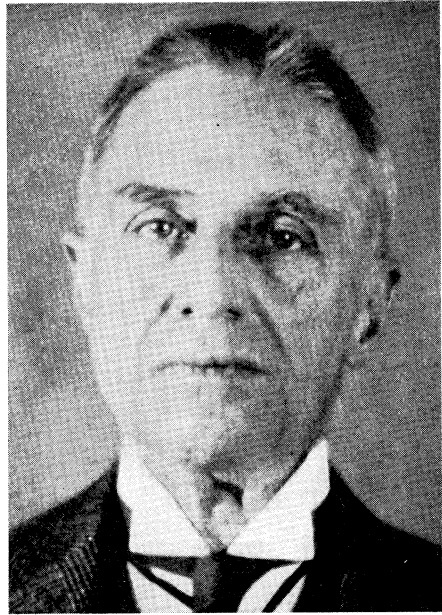




WILLIAM SYDNEY THAYER, M.D.  
Baltimore, Md.  
1864-1932

*Eighty-first President, A. M. A.  
Minneapolis Session  
June 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 1928*



*W. S. Thayer*

THE ELECTION TO THE PRESIDENCY of the Association of Dr. William Sydney Thayer was a recognition of outstanding achievement in medical science and the conferring of the highest honor on one who had already gained leadership in this country and abroad.

Doctor Thayer was born in Milton, Mass., June 23, 1864. He came from a distinguished family, of which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes had been members. His father James Bradley Thayer was professor of law at Harvard, and his brother, Ezra Thayer, became dean of the Harvard Law School. In his physique and character, in his love of scholarship and in his standards and ideals, Doctor Thayer exemplified to a high degree the best that New England blood and training have to give. After an elementary education in a private school in Milton, he attended the Cambridge High School and later Harvard University, where he graduated in Arts in 1885, and received his medical degree from the Harvard Medical School in 1889. Following an internship at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and a period of postgraduate study in Berlin and Vienna, he began as a general practitioner in Boston, but in 1890 was called to Baltimore to join Professor Osler's house-staff in the Johns Hopkins Hospital as a resident physician, which position he held until 1898. He succeeded to the position of attending physician and head of the medical department of the

dispensary from 1898 to 1906, at the same time serving as associate professor of medicine and later as professor of clinical medicine. Dr. Thayer did not become the immediate successor of Dr. Osler when he left in 1905 to be the Regius Professor of Physic at the University of Oxford, because at the time Dr. Thayer did not feel able to assume, for financial reasons, a fulltime professorship. However, in 1918, he became professor of medicine in Johns Hopkins University, and physician in chief to the hospitals, resigning in 1921, when he became professor emeritus. He continued to serve as visiting physician to the hospital, and as consulting physician to many other Baltimore institutions.

In later years Dr. Thayer often recalled the fifteen years of intimate association with William Osler—"the Chief" as one of the privileges of his life. Here he made some of his most important investigations, such as his studies of the blood in leukemia (1891), in typhoid (1895), and in malaria (1893-1900). He worked with Lazear in the cultivation of the malaria parasite in *Anopheles maculipennis*. Here he did his researches upon the third heart sound (1908-9), upon cardiac murmurs (1901-1919), upon the cardiovascular complications and sequels of typhoid fever (1903-4), upon arteriosclerosis (1904), upon chorea (1906), upon heart block (1916), and upon gonococcal endocarditis and endocarditis lenta (subacute bacterial). It was during this period that he attended the International Medical Congress in Moscow in 1897, as a representative of Johns Hopkins University and Hospital. His address was on "The Increase of Eosinophilic Cells in Trichinosis." At that time, he was elected an honorary member of the Therapeutic Society of Moscow.

In the Medical Service of the Army he was one of the 107 charter members of the Reserve Corps who accepted commissions as First Lieutenant on July 5, 1908. He was a member of a medical board with Lieutenants V. C. Vaughan, Wm. T. Councilman, John H. Musser, and Simon Flexner, which in December 1908 recommended vaccination against typhoid fever in the Army and Navy, and that it be compulsory in time of war.

