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William Edgar Lower, M.D.

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Founder Member

Memorial Issue

MEMORIAL SERVICE

ON June 26, 1948, a memorial service for Dr. William E. Lower was held at the Cleveland Clinic. Mr. John Sherwin, President of the Board of Trustees, presided. The Tributes which follow were given by Dr. Winfred G. Leutner, President of Western Reserve University, Dr. Norman C. Yarian, former President and Chief of Staff of the Lutheran Hospital, Dr. Thomas E. Jones, Chief of Staff of Surgery at the Cleveland Clinic, and Dr. William F. Braasch of the Mayo Foundation.



JOHN SHERWIN . . .

ON June 17, 1948, the last survivor of the four founders of The Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Dr. William E. Lower, passed away at the age of eighty-one, having lived a full life devoted to the alleviation of human suffering and misfortune. Loved and respected by all those who had the privilege of coming within the sphere of his influence, he has left a host of friends and admirers in all walks of life who will miss his kindly word and helping hand.

His contribution to the advancement of his profession is well known to all its members. His contribution to the Cleveland Clinic, both professionally and through the part he played in guiding its progress from the concept of the idea to the present time, is evident in the character of the institution itself and in the indelible mark his personality has left on it.

This issue of the Cleveland Clinic Quarterly is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Lower to permanently record the thoughts and reminiscences presented at that service.

DR. WINFRED G. LEUTNER . . .

AS a young surgeon Dr. Lower interested himself in the late '90's in the foundation and operation of a new and modest hospital venture on the west side, the now well-known Lutheran Hospital. I refer briefly to it because it brought Dr. Lower first within the orbit of my own youthful experience.

Dr. Lower had graduated as a Doctor of Medicine from the School of Medicine of Wooster University in 1891. The consolidation of that School five years later with the School of Medicine of Western Reserve University enrolled him among the alumni of the University. His professional work as a member of the faculty of the School of Medicine began in 1898 as lecturer and continued

until 1931 when he retired from the faculty with the rank of Associate Professor, a period of thirty-three years. His surgical career included appointments in Lakeside Hospital and Mt. Sinai Hospital.

In the meantime he had as early as 1900 become an army surgeon, an activity in which he was to play a major role. He served first in the Philippines and then became a major in the Medical Reserve Corps. He was called to active service in 1917 as Assistant Surgical Director of the Lakeside Base Hospital Unit of the United States Army in service with the British Expeditionary Forces in France. For a time he was its commanding officer and retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1918.

As is well known, the idea of establishing the Cleveland Clinic Foundation Hospital had long been discussed by Doctors Crile, Lower and Bunts, and in 1921 Dr. Lower became one of the founders of the Foundation and Chief Surgeon of the Cleveland Clinic Hospital. The role that he played from the beginning in planning, in building and in organizing the working forces of the Cleveland Clinic and its Hospital is too well known to warrant detailed account here. I think it is fair to say that the team of Dr. Crile and Dr. Lower with their associates—Bunts, Phillips, and their colleagues—brought into the service of the sick a force destined to make an extraordinary contribution to the medical and surgical care from wide areas of the population of the United States and even outside the limits of our country.

The most difficult problems of organization, of buildings and of maintenance which might well have discouraged one with lesser faith, especially when disaster threatened, Dr. Lower faced always with calmness and quiet cheerfulness that was as amazing as it was disarming. Indeed, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and the Hospital became his life, and through them he made to this community and to the world a contribution such as few men are privileged to make.

As friends and associates we deeply mourn his departure. The entire community is the poorer for his passing, but we are proud to nurture his memory, and to continue to push forward in the direction of his ideals and to count him in the long years ahead as one of God's gifts to our generation.

DR. NORMAN C. YARIAN . . .

TO have known and to have worked with Dr. William E. Lower has been one of the richest and most valuable privileges of my life. I came to know him fifty-three years ago, when as a student-assistant I entered the offices of Drs. Bunts, Crile and Lower.

