WALTER E. DANDY—SURGEON
1886–1946

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Thou renderest to every man according to his work. Psalm LXII, 12.

The shadow of a great scientist shrinks little with the passage of years. Walter Dandy would have rejoiced in the thought that subsequent generations judged him according to the validity and usefulness of his contributions to surgery. For when measured by this yardstick alone, there is every reason to believe that his shadow, like that of his chief, Professor Halsted, is actually growing longer rather than shorter.

The depiction of a man can be better comprehended when viewed against the background of his early life. Walter Dandy was born in Sedalia, Missouri, on April 6, 1886, the only child of John and Rachel Dandy. The parents had emigrated from Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire, England, but two years previously. John, a locomotive engineer, was a Socialist and a member of the religious sect known as the Plymouth Brethren. In the son’s antipathy toward England, and particularly to her caste system, he was no doubt early influenced by the feelings of his father and mother.

PREMEDICAL EDUCATION

He attended the public school in Sedalia, from which he was graduated first in his class. On entering the University of Missouri in 1903, he found it necessary to earn most of his expenses. This proved a blessing in disguise, for the laboratory jobs he obtained not only introduced him to scientific investigation, but brought him into contact with W. C. Curtis, the Professor of Zoology. Evidently Curtis appreciated Dandy’s talents and encouraged his interests in much the same way that Johnson and Bovell stimulated young Osler. Curtis once took Dandy as his laboratory assistant on a scientific expedition to Muscle Shoals.

On graduation from the University of Missouri, his outstanding character, scholarship and athletic ability were recognized by the offer of a Rhodes Scholarship. By that time he was anxious to begin the study of medicine, and since in that era this was not possible at Oxford, he declined the scholarship. Both parents were much disappointed, for despite the many faults they had found with England, they wanted their son to have an English University education and even to live there. Such was not to be the case, for even then young Walter had a strong mind of his own. That

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autumn (1907), with the help of Professor Curtis, he was admitted to the Johns Hopkins Medical School.

MEDICAL SCHOOL

Because of his exceptional work in science as an undergraduate, he was admitted to the second-year class. He was graduated in 1910, standing high in his class. Dr. L. Whittington Gorham, a classmate, relates that in medical school both Dandy’s ability and determination were readily apparent; that he was exceedingly hard working, taking little time out for the Saturday night convivialities which are even yet reported to be indigenous to that part of Broadway between Monument and Jefferson Streets.

GENERAL SURGICAL TRAINING

It was the opinion of Professor Halsted, and strongly shared to the end of their lives by both Cushing and Dandy, that a broad education in general surgery was the most secure foundation on which to build a career in one of its specialized fields. By the time of graduation, young Dandy had attracted the Professor’s interest and was selected for training. As was customary, the first year was spent in the Surgical Hunterian, or “Dog House.” In addition to investigative work, his duties included the teaching of operative surgery to undergraduates. In 1911 he came on the House Staff, where he served as intern and then assistant resident until 1916, when he was appointed resident. Having held this post for two years, he relinquished it to Dr. Mont Reid and went into practice as a general surgeon.

In order to understand how Dandy’s rapidly growing practice soon became entirely neurosurgical, it is necessary at this point to retrace our steps to 1907. Professor Mall had received one of the youngest human embryos up to that time discovered and entrusted its study to young Dandy, then an undergraduate. Mall’s confidence was well placed, for in January, 1910, his senior year, he published as his first paper, “A Human Embryo with Seven Pairs of Somites Measuring About 2 mm. in Length.” In embryological literature the specimen is still referred to as the “Dandy Embryo.” Largely on the basis of this work, he was, in the same year, awarded an M.A. degree by the Johns Hopkins University. It is interesting to note that but two brief paragraphs were devoted to the nervous system, whereas he appeared particularly intrigued by the vascular system, several pages having been devoted to its description. The work was done with scientific thoroughness and in minute detail. The author’s enthusiasm is evidenced by such a statement as “finding many beautiful examples of endothelial proliferation . . . .”

In the Surgical Hunterian he came into contact with Dr. Harvey Cushing who, in association with a brilliant group of young surgeons, Drs. George Heuer, Samuel J. Crowe, Emil Goetsch, and John Homans, was investigating pituitary function. At the suggestion of Dr. Cushing, Dandy undertook a study of the blood and nerve supplies of the canine and feline pituitary bodies. In two papers, published in 1911 and 1913, both the origins and