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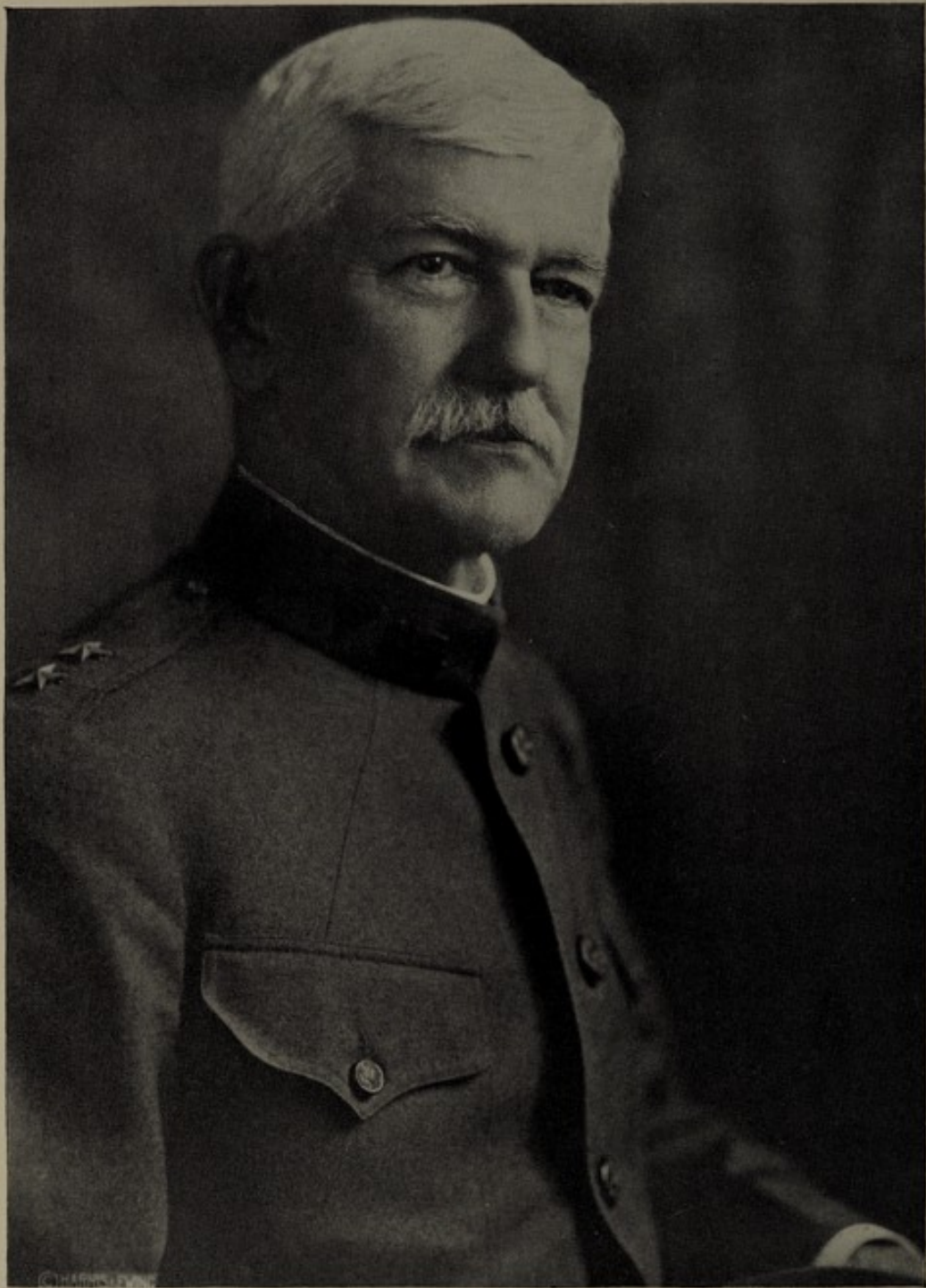
In Memoriam

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M. C. Gorgas.

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In Memoriam*

By S. ADOLPHUS KNOPF, M.D.