Some of Dr. Lower's characteristics which impressed me most were kindness, consideration for others, sincerity, devotion to his profession and his interest in helping young men. I am sure that many physicians, like myself, owe more than they can express for his interest and helpfulness. The sole criterion in his decisions was the welfare of the patient.

He was one of the most tireless physicians I have ever known. Busy from early morning until late at night, he knew no eight hour day, and he usually kept his appointments ahead of schedule, as many of us can attest.

In the earlier days of his practice, it was not unusual for surgical operations to be performed upon the kitchen table in a poorly lighted room in the patient's home. I recall such experiences, having either served as anesthetist or assistant, and despite the unfavorable setting for the operation, Dr. Lower's patients usually made a good recovery.

But it was when witnessing intubations upon children nearly suffocated from laryngeal diphtheria that he impressed me most. These intubations were often done at night, the doctor having been called from his sleep to the bedside of a child rapidly becoming cyanotic for want of air because of the terrible diphtheria membrane closing his larynx. Dr. Lower was there at his best. As one of us held the child, wrapped in a sheet, he dexterously introduced the tube into the larynx and in a few moments the cyanosis was gone and the child fell into a restful sleep. Dr. Lower's reputation for doing intubations was widely known and many children's lives were saved by his skill. He operated in numerous hospitals in the city as well as in other cities where he was called in consultation.

I vividly remember night trips I made with him behind his faithful mare, Lucy, to the Cleveland General Hospital (long since gone from Woodland Avenue), in response to some emergency call. Our quiet conversations in the flickering lights of the city as we drove down old Hick Street and over the Central Viaduct, lives on as a choice memory.

He was one of the first surgeons to operate in the White Hospital at Ravenna. It has been my privilege to have witnessed much of his work at the Lutheran Hospital, founded in 1896, the year of my graduation in medicine. Dr. Lower not only exerted a great formative influence in establishing the institution but always aided in upholding a high standard of the work done there. This interest continued as long as he lived.

We of the staff of the Lutheran Hospital have always held him in the highest regard and respect. He was our President and Chief-of-Staff for twenty-two years. We shall greatly miss his words of counsel and encouragement but his influence will live on. His framed photograph hangs upon the wall of the doctors' room in the hospital, just as it has hung beside my own desk for many years, and will remain there so long as my office continues.

DR. THOMAS E. JONES . . .

AFTER a long association with Dr. Lower which began after World War I in the office of Bunts, Crile and Lower in the Osborn Building, I find it difficult to do justice in representing the Staff in this memorial service to Dr. Lower, the last of our Founders to depart. When one is closely associated with a person for many years it is impossible to properly appraise him. So

many things are taken for granted in day by day communion that sometimes the great things are overlooked. When the final parting comes, one's emotions are likely to be expressed in superlatives, and that is the last thing Dr. Lower would want, contemptuous as he was in the presence of gallery play.

On occasions in the past I have paid tribute to our Founders: to Dr. Bunts, the gentleman and scholar, the mediator and friend; to Dr. Crile, always the stimulator who blazed the trail for anyone who wished to follow; to Dr. Phillips who was to everyone the ideal doctor, and now to Dr. Lower.

Today this institution is a monument to Dr. Lower's wisdom and planning and scrupulous attention to economy. He liked to plan, construct and complete — then be off to another job.

Time does not permit even a brief recital of his achievements and the honors bestowed on him in recognition of them. They are a matter of record elsewhere. It is an imposing summary but inadequate. One does not find here the secret of the irresistible personal magnetism which so endeared him to a host of colleagues, friends and grateful recipients of his professional skill. This was found in the collective attributes of his personality. He was gracious, humble, richly endowed with intellect, sound judgment and firm convictions, and in retrospect they were all consecrated to the service of humanity. The motivating force that activated his many virtues was a consuming and sustained desire to serve his fellow man modestly and efficiently, and to relieve suffering. Completely subservient to this was conventional social intercourse in which he had little interest, yet on any occasion he was a charming host, both at home and on the farm which furnished his chief recreation. He was courteous without formality. He took great delight in horseback riding and in the study of trees, birds and wild flowers.

