

**Memoir : Albert J. Ochsner [and] An appreciation by F. H. Martin.**

**Contributors**

Mayo, William James, 1861-1939.  
Martin, Franklin H. 1857-1935.

**Publication/Creation**

Chicago : Surg. Pub. Co., 1925.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/wqdcddqgh>



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

MEMOIR—ALBERT J. OCHSNER

42

*Reprint from*  
**SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS**  
*September, 1925, pages 255-258*  
Published by Surgical Pub. Co., Chicago, U.S.A.





## MEMOIR—ALBERT J. OCHSNER

UNDER the whispering pines of a country cemetery on Honey Creek, Sauk County, Wisconsin, the mortal remains of Dr. Albert J. Ochsner were laid to rest July 28, 1925.

Dr. Ochsner was a descendant of Wisconsin pioneers from near Zurich, Switzerland. His grandfather and father opened up a new country and made a home for themselves. Dr. Ochsner was educated in the country schools near his home and in the University of Wisconsin, where in 1884 he took the degree of Bachelor of Science as honor man of his class, having done the four years' work in three years. He was greatly interested in microscopy, which was then a comparatively new subject. His every inclination toward medicine, he was graduated from Rush Medical College in 1886, and spent the next two years in graduate study abroad. He received his first surgical inspiration from the late Dr. Moses Gunn, a striking figure in surgery in the early days in Chicago. Ochsner's knowledge of the microscope led to a position as instructor in histology at Rush Medical College. On the death of Gunn, Dr. Charles T. Parkes, professor of anatomy at Rush, took the chair of surgery, and Ochsner became his first assistant and chief of clinics. When Parkes died, Dr. Nicholas Senn took the chair of surgery, and for five years Ochsner served as his chief of staff. Ochsner, a tireless student, was one of a group of brilliant young men who surrounded Christian Fenger, who at that time was entering into his deservedly great reputation in surgical pathology.

In 1891, the original Augustana Hospital of about twenty beds, housed in a small frame building on the site of the present Augustana Hospital of 246 beds at the corner of Garfield Street and Cleveland Avenue, Chicago, needed a chief surgeon, and the place was given to Ochsner, whose extraordinary ability as diagnostician, operator, and teacher quickly made the hospital one of the most notable institutions in Chicago. I became acquainted with Ochsner while he was acting as assistant to Senn, and from the beginning was an interested and admiring observer of his work in the building of a great surgical clinic.

Few men of Dr. Ochsner's generation have equaled him in contributions to the science and art of surgery. The almost intuitive readiness with which he grasped important general surgical principles was one of his most striking characteristics. A fearless crusader for the truth, he was so far in advance of his time and so little interested in attracting attention to himself, that his name is not associated with many of his greatest contributions.



In the early days in Chicago, milk infected by the bovine bacillus of tuberculosis caused a great variety of tuberculous processes, especially in young persons. Tuberculous glands of the neck at that time were called scrofula, and patients were subjected to extensive dissections for their removal. Ochsner, after removing tuberculous glands, would thoroughly remove the tonsils, through which he believed that most of such infections came. At that period the direct relationship of the bacillus of tuberculosis to scrofulosis was not generally recognized.

Early in Ochsner's clinic it became the usual thing to see him with tooth forceps and root extractor clear up the septic mouths of his patients after operations, because he believed that rheumatism and many other forms of disease might have their origin in bad teeth. He had an arrangement with one of the dental schools whereby the poor patients of his clinic were later given the necessary dental reconstruction attention.

In the early days of our knowledge of the treatment of hernia, Ochsner used the non-operative procedure with young children of raising the foot of the bed to keep the intestines out of the hernial sac and noted how quickly the average patient was thereby cured. He was the first to point out that in cases of femoral hernia, if the sac was thoroughly freed, ligated, and dropped back, sutures were unnecessary, because the circular opening would heal to the center if it was not disturbed. He said that the certainty of cure of femoral hernia was in inverse proportion to the length of time consumed in the operation. An operation lasting an hour would usually fail, while one lasting from five to ten minutes would nearly always succeed.

The surgical condition with which Ochsner's name was most closely associated was appendicitis, or rather the treatment of acute spreading septic peritonitis, the result of acute perforating appendicitis. Ochsner early pointed out that sufficient distinction was not made between perforating appendicitis and its resultant septic peritonitis. He showed that to remove an appendix which had done its deadly work, in the face of an active, spreading, septic peritonitis, often did more harm than good. He made evident that the great factor in tiding the patient over an acute spreading peritonitis was to give nothing by stomach for a few days, in order to stop the spread of the infection by means of intestinal peristalsis, and to supply the patient with water by proctoclysis or hypodermoclysis to maintain adequate elimination.

Ochsner was a man without vanity. He was intensely interested in surgery, faithfully attending medical society meetings, reading papers, and participating in discussions. He was the author of a number of valuable treatises on surgery. He received just recognition from universities, both at home and abroad. He was a member of the Board of Regents of the American College of Surgeons from its inception, the president of the College in 1923, the president of the American



Surgical Association in 1924, and for twenty-five years, from 1900, professor of clinical surgery in the University of Illinois Medical Department.