New York

At its last meeting, in 1920, in St. Louis, the Association honored itself by the unanimous election of General Gorgas to the Honorary Vice-Presidency. The General belonged to us officially, as a director since 1917, but as an Honorary Vice-President he was ours only a few months, for he passed away from his earthly labors on behalf of suffering mankind on July 4, 1920, the day set aside to commemorate the declaration of our political independence. Many were the obituaries which appeared at the time of the great General's death, in all of which high tributes were paid to his achievements. One of the most touching which it was the author's privilege to read was by the General's successor, Merritt W. Ireland, Surgeon General of the United States Army.

William Crawford Gorgas, the son of General Josiah and Amelia (Gayle) Gorgas, was born in Mobile, Alabama, October 3, 1854. General Ireland speaks of the parents and their son William in the following graceful terms:

General Josiah Gorgas was Chief of Ordnance of the Confederate Army during the Civil War and later president of the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn. His mother was Amelia Gayle, a famous beauty, daughter of the war governor of Alabama. In lineage and personality, the late Surgeon General was a typical Southerner. He had what might be called the Alabama temperament, a pleasant, suave, affable manner and an attractive disposition, which, wherever he went, made him many friends.

William C. Gorgas received his preliminary and classical education at the University of the South from which he graduated in 1875. He then entered Bellevue Hospital Medical College, receiving his degree as M.D. in 1879, and subsequently served as interne there for two years. He entered the army in 1880 and received a commission as first lieutenant. As his first post he was sent to Fort Brown, Texas, and it was

* From the advance sheets of *The History of the National Tuberculosis Association*, by S. Adolphus Knopf.

here that we may say he was fortunate enough to contract the yellow fever which rendered him immune for the great work he was to do later on. He was promoted to captain in 1885, and served during the Spanish American War as Major and Brigadier Surgeon of Volunteers. On July 6, 1898, he received his commission as Major in the regular army. At the close of the Spanish American War Major Gorgas was made Chief Sanitary officer of Havana, in which capacity he served from 1898 to 1902.

General Gorgas's achievements in the combat of yellow fever in Cuba and in the Panama Canal Zone are so well known and have been referred to so often in the obituaries and biographies published of him that we may content ourselves by merely quoting here the following impressive statements from General Ireland's tribute:

When de Lessep started his ill-fated venture at canal building in 1880, the French occupants found the Isthmus a death trap and during the nine years of occupancy they lost 22,819 laborers from the disease. At this time Panama was called "the White Man's Grave." When the United States took charge of the Canal in 1904, the death rate was as high as ever and a yellow fever epidemic was actually going on. In less than a year's time, the disease was completely wiped out and there was not a single case since May, 1906.

For his work in Cuba Gorgas was made a Colonel and Assistant Surgeon General by special act of Congress in March, 1903. In 1907 he was made a member of the Isthmus Canal Commission and as such he remained in charge of the sanitation of the Isthmus until the winter of 1913.

In 1913, at the request of the British government, Gorgas went to South Africa to investigate conditions in the Rand mines where the natives were dying at a fearful rate from pneumonia, miners' consumption, malarial fever, and tuberculosis. It was here that for the first time the General's interest was centered publicly upon tuberculosis, although from personal conversations it is known to the author that he had always felt a profound interest in the combat of this disease. He had been a member of our Association for a number of years. General Gorgas had indeed a deep insight into the primary causes of tuberculosis as a disease of the masses, such as bad housing, underfeeding, over-work, etc., and did not hesitate to state publicly that our present taxation evils, grants and immunities represent an unjust social order

that is largely responsible for insufficient and unsanitary housing, and poverty and want in general. He was an ardent disciple of Henry George and firmly believed in the single tax system.

Gorgas was an idealist, but an intensely practical one. In one of his most remarkable addresses entitled "Economic Causes of Disease," delivered in Cincinnati, September 29, 1914, he said:

While dwelling upon thoughts such as these (better housing, better food, and better clothing for the laborers in order to combat disease) I came across "Progress and Poverty." I was greatly impressed by the theory and was soon convinced that the single tax would be the means of bringing about the sanitary conditions I so much desired, and was striving for. It was impressed upon me in a concrete form everywhere, in the United States, in the tropics and particularly in Panama, the great benefit that some such scheme of taxation would confer upon sanitation.

The entire address, which to the men engaged in the combat of tuberculosis has a deep significance, was published by Dr. Walter Mendelson of New York and endorsed by many of our leading sanitarians, medical teachers, sociologists and economists throughout the country.

