



HOMER G. HAMER  
1880-1971

When he was 70, William Lyon Phelps, who loved life and had a singular gift of radiating its warmth, said that if he should ever become physically incapacitated, he hoped by the grace of God that the words of the poet Waller might be true of him:

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that time  
has made,

Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,  
As they draw near to their eternal home.

And so it was with him whom we remember this morning.

Just east of the Ohio-Indiana state line, in the center of Logan County, Ohio lies Bellefontaine, a town of 11,000, first settled in 1806 within a mile of the highest point in the state. On a nearby farm, Washington Franklin Hamer and Julia Poole Hamer raised a family of 3 boys and 3 girls. One of the boys, Homer, born May 27, 1880 (only 15 years after the close of the Civil War), found his way westward after attending the local schools. Deciding to study medicine, he enrolled in the Indiana Medical College (now Indiana University School of Medicine) at Indianapolis from which he graduated in 1904. It was customary in those days for medical students to ally themselves with a local practitioner of their liking, working in the latter's office, often sleeping there, answering the telephone and accompanying the preceptor on out-of-town consultations. It was in this way that Dr. Hamer first became acquainted with Dr. Wm.

N. Wishard, Sr. who was the state's first urologist.

Dr. Hamer served an internship at St. Vincent's Hospital in 1904 and 1905, our city's only private, voluntary hospital at that time. Here it was that he became acquainted with hospital urology. Many is the time he told of sitting up all night to correct postoperative bleeding in those early median perineal or suprapubic prostatectomy cases. Residencies in urology were few and far between but Dr. Hamer spent nearly a year (1905-1906) in New York at the Post-Graduate Hospital. Unfortunately, we have no written record of that period of his study. In 1906 he returned to Indianapolis where he became associated in the practice of urology with Dr. Wm. N. Wishard, Sr.—a relationship terminated only by the latter's death in 1941. To this partnership were added Drs. H. O. Mertz (1918), W. N. Wishard, Jr. (1928), M. H. Nourse (1947), J. H. O. Mertz (1952) and D. M. Newman (1965).

The practice of urology at that time was much more limited in scope than today. Much of the office work dealt with strictures, urethritis, prostatitis and syphilis. The office fixtures were decidedly different. No room was complete without its Valentine irrigator hanging on the wall. Cystoscopies were less frequent then and much more of an ordeal. Hospital practice consisted of surgical procedures for stricture, prostatic operations and a few surgical operations on the upper tract for stone, hydronephrosis, tuberculosis and

tumor. Nephropexies were then much more common than today.

During this early period, Dr. Hamer became active in organized medicine. He, of course, became a member of the Indiana State Medical Association, the American Medical Association and the American Urological Association (1907). His first AUA meeting as a member was held in Atlantic City. Dr. Bransford Lewis was president. Pictures of the group at that time showed a small fraction of the present attendance.

As time went on, Dr. Hamer showed a propensity to become president of every organization to which he belonged. He became president of his local society in 1923, of the AUA in 1929 at the Seattle meeting and of the American Association of Genito-Urinary Surgeons in 1942. He had become a member of the latter association in 1923. In addition, he was a member of the Clinical Society and the American College of Surgeons. He was a delegate to the AMA from 1932 to 1952.

When the United States finally became involved in World War I, Dr. Hamer entered the Army Medical Corps as a lieutenant. In early 1917 Dr. Edward L. Keyes, Jr. was stationed at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, near Indianapolis. Here Dr. Hamer became acquainted with Dr. Keyes, forming a life-long friendship. Up to a time shortly before Dr. Keyes's death, Dr. Hamer collaborated with him, working on a new edition of Keyes' textbook on urology. Numerous were the happy times Dr. Keyes spent in Indianapolis with the Hamers, largely for this purpose. Unfortunately, Dr. Keyes's health failed before his work really got off the ground, thus denying the profession another edition of that classic text. With the end of World War I Dr. Hamer was back in Indianapolis and in active civilian practice. By this time he had become clinical professor of Genito-Urinary Surgery in a relatively new university hospital and medical school building. However, the department was 30 years old and then, as now, was not smothered as an adjunct of general surgery. After the war, the department gave one lecture a week to the junior class of the medical school, as well as conducting a weekly outpatient department and active inpatient urologic service.

