

## **Obituary : Clinton Thomas Dent, M.A., M.C. Cantab., F.R.C.S.**

### **Contributors**

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# Obituary.

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## **CLINTON THOMAS DENT,**

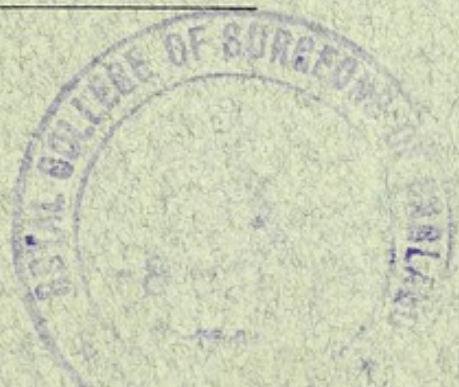
**M.A., M.C.Cantab., F.R.C.S.,**

SENIOR SURGEON, ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL;  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS;  
CHIEF SURGEON TO THE METROPOLITAN POLICE.

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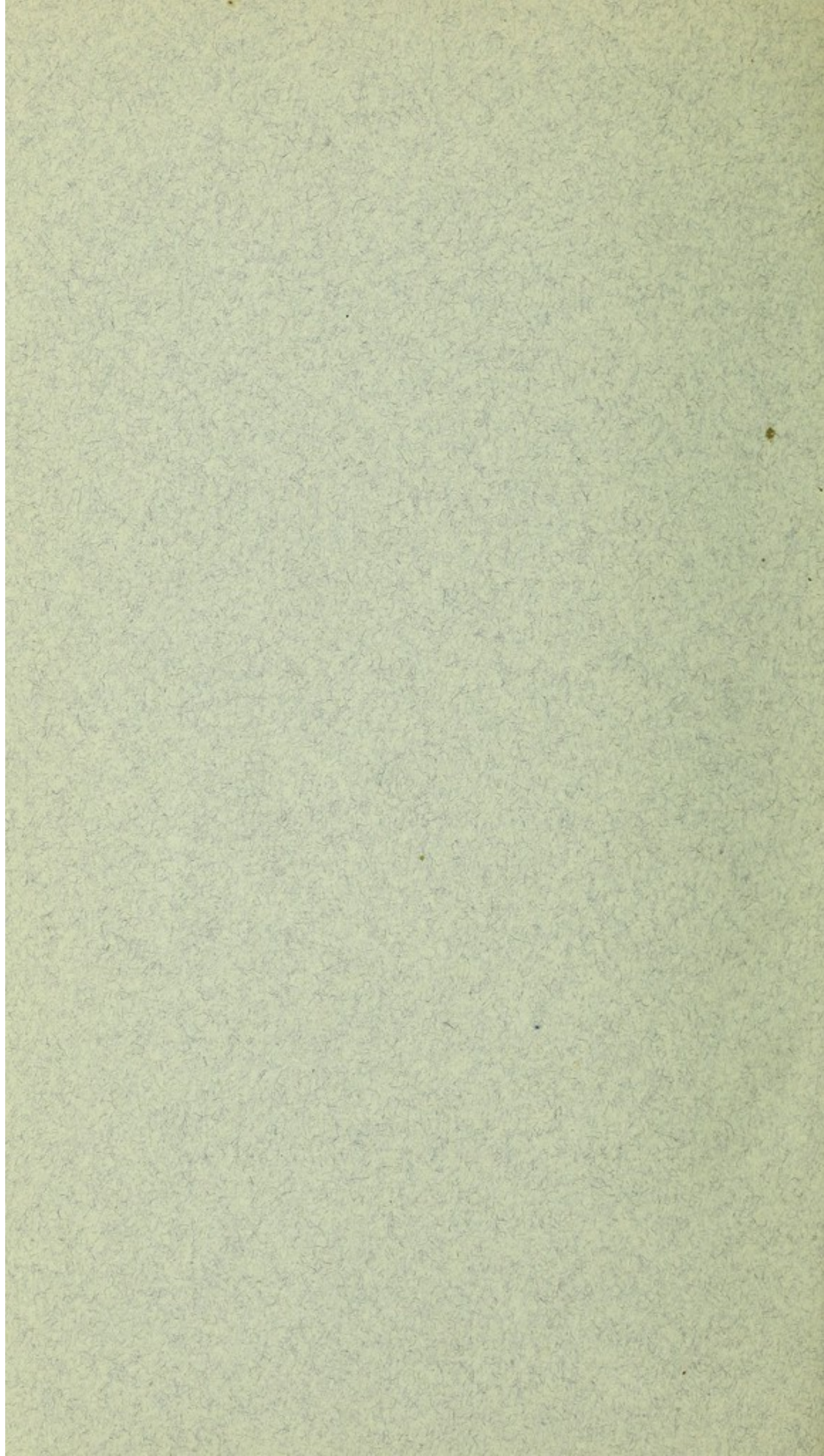


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1912.