In South Africa, where General Gorgas had complete command of the situation, he at once inaugurated a campaign for the combat of pneumonia, tuberculosis, miners' consumption, etc., based on the principles of rational hygiene and general human welfare, such as we apply in the prevention of tuberculosis—more air space for sleeping and living quarters, a pure water supply, a sewer system, the destruction of flies and mosquitos, and a better food supply.

On January 16, 1914, Gorgas was appointed Surgeon General of the United States Army with the rank of Brigadier General and in 1915 he was made Major General. During the summer and fall of 1916 he spent several months in South America, making a preliminary survey for the Rockefeller Foundation of localities still infested with yellow fever.

With the entrance of the United States into the World War in 1917, General Gorgas fulfilled the duties of his high office in a remarkably efficient way. The subject of tuberculosis was of course of particular interest because so much work had to be done in order to safeguard our troops from contracting the disease, and it was given close attention. General Gorgas selected for this work the best talent among the military and civilian population. In the general history of our association and

in Colonel Bushnell's biography the work done by the division of tuberculosis in the Surgeon General's Office has already been referred to in detail.

General Gorgas showed his farsighted interest in the tuberculosis problem of the army by appointing Colonel Bushnell to the task of looking after that disease. He saw that the Colonel was not interfered with by other officers and left him free to do exactly what he thought best, so that the responsibility for the course pursued was really Colonel Bushnell's. It is one evidence of the greatness of General Gorgas that having selected the men whom he needed he left them alone, in the confidence that they would do the right thing and without the wish to add to his own renown by taking to himself any credit that might be acquired by the course pursued.

In recognition of General Gorgas's service to medical science and to humanity at large, many honors were conferred upon him. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal of the United States and was made Commander of the Legion of Honor of France. He was knighted by King George of England and decorated by King Albert of Belgium, as well as by rulers of other foreign countries. Honorary degrees were conferred on him by the University of Pennsylvania, University of the South, Harvard, Brown, Alabama, Tulane, Johns Hopkins, Oxford, Lima, and other universities. His alma mater, now the New York University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College, conferred on him the degree of LL.D. in June, 1918, in the midst of the great war. A brilliant assembly gathered in the amphitheatre of the college to pay homage to their distinguished fellow alumnus. It was largely composed of physicians training for or already active in war work. At the conclusion of the ceremonies, the General made a gracious address, expressing his appreciation of the willingness of the American medical profession to do its duty in the great war. He congratulated those present on having the great privilege to serve their country in an hour of greatest need, bidding them an affectionate God-speed. He concluded by saying that he hoped soon to see them all on their job. Many of those present he hoped to meet in France for which country he was about to sail with the Honorable Newton D. Baker, the Secretary of War. Besides the honors conferred on General Gorgas which have just been mentioned, he was awarded the Mary Kingsley medal from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (1907), a gold medal of the American Museum of Safety (1914), and a special

medal from the American Medical Association (1914). Besides being President of the American Medical Association in 1909-1910, he was a member of the American Society of Tropical Medicine, American Public Health Association, and Association of Military Surgeons; Honorary Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, and of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, and Associate Member of the Societe de pathologie exotique de Paris.

After his retirement from active duty in the Army, during the year 1919, General Gorgas was occupied with yellow fever investigations at Guayaquil and other South American foci, and in 1920 the question of exploring the African foci came up. General Gorgas reached London on his way to West Africa on May 19, apparently in the best of health, and after a short period of travel on the continent, during which time he was decorated by King Albert of Belgium, he returned to London on May 29th. On the following day he had a stroke of apoplexy from which he never recovered. The funeral ceremonies in London and in Washington were conducted with the military and civil honors becoming his rank and his distinction.

To characterize the man Gorgas, we may be permitted to quote again from General Ireland's tribute: "Reticent and shy in public address, kindly, modest and unselfish in authority, patient and openminded, General Gorgas stands as one of the great figures in the application of science to the conquest of disease." To have known him intimately was indeed a privilege and his kindly face will never be forgotten by those who served with him, or under him, or came into personal contact with him socially. We are indebted to Mrs. Gorgas for the photograph of the General which she considers most excellent and the best ever taken of him. It was taken just before his retirement from the Army.

With the passing away of General Gorgas the world has lost one of the greatest medical authorities of the American Army, a true benefactor of mankind, an ideal soldier, and a most lovable man. His achievements in preventive medicine have placed his name among the great immortals of the age.