In the twenties most of the doctors of Indianapolis had offices in one downtown building. Dr. Hamer and his 2 partners broke the ice in 1928 by erecting a new office building uptown for the group practice of urology, across from the Methodist Hospital. This trend of private office buildings, out of the inner city district, has been gradual ever since, so that the majority of physicians now are away from the downtown area.

During the thirties Dr. Hamer became an active attendant at the meetings of the Societe d'Urologie Internationale. From one of these European trips he brought back a supply of uroselectan before it was commercially available here. The administration of this first intravenous con-

trast medium was much more dramatic than our present excellent solutions. What with burning in the veins and frequent untoward reactions, it was a step forward but one to be reckoned with.

The span of his professional years, beginning in 1904, saw the development of all that makes up modern urology. His generation had inherited the cystoscope, such as it then was, x-ray in a very primitive way and a few standard surgical procedures. All the rest of what we know today was yet to come.

In 1912 Dr. Hamer and Miss Maone Dolphin were married, a union which was blessed for 59 years. Their home was a haven of fellowship for their many friends. Mrs. Hamer, one son—John, and 4 grandchildren survive. She had and has the delightful ability to create a wonderful home atmosphere and interesting entertainment for all who were fortunate enough to come under their roof. We will remember him in many ways. Reference has just been made to his family life. He never complained nor found fault. He built upon his own endowments to create a warm human being with an infinite capacity for friendship. He had patience and forbearance but was nevertheless firm in his convictions. He had unflinching respect for others. His widow said, shortly after his death, that living with him was a benediction.

In his community life, he was respected by all who knew him. He was active in the life of his Methodist church. Although he did not hold political office, he was a staunch, life-long Republican. He had served on a regional committee of the Nobel Prize Commission. He collaborated with Dr. Bransford Lewis in *The History of Urology*, 1933. He was a charter member of the medical staff of the Methodist Hospital where he did most of his private practice and a one-time president.

As a physician, he was imperturbable—he truly had aequanimitas. In consulting and treating patients, he knew what to do, what to say, what not to say and when to be silent. Dr. Keyes once referred to "Homer's magnificent silence". As a surgeon he was cool, unruffled, forceful, never excited and always calm. He knew his talents and how to employ them to the best advantage. When it looked as if things might be deteriorating at the operating table, he would muster his forces, almost always coming out on top. His patients loved him, his residents and students praised him as a teacher and his colleagues accepted as law his clinical ability. With all his honors and attainments, he was a modest man, totally devoid of conceit, leaving to others the assessment of what he really was—a truly great man.

He continued his surgical work until he was a little more than 70 years old, after which he confined his work to the office and consultation. Ten years ago cardiac arrhythmia developed and gradually led to increasing physical disability. At the time of his death (August 30, 1971), his minister, Dr. Richard Lancaster said of him: "His char-

acter and greatness showed in his face. His grace, strength and kindness etched themselves in his features. When such a man dies at the age of 91, there is a kind of grief that is inappropriate but there is a kind of gratitude that is very much in order. It seems to me that we should think of ourselves as being here to celebrate his life, not to mourn a death. By his life, he has reminded us that a man can be content to let his competence

“speak for itself.” And so it is with us now. We celebrate his life, we rejoice in his memory. With S. Weir Mitchell, Dr. Hamer could have said:

I know the night is near at hand  
The mists lie low on hill and bay,  
The autumn sheaths are dewless, dry;  
But I have had the day.

*Wm. Niles Wishard, Jr.*