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*Photograph by]*

CLINTON THOMAS DENT.

*[Elliott and Fry.*



## CLINTON THOMAS DENT,

M.A., M.C.Cantab., F.R.C.S.

To a wide circle of friends the news of the death of Clinton Dent, on August 26th, must have come as a painful shock, for he was apparently in his usual health when he began his summer holiday, and his fatal illness—a virulent pure septicaemia, possibly due to oral sepsis—lasted little more than a fortnight. He was the eighth child and fifth son of Thomas Dent, and was born on December 7th, 1850, at Sandgate. He was educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took the ordinary B.A. degree in 1873. Subsequently he examined in surgery for many years, and was made Hon. M.C. in 1899. He entered the Medical School of St. George's Hospital, and after holding the usual appointments was elected Assistant Surgeon in 1880, and for a time was Joint Lecturer on Physiology in the Medical School. In 1895 he became full Surgeon, and at the time of his death was Senior Surgeon and Chairman of the Medical School Committee. He was also for many years Surgeon to the Belgrave Hospital for Children, which owed much to his constant guidance and generosity. In 1904 he undertook the congenial duties of Chief Surgeon to the Metropolitan Police, thus serving in the same capacity as his former teacher and colleague, the late Timothy Holmes.

Ample private means, which sometimes interfere with professional activity, had no such paralysing influence on Dent, and merely enabled him to concentrate his energies on worthy objects. He took an active part in the medical societies of London; he served as Secretary (1901-4) to the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, before which he read papers on "Four Hundred Cases of Amputation" (1890, with W. C. Bull), "The Behaviour of a Tendon Ligature" (1891, with S. Delépine), "Amputation of the Entire Upper Extremity for Recurrent Carcinoma" (1898), "Congenital Hypertrophic Stenosis of the Pylorus and its Treatment by Pyloroplasty" (1903, with E. Cautley), and at the time of his death was President of the Surgical Section of the Royal Society of Medicine. He was also Secretary and Vice-President of the Medical Society of London, and in 1908 delivered the annual oration on "The After-Results of Injuries," in which he embodied some of the experiences derived from work among the Metropolitan Police in connexion with the difficult subject of



traumatic neurasthenia. As Hunterian Lecturer at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1905 he dealt with "Congenital Hypertrophic Stenosis of the Pylorus" and on "The Forms of Softening of Fracture of the Bones occurring in Childhood and Youth." It is to be regretted that these lectures were never published, for he had paid much attention to both of these subjects, and in the second lecture collected a number of original observations, and brought forward evidence to show that mollities ossium might be a sequel of infective disease. He was a most fastidious and critical writer, and has left behind a number of original and interesting notes and lectures in manuscript. For some years he was lecturer to the nurses of St. George's Hospital. These lectures, which were fully written out, he sometimes spoke of publishing, but this was never accomplished. He had long been interested in John Hunter, and in 1901 published a beautifully got up pamphlet as an explanatory notice of the picture of "John Hunter leaves St. George's Hospital, October 16th, 1793," by A. D. McCormick, R.B.A. It is sad that the material he collected will never see the light in any Hunterian Lecture of his; some of these data he generously gave to a previous orator, but this by no means exhausted his store. At the Royal College of Surgeons, of which he became a Fellow in 1877, he was a member of the Court of Examiners (1902-1911), had been on the Council since 1903, and at the time of his death was senior Vice-President. His friends cannot but feel disappointed that his life has been cut short before it was crowned by the honour of the Presidency, for which he was so manifestly suited by his scholarly knowledge of surgery, his striking personality, and his exceptional powers of oratory. The latter was remarkably shown by his delivery without a note of the introductory address to St. George's Hospital twenty-five years ago on "The Nature and Significance of Pain," which was afterwards printed.

