

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

WILLIAM STEWART HALSTED

William Stewart Halsted, M.D., Sc.D., LL.D., Hon. F.R.C.S., F.A.C.S., Professor of Surgery in The Johns Hopkins University and Surgeon-in-Chief to Johns Hopkins Hospital, was born in the city of New York on September 23, 1852, and died in Baltimore on September 7, 1922.

Dr. Halsted was of English ancestry, descended from a family prominent in the social, business, and philanthropic life of New York. He was the son of William M. Halsted, Jr., and Mary Louisa Haines Halsted.

Dr. Halsted prepared for college at Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. He was graduated from Yale University with the A.B. degree in 1874. He studied medicine in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, now a department of Columbia University, and was graduated in 1877 at the head of his class, for which he received the first prize of one hundred dollars. He served as surgical interne and later as house surgeon in Bellevue Hospital from 1876 to 1878. He was the first house physician in the New York Hospital where he served for a short period in 1878, leaving this service to go abroad where he studied for 2 years, chiefly in Vienna, Leipzig, and Wuerzburg. Upon his return to New York he was made assistant demonstrator of anatomy in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and later became demonstrator of anatomy, which position he filled with great distinction until 1885.

He began the practice of surgery in the fall of 1880. From the beginning he limited his practice to surgery, and in all probability was the first in this country to confine himself exclusively to this specialty. About the same time he was appointed attending surgeon to Presbyterian and Bellevue Hospitals and assisting attendant surgeon to Roosevelt Hospital. He was also chief surgeon to the dispensary of the latter hospital from 1881 to 1886. In addition to all this he was surgeon-in-chief to the Emigrant Hospital, Ward's Island; attending surgeon to the Charity Hospital, Blackwell's Island; and substitute attending surgeon to Chambers Street Hospital.

Upon his return from Europe in 1880 Dr. Halsted organized a corps of teachers called a "quiz," for the purpose of higher medical education. None but graduates of first-class colleges was accepted. Associated with him in this work were such men as Frank Hartley, George M. Tuttle, William G. Thompson, George E. Munroe, and West Roosevelt. All of the teachers in this quiz had hospital

appointments and hence could give the students dispensary, bedside, and laboratory instruction. As an evidence of the thoroughness with which the instruction was given by this able corps of instructors headed by Dr. Halsted, of the last class graduated from this quiz eight were on the honor list of ten in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and of the first twelve in the graduating class that year ten were from this quiz. Thus his subsequent contributions to the science and art of surgery as author, investigator, teacher, and trainer of men were but the natural fulfillment of the early promise exhibited in his brilliant achievements during this busy period of his career in New York.

As a direct result of the character and extent of his work during this period, his health suffered and he was compelled to relinquish his work for a time. His health having improved, Dr. Halsted, in 1887, came to Baltimore as one of that brilliant coterie of men who had been attracted thither by the unequalled opportunities offered in the newly opened Pathological Laboratory of the Johns Hopkins University under the inspiring leadership of Dr. Welch. Here he became at once identified with, and a leading spirit in, the new Johns Hopkins School of Scientific Medicine. In the early days of this development he was associated with such brilliant pupils of Dr. Welch as Mall, Councilman, Nuttall, Walter Reed, Abbott, Flexner, and many others of like mind. No wonder then that Dr. Halsted, with his splendidly trained mind, his scientific curiosity, and his wide experience and interest, developed rapidly in this congenial atmosphere and was not long in embarking upon that career of unrivalled productiveness along all lines of surgical progress that has marked his connection with The Johns Hopkins from beginning to end. Here he founded a school of surgery, based upon the most approved scientific principles, the distinguishing characteristics of which were honesty of purpose and thoroughness in method. It is impossible thus early to appraise at their true value the various elements that contributed to raise Dr. Halsted to the high position that he undoubtedly occupied in the surgical world. The proper perspective is hardly possible so soon after the close of his remarkable career. But to those who were privileged to serve under him, to benefit by his inspiring leadership, his wise counsel, and stimulating example, the one thing that stood out with greater prominence than anything else was his earnest search after and his passionate love of the truth. Everything else was subordinated to this. It made no difference whether or not the truth, when finally discovered, confirmed or overthrew his preconceived ideas or previously enunciated theories. His absolute honesty made him always the first to call attention to his own mistakes. The painstaking care, however, with which his work was planned and the scientific accuracy with which it was performed made this rarely necessary.

Dr. Halsted has expressed himself upon more than one occasion as convinced that the best result of his arduous labor was the development of a group of younger surgeons trained under him in modern scientific methods, and thoroughly

imbued with the same high ideals of surgical honesty. Among all of his contributions he personally attached greatest importance to the law discovered and enunciated by him in connection with the investigations of the action of parathyroid autografts in the dog, namely, "that unless considerable deficiency in parathyroid tissue has been created, the autografts do not live."

From the first publication that appeared under his name, the report of a case of intestinal incarceration operated upon by him, appearing in the *Medical News*, January 27, 1883, surgical literature has been continuously enriched by the many thoughtful and erudite studies that have come from his laboratory. This was truly his workshop, for the clinical side of his work interested him comparatively little, although all of his publications had a very practical application, many of them pre-eminently so, for example, his introduction of the use of rubber gloves in surgery, his insistence upon the most meticulous care in the gentle handling of tissues, absolute asepsis, complete hæmostasis, etc.

Personally, "The Professor," as he was familiarly called by his staff, was a curious mixture of contradictions; abnormally shy and sensitive as a woman; to a stranger reserved to a degree; and yet to his few intimates the most charming of companions; endowed with a keen yet kindly sense of humor, and at the same time with a wit that upon occasion could be caustic in the extreme. To his associates and assistants he was always stimulating and helpful, even if at times he may have felt it necessary for their good to apply the Biblical adage, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Dr. Halsted was in the truest sense of the term a Master Surgeon. There was nothing that concerned either the science or the art of surgery that did not hold something of interest for him. While his natural bent inclined rather toward the science than the art of surgery, still the list of his contributions covers pretty much the entire range of both phases of the subject. The number of his publications reaches well over a hundred, all valuable and many original pieces of research, and some epoch-making, e.g., his work upon the radical cure of cancer of the breast and of inguinal hernia, nerve blocking, etc.

Dr. Halsted has, by the wide range and excellent character of his work, given prestige and renown to American surgery and earned the right to have his name enrolled among those of the great immortals. To scientific surgery, to the institutions with which his name has become inseparably connected, to his pupils and friends who enjoyed the inestimable privilege of his inspiring companionship, his death means an irreparable loss.

"Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon's light is quenched in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill."

J. M. T. FINNEY.