

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

CHARLES A. WHEATON

DOCTOR CHARLES A. WHEATON was born in Syracuse, New York. He was one of a family of fifteen who immigrated to Minnesota. His father settled at Northfield.

His education was gotten in the local schools of Northfield and from his older sisters, two of whom were teachers. He was not a college man. His father was a literary man, being an editor for many years. As a boy he was surrounded with literary people. As a consequence, his love for literature was pronounced even at an early age and continued throughout his entire life. While still young he conceived the idea of becoming a surgeon, but for financial reasons he was unable at once to begin his medical education. He became a railway express messenger in order to earn enough to take him through college and while acting as such he carried in his grip Gray's *Anatomy* and Yeo's *Physiology*, both of which he mastered at odd hours in his work. After a few years he had accumulated sufficient funds to enable him to matriculate at Harvard Medical School. After graduating from Harvard he spent 2 years in the Massachusetts General and Boston City Hospitals, before coming to St. Paul in 1879 to practice his profession.

He early allied himself with Dr. J. H. Stewart, an old practitioner, an able man and extremely popular. Through this alliance Doctor Wheaton was enabled at once to plunge with enthusiasm into the practice of his chosen profession and very soon was able to cull from a large general practice surgical material of a very general character. With this material at hand he early demonstrated his great surgical ability.

As a general practitioner as well as a surgeon, he was especially noted for his clinical ability and for his remarkable personality, a personality which inspired absolute confidence on the part of his patients and of his confrères.

As a diagnostician he had no superior. His interpretation of clinical signs was exact to a remarkable degree and, he depended throughout his entire career more upon clinical signs than upon laboratory or other aids in diagnosis. He deplored the growing tendency of the younger men to depend too much upon laboratory and X-ray or machine-made diagnosis.

He was a pioneer of the Northwest in antiseptic and aseptic surgery and stood head and shoulders above any other man of his community.

As one of the founders of the present Medical Department of the University of Minnesota, he was an enthusiastic teacher for a quarter of a century. His lectures were carefully prepared, often illustrated by his own drawings, and always couched in classical language. He was an indefatigable reader and had at his tongue's end the literature of any subject on which he lectured. To those fortunate enough to hear him, his lectures were a privilege and an inspiration.

Always progressive, he was foremost in the organization of many medical societies in the city and throughout the Northwest. He was ethical to a degree and he hated anything in medicine that smacked of the charlatan or of quackery.

He was charitable to his professional brothers who had not had the opportunity; he could not condone dishonesty or carelessness. For the fads and fancies of surgery he had little patience and was outspoken in condemnation of all such.

At the operating table he was master of every situation that might arise. His anatomical dissection while operating was a joy to the onlooker. His courage and boldness were remarkable. His quickness and deftness was unsurpassed. His experience in surgery was tremendous, and it is to be deplored that throughout his active professional life he was too busy to record his cases or to contribute, to any great extent, to the literature of the day. He himself often deplored his inability to find time to write. His great fund of knowledge, acquired from his own long experience and through his study of the surgical masters, commanded the respect of the entire profession of the Northwest.

He was much sought as a speaker in the many medical and surgical societies of Minnesota and adjoining states. Outside of the medical profession his great vocabulary and command of language made him much sought as a postprandial speaker. Few men equalled him as an after-dinner talker and story teller. His stories were always apropos and their verbal embellishment was a work of art which could be appreciated only by those who had heard him.

He was a genial, companionable man, fond of the good things of life and happiest when extending hospitality and good cheer to his friends. He was a lover of nature, and would often steal away from his active work to spend a few days or hours in the fields or on the streams. During the latter part of his life he was in ill health and spent most of his time in the South during the winter, and on the beautiful Brule River in the summer.

No man of his time was so universally beloved and respected as was Dr. C. A. Wheaton and no man was more deserving.

Whether they know it or not, or whether they appreciate it if they do know it, it remains a fact that the trail he blazed through the wilderness of ignorance in surgery has made it comparatively easy for those of the generation following him. He was a self-made man and he put surgery on the map in the Northwest. His memory and his accomplishments will endure forever.

JOHN T. ROGERS.