

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

LEWIS ATTERBURY STIMSON

LEWIS ATTERBURY STIMSON, born August 24, 1844, in Paterson, New Jersey, was descended from the earliest settlers in this country. His father's family were among the settlers of the second Massachusetts Bay Colony and his mother's family were of old Huguenot stock. Both families were active participants in the American Revolution.

At the age of 18 he graduated from Yale University in the class of 1863. In 1864 he enlisted in the Union Army and was an aid upon the staff of General Birney and later upon the staff of General Terry. His Civil War memories written during his maturity (1924) contain one sentence which is illuminating in the light of our present post bellum demoralization. Speaking of war in general he writes—"‘War is Hell,’ but the hellishness is not simply the slaughter and the physical destruction, it is also the corruption of character, the loosening of moral bonds, the utter disregard of right and wrong."

Following the Civil War he engaged in business on the Stock Exchange but during this time, in association with a young medical friend, he was interested in certain pathological problems which finally aroused his interest to such an extent that in 1871 at the age of 27 he began to study medicine. In 1871 he went to Paris where he studied under such great teachers as Pasteur, Nélaton, Robin, Cornil, and others. In 1875 he was graduated from the Bellevue Hospital Medical College. He was professor of physiology in the New York University Medical School from 1883 to 1885; professor of anatomy from 1885 to 1889; professor of surgery from 1889 to 1898. In 1898, largely due to his efforts, the Cornell Medical School was established and he became its first professor of surgery.

From the beginning of his professional career his scientific contributions were numerous. Among these were, *Operative Surgery*, *A Treatise on Fractures and Dislocations*, which will always remain a classic upon this subject. Among his other important contributions to surgical knowledge were (1) the ligation of the ovarian and uterine arteries in sequence in their course in hysterectomy (1889), a step which Kelly considers placed the modern operation upon a safe basis; (2) the introduction and popularization of the moulded plaster splint in the treatment of fractures; (3) methods of reduction of dislocations at the hip and shoulder

(1888); (4) combined traction and suspension (Hodgen-Stimson) in fracture of the femur; (5) the treatment of old dislocation of the elbow . . . in this he was the first to draw attention to the newly formed bone on the humerus as the obstacle to reduction . . . , and (6) the use of the transverse incision as an approach to the abdominal contents. Pfannenstiel's article appeared in Germany before Stimson's article was published in this country, but Stimson evidently antedated Pfannenstiel in the use of the method.

He was in the course of his professional career, attending surgeon to the Presbyterian, Bellevue, and New York Hospitals, and the Hudson Street Hospital (New York Hospital House of Relief), and served 22 years on the staff of the latter two hospitals as an active surgeon. Later he was consulting surgeon to Bellevue, New York Hospital, and Christ's Hospital in Jersey City. In conjunction with Dr. Van Buren he founded the New York Surgical Society. From 1893 to 1896 he was vice-president of the New York Academy of Medicine. He was a member of the Société de Chirurgie of Paris and regent of the State of New York, 1893 to 1904. In 1900, Yale University conferred upon him the degree of LL.D.

Dr. Stimson was an enthusiastic sportsman as evidenced by his love for his yacht, the "Fleur de Lys," in which he made many cruises to the Mediterranean, Iceland, and elsewhere. His little vessel of 90 tons was seventh in the ocean race of 1905 for the Kaiser's cup, and his eyes sparkled with delightful memories when he described the remarks of his captain, Tom Bohlen of Gloucester fame, when the latter instructed a timid mate "to carry all sails as long as the sticks hold."

As a teacher Stimson was inspiring. His method was direct, easily understood, logical, analytical, and practical. No necessary detail was too small, but no unnecessary detail was added to lay emphasis. His insight into his subject was remarkable and few of his students found his courses anything but absorbing. His enthusiasm and his interest carried them with him. To those whose privilege it was to be associated with him in the hospital, "Stimmy" to the staff and nurses, his presence was always an inspiration and his rounds were always well attended. His relation to his staff was a personal one and his help and advice given without stint. His analysis of the cases before him was clear-cut and incisive and he had to a very marked degree that keen decisive clinical insight which separates the essential from the non-essential. To the junior members of the staff he never grew old; to them he gave sympathetic advice and instruction and more than one young house officer has given voice to the sentiment, "Stimmy looked at that just as I did and, gee, it was a help to have him show me the solution of my difficulty." He was frank, honest, kindly and sympathetic and perhaps the old Irish woman's reply to his question—"And how are you today?"—"Sure, and with your attention and kindly presence, how could I be other than better?" explains more readily than any words his relation to his patients.

To have gained his friendship was to be admitted to an inner circle where dwelt kindly sympathy, an earnestness of purpose in the pursuit of truth, and a devotion to fact which was always an inspiration.

Doctor Stimson died September 17, 1917, while out walking with his dog on the Shinnecock Hills.

“The Legend of Felix is ended, the toiling of Felix is done;
The Master has paid him his wages, the goal of his journey is won:
He rests but he never is idle.”

JAMES MORLEY HITZROT.