In December, 1899, he went out on his own initiative to the South African war, where he acted as correspondent to this JOURNAL. On his return he delivered an address on "The Wounded in the Transvaal War" before the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society.

As a surgeon he was conscientious, careful, and at times, especially in the face of unexpected difficulties, extremely brilliant. He was not inclined to operate unless he was convinced of the need and that benefit would result; and he was always anxious to make a diagnosis before rather than at the operation. In spite of his critical attitude to his own work, his professional writings covered a wide field, for, in addition to those already mentioned, he translated and edited *Billroth's Clinical Surgery* for the New Sydenham Society (1881), contributed various articles to *Heath's Dictionary of Practical Surgery*, wrote on "Traumatism and Insanity" in *Tuke's Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892, vol. ii), "The Development of London Hospitals during the Nineteenth Century" (*Lancet*, 1898,



ii), "Insanity and Surgical Operations" in Allbutt's *System of Medicine*, "The Surgery of the Heart" in Musser and Kelly's *System of Treatment* (1911), and "Intestinal Obstruction" in Latham and English's *System of Treatment* (1912, vol. ii). His wide acquaintance with various forms of athletics prompted him to write an interesting article on "Periostitis following Muscular Exertion" (*Practitioner*, 1897).

Between 1904 and 1911 death or premature retirement deprived the active staff of St. George's Hospital of four on the surgical and three on the medical side, and at the moment it is difficult to realize all that this further loss entails. Dent was a staunch and generous friend to the school, an ideal and absolutely impartial chairman of committees, a wise leader, and a charming colleague. Though the time limit would have necessitated his retirement from the staff in 1915, he was fully in sympathy with young men, and thus was a successful and graphic teacher.

As an Alpine climber Mr. Dent had so long been famous that the world at large thought of him in this, rather than in his professional, capacity. He made the first ascent of the Aiguille du Dru after eighteen unsuccessful attempts, the first ascent of the Rothhorn from Zermatt, and of other Alpine peaks, but his greatest achievements were in the Caucasus, where he not only climbed the peaks, but explored the range. He undertook in 1889 the sad duty of searching for the bodies of W. Donkin and H. Fox, who were killed on Koshtantau, in 1888; he had gone out with them and would have shared their fate had it not been that he was prostrated by illness. He wrote a charming book, *Above the Snow Line*, published by Longmans in 1885, edited and wrote a large part of the volume on *Mountaineering* in the Badminton Series (1892, third edition 1900), contributed largely to *The Alpine Journal*, and gave a Friday evening lecture at the Royal Institution "On the Influence of Science on Mountaineering" (1895). He also gave two juvenile lectures on "How Mountains are Made and Destroyed" before the Society of Arts in 1897. He joined the Alpine Club in 1872, was elected to the Committee in 1874, was Secretary (1878-1880), Vice-President (1884), and President (1887). It is curious that Sir Alfred Wills, who was the third President of the Club (1863-1865), also entered into the valley of shadows early in August. Dent was the first and only President of the recently formed Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club. He was an expert photographer, and often exhibited the fine effects which he had obtained in the Alps and Caucasus, especially at the Graphic Society of St. George's Hospital, of which he was at one time President. He had an extensive collection of photographs of patients, and last year gave a cinematograph demonstration of gastric peristalsis in hypertrophic stenosis of the pylorus before the Section for Diseases of Children of the Royal Society of Medicine. He had wide interests, was a member of the



executive committee of the Athenaeum, belonged to many social clubs, and leaves numerous friends. Earlier in life he was fond of acting, wrote some farces, and under the title, *Fruit and Blossom*, adapted Pailleron's *Etincelle*.

H. D. R.

The following tribute was circulated throughout the Metropolitan Police District on August 27th by the Commissioner, Sir Edward Henry, G.C.V.O., C.S.I.:

It is with deep regret that the Commissioner acquaints the Force of the death of the chief surgeon last evening.

A singularly able man, he devoted to the Metropolitan Police, from the time of his appointment in 1904, his whole-hearted efforts. The Police Medical Service has been greatly improved under his care and guidance, and those who have been brought in touch with him by sickness will long remember the personal and kindly interest he took in every case. The Commissioner feels that he has lost an able and fearless counsellor in all medical questions affecting the wellbeing of the Force.