Directness of speech and thought was one of Dr. Lower's characteristics and there was never a question as to where he stood on a problem. His art of conversation linked with a gift of repartee and sense of humor made an impression not easily forgotten. He was a skillful surgeon, bold when necessary but not adventurous. He had that rare ability to apply his native talents in a manner that successfully combined his analytical mind, dexterity and common sense. He gave dignity to the operating room and to surgery without any pretentious solemnity.

His aim in writing was, like his oral technic, chiefly directed at lucidity, brevity and correctness without display of ornamental bibliographic erudition.

One of his outstanding traits was punctuality and he could not countenance tardiness in others. I am reminded of an annual Clinic meeting and a verse of a song which was as follows:

“There's no one at the Clinic who hasn't had the fate
To meet the next speaker at the door when he is late.
He checks us up each morning; one's faults he knows too well.
We hope we have some virtues, too, of which he'll also tell.”

With his natural quick wit he responded, “Of course I can't conceive of any one being late, but I can readily imagine, should one be late, how dis-

tressed he would feel, and so I hope I may continue to be at the door to comfort him as he comes in."

His spirit was always free, alert and vivacious. He was cheerful and kind to his patients and had the happy knack of friendliness for rich and poor, young and old, learned and ignorant. In my long association with Dr. Lower, I have never seen a trace of conceit or boastfulness.

He had his fun, however. Raised on a farm in Ohio and educated in a country school, he grew up the hard way, and when he came to Cleveland could hold his own with the "city slickers." One gleaned from stories by Dr. Crile and Dr. Bunts that he was more bent on mischief than books, but when his interest in medicine began he became as absorbed with the single idea of doing a day's work as honestly, faithfully and energetically as was in his power. Nor did he fail to prod others as many of us are aware. When I joined the old group of Bunts, Crile and Lower, occasionally I would meet some of his cronies who had lived with him at the old University Club on Prospect Avenue. Invariably they would say, "Old Billy Lower is quite a boy." He was a prankster. He enjoyed real fun that hurt no one but may have caused some annoyance to the victim of the joke. We are told that the recipient of many of these was former Justice Clarke of the Supreme Court. In spite of this they were loyal friends and frequently corresponded until the latter's death a few years ago. Dr. Lower told stories well, particularly when the joke was on himself. With advancing age one is apt to spend a lot of time reminiscing, but Dr. Lower did not; he always looked toward the future and its probable accomplishments.

He told me many times that he had tried his hand at reforming but eventually gave it up. Perhaps that accounted for his ability to avoid insoluble issues successfully and gracefully in a few well-chosen words. He never prophesied but he was a visionary. Well do I remember the controversy twenty years ago when he took up vigorous defense against the so-called higher education for nurses. It was misinterpreted. Dr. Lower would not deny education for anyone but he felt that many people were denied the opportunity to serve. From his early association with Lutheran Hospital he knew full well the qualifications of a nurse and he did not think a college education was necessary to fulfill the requirements and that it would militate against the training of much real talent.

Dr. Lower established a library at Coshocton, Ohio, in memory of his nephew, Hunter Lower, and also one in memory of his father and mother, known as the Henry and Mary Lower Fund. In giving these libraries he specified that they were to be used only for nature and scientific subjects. He also established a fund for the Lower Fellowship Thesis prize. He was the donor of the Lower Lecture and a permanent fund has been set up to perpetuate this at the Academy of Medicine—such was his interest in education.

One of his greatest traits was probably least known. Things do not always progress serenely in any institution and particularly in a rapidly growing one. We are apt to get fractious in times of stress and over-work, and many were the complaints he had to face. However unruly, in his presence you were soon

subdued; he bridled and saddled you and the cinch was adjusted to proper tightness before you returned serenely onto the track.

