuously and wholeheartedly to what he considered his duties.

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