(Signed) E. R. HENRY.

The memorial service, held on Friday, August 30th, at St. Peter's, Vere Street, was largely attended by friends and by representatives of the Royal College of Surgeons (Sir Rickman Godlee), the Royal Society of Medicine (Sir H. Morris), the Metropolitan Police, the Alpine Club, St. George's and the Belgrave Hospitals; and the burial at Kensal Green Cemetery was followed by hundreds of policemen who voluntarily came to show their respect.

By order of the Commissioner of Police, the body was carried into the church at Vere Street by men of the C Division, and at the cemetery it was carried to the grave by men of the X Division.

AN OLD COLLEAGUE writes:

In the death of Clinton Dent the profession deeply mourns the loss of a great personality—a personality which made itself felt in all that he said and in all that he did. Throughout the whole of his very active life Dent was always “up and doing.” He was a man of great force of character, of wide and comprehensive views, absolutely unbiassed by petty jealousy or party spirit, both in his professional work and that—and it was great—which lay outside it. A voracious reader, he had acquired an extensive and accurate knowledge of many subjects connected and unconnected with his profession as a surgeon. All that he read he inwardly digested; in all that he did he was earnest, thorough, and scrupulously conscientious. To employ the expression “a right judgement in all things” may be strong language in the case of any human being, but it may be truthfully averred that in a delicate or difficult question the greatest respect was invariably paid to Dent's judgement. His opinion never failed to carry weight, because it was universally accepted



that he never spoke at random or expressed an opinion without careful consideration of the point in debate.

Such attributes made him an ever helpful and valuable colleague in his various fields of action, whether it were as Surgeon and Governor of his hospital, in his office in Scotland Yard as Chief Surgeon of Metropolitan Police, on the committee of the Alpine Club, or in the less important associations with which he was connected.

He combined in a marked degree both theory and practice. He was an enthusiast in everything that he undertook, whether it was work or whether it was play. To his superabundance of energy and activity of thought it was due that in lecturing, and even in ordinary conversation, his words at times followed one another with so much rapidity that it was difficult for a listener to grasp his meaning and occasionally to distinguish his words. But in his prepared speeches or addresses it was a real pleasure to hear him. They were always good. None of those who heard his introductory address at the opening of the session at St. George's Hospital on "The Nature and Significance of Pain" (delivered without a note of any kind) are likely to forget the impression that it made.

It was not all mere brain work with Dent. He was a man of many accomplishments. As a photographer he was unsurpassed; as a mountaineer he had few equals. His pictures of the High Alps and the Caucasus show him to have been a true artist; they formed an interesting and pleasing group in many an exhibition. His professional attainments and his contributions to literature and science have already been set forth and may well be omitted from this memoir.

As an after-dinner speaker Dent was peculiarly attractive by reason of his manner and his matter. The speeches he made sparkled with wit and humour; otherwise they gratified the more serious members of his audience.

As a host he had few peers. One of his great delights was to entertain a few friends at his dinner-table; most pleasant dinners they were. It was on such occasions that he displayed his knowledge of a vast variety of subjects, and it was realized by his guests to what an extent he made himself master of them. His house was filled with art treasures—ample evidence of his good taste in silver plate, furniture, pictures, embroidery, and what not.

Dent was in all respects a well-read man, and the results of his reading in conjunction with his originality illumined his conversation. But it was during the later years of his life that what may be termed his chief work was done—from the time, that is to say, when he was appointed Chief Surgeon to the Metropolitan Police. From the date of that appointment in 1904 his heart and soul were in his work in Scotland Yard, and most excellent work he did there. This office is no sinecure, but to Dent, so far as one could judge, it was almost child's play, so inexhaustible was his energy, so great his ability to solve a difficulty. He rendered yeoman service to one of the most important departments of municipal London, and his



name will be intimately associated with many recent improvements in the organization of the Force. He was popular with the divisional surgeons, and was liked by the men.

With his evenly balanced mind, he avoided mistakes arising from hasty conclusions. He was shrewd in matters of business, but scrupulously honourable in his dealings with men. As a consequence, he secured to himself the utmost confidence in his integrity of all with whom he came into contact. He was a clever, able, upright man, and he was a staunch friend. Echo answers *Qualis erat!*