

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

ALEXANDER HUGH FERGUSON

ONE of those who reached the highest rank among American surgeons was the late Alexander Hugh Ferguson of Chicago. A Canadian by birth, of Scottish parentage, and a direct descendant of a line of Covenanters, he gradually rose from the obscurity of a rural home to become one of the outstanding figures among the surgeons of America.

He was born near the village of Woodville in the Province of Ontario, on the 27th of February, 1853. Of strong vitality and a clear mind, he possessed the rare qualities of persistency, perseverance, and a great capacity for work, which eventually overcame all obstacles, and carried him to great achievements. His education was of that practical quality of the Ontario Rural Schools which served him so well in after life, himself becoming a teacher, and later a tutor of Latin at the Rockwood Academy. The lure of the West attracted his parents to Manitoba, and they settled in Winnipeg, where he studied at the Manitoba Presbyterian College. He continued his studies at Toronto University and Trinity Medical School, where he graduated, a Bachelor of Medicine in 1881, and the same year, an Honorary Graduate M.D., C.M., later taking advanced training in New York, Glasgow, London, and Berlin. From the University of Berlin, he attained a special certificate in bacteriology.

Returning to Winnipeg, he began the practice of his profession in 1882. In 1883, he with twelve others, outstanding men even in those early days of the country's development, founded the Manitoba Medical College, which has since become affiliated with the University of Manitoba, one of the leading universities of Canada. Associated with Dr. Ferguson in founding the Manitoba Medical College and justly entitled to the distinction of being the pioneers in medical education in Western Canada, were: Doctors James Kerr (deceased); James Robert Jones (deceased); Robert Johnston Blanchard, Winnipeg; Robert George Brett, Edmonton; Robert Buchanan Ferguson (deceased); James Wilford Good, Vancouver; James William Whiteford (deceased); James Patterson (deceased); Theogene Fafard (deceased); Andrew McDiarmid, Pochahontas; Hon. David Henry Wilson (deceased); William Robert Douglas Sutherland (deceased). These men possessed a wonderful vision and some of them lived to see the realization of their dreams in bricks and mortar, a Grade A medical school.

In 1886, Dr. Ferguson accepted the professorship of surgery in the Manitoba Medical College, following the late James Kerr, who resigned to accept a similar chair in Columbia University, Washington, District of Columbia. He was a member of the staffs of the Winnipeg General and St. Boniface hospitals. On December 18, 1893, the chair of surgery in the Post Graduate Medical School and Hospital of Chicago was offered him, which, after due consideration, he accepted and assumed his duties in June, 1894.

The esteem in which he was held by his professional brethren in Canada is reflected in an illuminated address presented by the Faculty of the Manitoba Medical College upon his departure:

"As Professor of Surgery, you have not only commanded the admiration and regard of your Associate Professors, but also the veneration and loyal esteem of your students. Your operative work in Hospital and Private practice has challenged the keenest attention of the Medical Profession of this country, and has reflected the highest honor on yourself and credit upon the Medical Profession of Canada, etc."

In time, he became owner and chief surgeon of the Chicago Hospital, one of the most efficiently equipped institutions in the West at that time. In 1900, Dr. Ferguson accepted the chair of professor of clinical surgery in the College of Physicians and Surgeons (University of Illinois, College of Medicine), one of the most progressive colleges in America.

Dr. Ferguson's fame as a teacher of surgery and as a skilful operator extended beyond the shores of America, and some years before his death, King Carlos of Portugal honored him with a decoration of which he was justly proud: "The Commander of the Order of Christ" for "excelling in surgery." Being diligent he did stand before kings.

Intuitively he seemed to possess the power to apply means to ends. Thus, he devised many surgical instruments that bear his name: the Ferguson artery forceps, Ferguson pedicle clamp, a prostatic retractor for the operation of perineal prostatectomy, and other instruments. He developed and improved the operation for cleft palate, excision of the maxilla for malignant disease, and devised an ingenious operation for drainage of the subarachnoid space into the peritoneal cavity by tunnelling through the body of the fifth lumbar vertebra and inserting a silver wire seton. Although not a voluminous writer, he contributed a number of excellent articles on surgical topics and wrote a monograph on hernia, which is a classic on this subject. The operation for inguinal hernia with which his name is associated is at many clinics the most popular today.

Dr. Ferguson was a member of the following medical societies and was one of the outstanding figures at their gatherings: The British Medical Association; the American Medical Association; International Surgical Congress; Chicago Medical Society (ex-president, 1910); Michigan State Medical Association (Hon.);

Chicago Gynecological Society; Chicago Surgical Society; Fellow, American Surgical Association; Chicago Academy of Medicine; American Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians; Southern Surgical and Gynecological Association; Western Surgical and Gynecological Association (ex-president).

Among an ever increasing circle of friends and admirers, Dr. Ferguson's loyalty and devotion to those of his early days never waned. He possessed in a large measure that quality which is known by the Scots as "clannish." His door, 4619 Grand Boulevard, was ever open to his old friends, especially those from Canada. He was a member of the Scottish Rite, a thirty-second degree Mason (A.F. & A.M.), and a member of the Presbyterian Church.

After a brief illness, he passed away on October 20, 1911, being survived by Mrs. Ferguson who is a daughter of the late Mr. Edward Thomas, Esq., of Nassagawaya, Ontario; and two sons, Mr. Ivan Havelock Ferguson, and Alexander Donald Ferguson, M.D., of Chicago.

Dr. Ferguson contributed his quota to the advancement of the science of surgery. As a leader in the surgical thought of his day, he ranked with Fenger, Senn, and Murphy. His was a life worthy of emulation. NEIL JOHN MACLEAN.