

Memorial Resolution on the Death of

Willis D. Gatch

Born October 27, 1877, on a farm near Aurora, Indiana, he was the son of Oliver and Susan Gatch. His father was a captain in the Union Army, and two uncles were surgeons in the Union Army. (His father and his uncle Dr. Charles Gatch, were the first to attend President Lincoln after he was shot.) He received his A.B. degree from Indiana University, then a small school of five hundred students with a distinguished faculty which had been assembled by David Starr Jordan. He was graduated by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 1907; was intern and assistant surgeon in the Johns Hopkins Hospital from 1907 to 1911. While an intern he invented the hospital bed which now is in universal use and bears his name. While an intern and assistant resident, he assisted Dr. Halsted in experimental work and did experimental work on anesthesia in which he was aided by the advice of Dr. John Abel and Dr. William Howell. This led to a better and safer use of nitrous oxide-oxygen anesthesia.

In 1911 he was chief resident in surgery at Washington University in St. Louis and in 1912 he came to Indianapolis to be professor of surgery in the medical school just established by the union of four proprietary schools. Here he established a little research laboratory in which Dr. Frank Mann did his experiments on the peripheral origin of surgical shock. He soon acquired a large private practice. In 1932 he assumed the added responsibility of Dean of the Medical School, a post he held until his resignation in 1946. Even though this period included World War II years, with a depleted faculty, he found time to plan for the needs of the school in the future.

Dr. Gatch's chief contributions are on the accurate measurement of blood loss at operation; on the local and systemic effects of bowel obstruction; on the proof that cholecystitis is caused by chemical and not by bacterial actions; on the cause of tumor metastasis, and on the proper treatment on malignant growths. He was a member of the American College of Surgeons and of the American, Western, Central and Southern Surgical Associations.

In 1911 he married Miss Jean McIntosh, who, with a daughter and two grandchildren, survive him.

In addition to his devotion to the principles and practice of surgery, he maintained an abiding interest in methods of teaching. He was particularly interested in the importance of a classical background as a basis for scientific training. This was an outstanding attribute of his until his final illness.

There were but few who came under his influence who were not profoundly affected by his sincere attempt to stimulate critical analysis of scientific thought. He had the unique ability to impart this to others. No one has had a more far-reaching influence on our school.

A visit to Dr. Gatch's home was always interesting and inspiring. He had wide ranges of interest outside the field of medicine, including literature, government, history, art, music, geography, sports and non-medical sciences. His active work terminated with an incapacitating illness in the summer of 1960. He died on January 24, 1962, and thus ended an era in our school.

In recognition of his service to the University and to the cause of medical

education, be it resolved that the Faculty extend its sympathy to his wife and his daughter and that copies of this resolution be sent to them.

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