These words of Robert Louis Stevenson may fittingly be applied to the life of Dr. Lower and the Clinic for which he worked so hard:

"Our road is not built to last a thousand years, yet in a sense it does. When a road is once built it is a strange thing how it collects traffic, how every year as it goes on more people are found to walk on it and others are raised up to repair it and keep it alive."

In a large measure he has been responsible for a potent ferment with which we are now endowed and I am sure it is his wish that it continue to effervesce to the benefit of all. We have an obligation to guard it wisely. The road of knowledge, skill and character which he built will be kept alive by the gratitude of the patients he served, the accomplishments of the students he taught, and the affectionate memories of the colleagues to whom he was an inspiration and an example.

Wherever "Billy" Lower is today, he is at peace. He was so true to his convictions.

DR. WILLIAM F. BRAASCH . . .

MY acquaintance with "Billy" Lower began in 1907. At that time American urology was in the embryonic stage of its development. There were only three or four specialists in that field west of the Atlantic Coast. Since my knowledge of urology was limited, Dr. W. J. Mayo (the Chief) advised me to spend some time with Dr. Lower in Cleveland, saying that in his opinion he was the leading American urologist of that day.

When I arrived in Cleveland, Dr. Lower welcomed me with unassuming charm and warmth of personality. He was a bachelor at that time and, in his friendly way, suggested that I share his quarters. I shall never forget the wonderful weeks spent with him, making daily rounds, watching him work, and listening to his wise words of counsel. He had an electric automobile then and I can still see him as he drove the car to the various hospitals where he worked, commenting on medical conditions and problems as he drove.

What I learned from him at that time was a large factor in guiding my subsequent progress in urology and in laying the foundation for the Section on Urology at the Mayo Clinic. I know that the same generosity he showed to me as a teacher was extended to many other young urologists. It is evident that it gave him pleasure to be of help to his younger colleagues.

Dr. Lower was fundamentally a surgeon. He belonged to that remarkable group of Americans who contributed so much to the surgical field during the first two decades of this century. These men will go down in surgical history because of their influence in simplifying and standardizing the technical procedures of surgery and in shaping them as they exist today. Dr. Lower demonstrated the value of speed with surgical dexterity and sound surgical judgment.

He possessed the three cardinal virtues of a modern surgeon to a superlative degree. While in no way oratorical, the eloquence of his keen observations at the operating table or bedside made a deep impression on the minds of those who heard him.

Dr. Lower was widely known as an outstanding general surgeon but he was particularly interested in the field of genito-urinary surgery. He took a keen interest in the problems of urology and contributed generously to that field. He was among the first of the urologists to perform suprapubic prostatectomy and to advocate bilateral transplantation of the ureters for exstrophy of the bladder. He made improvements in various operative technics and described a number of instruments to aid in their application. As an example of his breadth of vision and his forward looking manner of thought, in his later years he actively encouraged research in the basic sciences in order to solve various problems in urology. His contributions to the subject of hypophyseal gonadal influence on the growth of the prostate gland were important and stimulated additional research.

He conceived and helped establish the Clinical Society of Genito-Urinary Surgeons and served in the capacity of President in 1921 and 1922. He was also keenly interested in the affairs of the American Association of Genito-Urinary Surgeons and was President in 1923. Whenever Dr. Lower read or discussed a paper, he commanded profound attention. In fact, his discussions of various urologic problems were so informative and were based on such wide experience and keen observation that they were always remembered.

In addition to Dr. Lower's attributes as a surgeon and urologist, there was a quality in his clinical work which was outstanding: his humanitarian interest in the patient himself. This permeated his every thought and action. In his quiet way, with the aid of his kindly smile and humorous remarks, he gained his patient's confidence.

Dr. Lower left a heritage to the surgical world and in particular to urology, which will continue to influence it as profoundly in the future as in the past. Those of us who were fortunate enough to come in contact with him will always remember him as a great teacher, a great clinician, a good doctor and a kind friend.