In 1917 he went with Dr. Frank Billings on an American Red Cross mission to Russia; he hesitated at first because of the serious illness of his wife who was in the late stages of cardiac disease, but she urged him to go, both of them fully realizing that this meant their last farewell.

At the beginning of World War I he was commissioned a Major and Chief of the medical service of Base Hospital No. 18, which was organized at Johns Hopkins in 1916, and went to France with

it in 1917. In 1918 he was promoted to Colonel and later to Brigadier General, Medical Corps, and Chief Medical Consultant to the American Expeditionary Forces. The Distinguished Service Medal was conferred on him in 1919, and he was awarded the rank of officer in the French Legion of Honor in 1923.

After the war he was Brigadier General of the Medical Section, Officers Reserve Corps, and his title was changed to Brigadier General Auxiliary, U.S.A.

His accomplishments were recognized by election to honorary membership in numerous domestic and foreign medical societies. He was president of the Association of American Physicians, the Interurban Clinical Club, the American Society of Tropical Medicine, and the American Society for Clinical Investigation; also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Historical Society, and the National Research Council. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa Society, and Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

He was also an honorary member of the Royal Society of Medicine of London, the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland, the Royal Medical Society of Budapest, the Academie de Medicine of Paris, the International Tuberculosis Association, and a corresponding member of the Gesellschaft für innere Medizin of Berlin and of Kinderheilkunde in Vienna.

In the American Medical Association Doctor Thayer served as Chairman of the Section on Practice of Medicine in 1902-3. He was a member of the editorial board of the Archives of Internal Medicine from the time this publication first began in 1908 until 1932. He was made a member of the Judicial Council in 1918, and served on that body until his election as President-Elect in 1927.

Great Britain honored Doctor Thayer by asking him to give the Bright Lecture in clinical medicine in 1927. He was for many years a member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard University. He received the LL.D. degree from Washington College in 1907, from the University of Edinburgh in 1927, and from McGill University in 1929. He was appointed by Secretary of Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur to serve as a member of the Education Commission to study the relationship of the national government to education. In 1928 he received the degree of Docteur Honoris Causa from the University of Paris, and during the same year was appointed Gibson Lecturer at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. He was an honorary Fellow of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of Edinburgh and Ireland.

The University of Chicago in 1907 conferred upon him the honorary Doctor of Science. He gave the Alpha Omega Alpha annual lecture in 1929, and the Frank Billings Lecture in 1932.

In May 1927 a large and representative group of friends and colleagues of Dr. William S. Thayer gathered at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C., to present to the Johns Hopkins Medical School a lectureship in his honor, to be called "The William Sydney Thayer and Susan Reed Thayer Lectureship in Clinical Medicine."

The contributions of Doctor Thayer were numerous, both to medical and lay literature. He was the author of "The Malaria Fevers of Baltimore" published in 1895, "Lectures on Malaria Fevers," 1897, "Studies of Bacterial Endocarditis," 1925, "America a Poem," 1917, "Other Verse," 1926, and in 1931 appeared that interesting volume "Osler and Other Papers," which contains many of his addresses and his reminiscences of Osler and frequent affectionate tributes to his "dearest and wisest master." As a writer his style, both in prose and in poetry, was exceptional. His poem on Osler contains the following:

"A heart whose alchemy transforms the dross  
of dull suspicion to the gold of love  
A spirit like the fragrance of some flower  
That lingers round the spot that this has graced"

and from the sorrow that came with the loss of his wife came these lines:

"But ah, how short the day—my light has passed,  
Has vanished as the sun that sets; and now  
Again in darkness and alone. I grope  
Along the sombre way that winds before."

He was a natural linguist, and aside from Latin and Greek he could read and think in French, German and Russian.

He enjoyed the company of congenial persons in dinner clubs and other social groups. To his friends he was known as a lover of books, of people, of sports, and of nature. A rare man of unique personality, high minded, tolerant and lovable, a cultivated man of many talents and of excellent qualities.

Withal he was a great teacher and clinician who left in the minds of many young men an appreciation of the significance of medical service.

He died of heart disease on December 10, 1932, while visiting in Washington, at the age of sixty-eight years. His grave is in Concord, Massachusetts, near that of his New England ancestors.