

IN MEMORIAM

HUNTER ROBB
1863-1940

ON MAY 15, 1940, Hunter Robb, Fellow of the American Gynecological Society, passed away quietly at his home in Burlington, New Jersey. Arteriosclerosis had for several years curtailed his activities, and in quest of relief he sought the warmer climate of Florida where he had a stroke from which he slowly recovered. Returning north in May, he succumbed to pneumonia within a few days.

Hunter was born in Burlington, September 30, 1863, the son of Thomas and Caroline Woolman Robb and a descendant of James Robb of Edinburgh, Scotland, who came to America in 1793 and was a lumber merchant of Philadelphia. His mother was connected with many of the old families of Friends in Burlington County and was the great-grand niece of John Woolman, noted Quaker preacher and author. Once while on a trip to England, Hunter visited his ancestor's grave in the old Bishopsgate burying ground at York; the two trustees of the ground accompanying him insisted that he precede them through reverence for his distinguished ancestor. Though many of the customs of the Friends prevailed in their family circle, the Robbs were life-long members of the Presbyterian church.

After a preliminary education in the Episcopal Academy of Philadelphia, Hunter attended Burlington College; in 1884, he took his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania. His professional career began in the Presbyterian and Episcopal Hospitals of Philadelphia where he was a Resident during 1884-1886, after which he became an assistant to Howard A. Kelly who had just established a small hospital in the mill district of Kensington, Philadelphia, subsequently greatly enlarged and known as the Kensington Hospital for Women. When Doctor Kelly was called to Baltimore in 1889 to accept the Chair of Gynecology and Obstetrics in the Johns Hopkins University, the medical school of which was soon to open, Robb came with him as Associate in Gynecology, and there remained until he left five years later to become Professor of Gynecology at the Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Here, too, he was visiting gynecologist to the Lakeside Hospital.

The early days of the Hopkins taxed the capabilities of its first staff, but with the work back at the old Kensington Hospital still tugging at the heart-strings of Kelly and Robb, each Friday they would be off to Philadelphia to help carry on there.

While at the Hopkins, the still relatively early aseptic technique led Robb to investigate contamination of the wound through the hands and

to use finger stalls in studying the question of infection by the abdominal drainage tubes so often inserted following operation. He also devised a foot pedal to avoid handling the faucet in turning on water. Later, unable to get such pedals installed in the Lakeside Hospital, he had small cotton bags made with drawstrings, which were autoclaved and carefully tied over each faucet handle.

In his operative work, he was persuaded that the use of iodine on the skin as an antiseptic was no more effectual than a thorough scrubbing with soap and water.

Shortly after going to Cleveland, he learned that a Doctor Teter, a well-known dentist, had a complicated apparatus by means of which he induced anesthesia with nitrous oxide and then substituted ether; recognizing the possibilities of gas-ether anesthesia, he was quick to adopt this technique in his surgery.

The matter of shock became to him so grave a problem that he had pipes fitted beneath his glass-topped operating table, carrying electric wires to six high-power electric lights to maintain a steady temperature.

In the belief that chronic pelvic inflammation could be helped by hyperpyrexia, he designed a double-walled, half-barrel-like structure of sheet metal to fit over the abdomen, rubber curtains closing the ends. Electric bulbs were hung inside with wide-mouth bottles, containing a deliquescent salt to absorb moisture. The patient could thus be baked for a long period at a high temperature.

The advisability of operating immediately upon a patient with a recently ruptured ectopic pregnancy also attracted his interest, and he concluded that in most cases the bleeding would stop spontaneously before death supervened and that it was, therefore, often wiser to delay operating until the patient was at least partly out of shock.

In 1914, Robb retired from active practice and began to travel, like Treves, Bland Sutton, Moynihan, August Schachner, and many others, but during the war he served as major in our Medical Corps, being stationed at Camp Greenleaf, Georgia, the Rockefeller Institute, New York, and Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

Papers on surgical technique and diseases of women came from his pen in addition to a book on *Aseptic Surgical Technique* published in 1894. Of interest are his remarks on and translations of the writings of Mme. LaChapelle, Louyse Bourgeois, Madame Boivin, and Justine Siegemundin, famous French midwives of the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. He also contributed to Hare's *System of Therapeutics*, 1891, Keating and Coe's *Gynecology*, 1894, Jewett's *System of Obstetrics*, 1900, and Reed's *Gynecology*, 1901.

In 1894, he married Isabel Adams Hampton of Welland, Ontario, first superintendent of nurses at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and author of a standard book on nursing. The nurses' home of the Hopkins is named Hampton House in her honor as is that at Western Reserve University. Two sons, Hampton and Philip Hunter Robb, survive.

On May 22, 1929, he married a long-time, devoted friend, Marion Wilson of New York, who became the beloved, constant companion of his latter years, bringing much joy and happiness into his life.

Robb came into the field of gynecology as it was in process of development into a finished specialty, and through his meticulous attention to surgical details, he attached to himself a group of men to carry on in this field, happy to honor their Chief as the source of their own personal attainments. He exacted precision of his residents, rehearsing them long and tediously, with frequent corrections. Students and residents found in him a friend ever ready to help them.

He was a gentleman of the old school, bright in conversation with a gift of anecdote enhanced by mimicry. His devotion to detail also asserted itself in his home life.

A devoted Episcopalian, Doctor Robb is buried in the churchyard of historic St. Mary's.

Howard A. Kelly.