But why recapitulate these scientific activities which are so well known to all? As my lifelong friend, my companion in traveling both at home and abroad, it is Ochsner, the man, of whom I wish to speak. Honest, sincere, kindly, I never knew him to say a word or do an act that little children might not have heard or seen. An instinctive courtesy and consideration for others, and charity under all circumstances, were his most conspicuous traits. A man of strong convictions and independent thought, he always conceded the same rights to others. He was interested in young men in medicine, and supported and helped to educate a group of grateful students.

In the death of Ochsner I feel a great personal loss which words fail me to express. Spiritually, morally, and professionally, I profited greatly from my association with him. Tribute had been paid Dr. Ochsner in universal expressions of regret, and in expressions of sympathy to his family, especially to his wife, who labored faithfully by his side for more than thirty years.

A gallant soul has passed from us. His memory will be a sacred heritage to those who had the privilege of knowing him.

WILLIAM J. MAYO.

### AN APPRECIATION

IN the death of Albert J. Ochsner, the American College of Surgeons shares with the whole medical world an irreparable loss. He was the first president of the Clinical Congress; one of the Founders and a past-president of the College, its treasurer and constant supporter and counsellor from its inception, and one of the Editorial Staff of this, its official Journal.

Ochsner typified strength in every phase of his intellectual and physical being. One must have known him and have appreciated his character to understand how a man who so consistently shunned the spectacular, and who possessed his inherent modesty, could attain his eminence and wield his influence in the medical profession and in civic society. The great balance of this man of gigantic accomplishments was his force of character, supported by a strong physique and a keen intellect, which never were impaired or confused by dissipation. His heritage afforded an adequate background which was refined by educational advantages, and at the very outset he proved himself a man of vision and of scientific force, as evidenced by his thesis on microscopical investigations in embryology, based on work which he had done while an undergraduate student, which won for him a Fellowship in the Royal Microscopical Society. To his natural advantages he added untiring industry, unyielding perseverance, unerring judgment,



and unimpeachable honesty; he was devoted to his profession, had a personal interest in his associates and patients, lent his enthusiastic support to professional and lay societies, and was a lover of Art—pictures, sculpture, and music.

Ochsner, with his pleasing personality and his love of peace, was an uncompromising foe of all kinds of hypocrisy in living and unethical shifting in the profession. With his scientific mind tuned to accuracy, he was utterly unappreciative of the subtlety of creeds; yet all of his life he worked harmoniously and sympathetically in hospitals controlled by people of the strongest beliefs; and in his personal contact with peoples of all creeds, especially the poor and the helpless, his attitude was that of the Master Himself. The Golden Rule was his guiding principle.

The epoch-making anti-fee-splitting pledge of the American College of Surgeons was written by Doctor Ochsner, and he defended it with strong arguments and was in the forefront in the uncompromising enforcement of it. It is the Sermon on the Mount in medicine of the present and for the future, its meaning is unmistakable, and its language is not obscured by ornamentation.

The presidential gown of the American College of Surgeons, in which Doctor Ochsner was laid to rest, was placed upon him by Mrs. Ochsner, who said it was her feeling that this was a fitting tribute to the College in view of Doctor Ochsner's love for, and pride in, the organization.

FRANKLIN H. MARTIN.

Doctor Ochsner was born at Baraboo, Wisconsin, on April 3, 1858; son of Henry and Judith (Hottinger) Ochsner. B.Sc., University of Wisconsin, 1884, LL.D. 1909; M.D., Rush Medical College, 1886; interne, Presbyterian Hospital, 1886-1887; Post-Graduate courses, Universities of Vienna and Berlin, 1887-1888. Married Marion H. Mitchell, of Chicago, April 3, 1888. Children, Albert Henry and Bertha. Practiced in Chicago 1889-1925; instructor in surgery, Rush Medical College, 1889-1895; professor of clinical surgery, University of Illinois, College of Medicine, 1900-1925; chief surgeon, Augustana Hospital, 1891-1925, and St. Mary's Hospital, 1896-1925. Spent two weeks of every three months at various surgical clinics in the United States, 1895-1907. First Lieutenant, U. S. Medical Reserve Corps, 1908-1916; Major, U. S. Medical Reserve Corps, 1916; on active duty during late war. President, Clinical Congress of Surgeons of North America, 1910-1912; Founder of American College of Surgeons, Regent and Treasurer, 1913-1925, President, 1923-1924; Fellow, American Surgical Association (President, 1924); member, Southern Surgical and Gynecological Society, American Medical Association (Chairman, Surgical Section, 1901), Illinois State Medical Society; Chicago Medical Society, Chicago Pathological Society, Chicago Surgical Society, International Society of Surgeons; Fellow, Royal Microscopical Society of England; Honorary Fellow, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland; Honorary Member, National Academy of Medicine of Mexico, National Surgical Society of the Republic of Switzerland, and Medical Society of Stockholm. Member of Editorial Staff, SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS. Author: Handbook on Appendicitis (1st edition 1902, 2d edition 1906); Clinical Surgery for the Instruction of Practitioners and Students (1st edition 1902, 2d edition 1905, 3d edition 1912); Thyroid and Parathyroid Glands, 1910; Yearbook on Surgery, 1917-1925; Surgery of the Thyroid Gland; Treatise on Surgical Diagnosis and Treatment, 1918; Organization, Management, and Construction of Hospitals (1st edition 1907, 2d edition 1913); and many monographs on surgical subjects.







