

OBITUARY

James Tate Mason: An Appreciation

JAMES Tate Mason came from a sturdy ancestry in the Old Dominion. His grandfather, Capt. Claiborne Rice Mason, was a self-educated man, and was a pioneer railroad contractor who constructed the greater part of the Chesapeake and Ohio, and much of the old Virginia Midland Railroad. He was one of Stonewall Jackson's engineers during the Civil War. In fact the firm of Mason, Rinehart & Co., has existed



JAMES TATE MASON
1882-1936

for more than a hundred years under various names, but always with a Mason in the firm, and at the present time as the Mason-Walsh-Atkinson-Kier Company is building the Coulee Dam in the State of Washington, the largest construction project ever undertaken by man.

Captain Mason's son, Dr. Claiborne Rice Mason, was also under Stonewall Jackson, was wounded and captured, and was kept as a prisoner of war at Elmira until the surrender at Appomatox. He was paroled

and became a student at the University of Virginia, and later graduated in Medicine at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He later married Mary Moore Woolfolk of Orange County, Virginia, a member of a prominent colonial family. From this union the only child was James Tate Mason, born May 20, 1882, at Lahore, Orange County, Virginia, where his father was a practitioner.

Young Tate Mason went to the Locustdale Military Academy when fourteen years old and was unusually well liked. He soon demonstrated remarkable athletic ability, particularly in baseball. He entered the University of Virginia Medical School in 1901 and made an enviable record as regards both athletics and popularity. He was a star on the baseball team and was beloved by his fellow students—in fact to the day of his death he was constantly in demand by former college friends. His scholarship was only average, but in spite of this he was as well liked by his professors as by his classmates. Even today at the University of Virginia his wholesome good fellowship and loveliness are a tradition.

In his medical schools days Mason served during summer months as assistant to Colonel Frazier, owner and manager of the Rockbridge Alum Springs. There were no vacations for him, as was so often the case in Virginia on account of the poverty of the early 1900's. Each summer he entertained his parents for a few weeks at the Rockbridge Alum Springs. His radiant and winning personality as a boy proved a valuable asset and made the Colonel so fond of him that when Colonel Frazier died thirty years later he made Doctor Mason heir to half of his small estate. Such devotion was Doctor Mason's good fortune all his lifetime, for no man ever made stauncher friends or more of them.

He graduated from the University of Virginia in 1905, took the Virginia State Board immediately, and then began a two-year service at the Philadelphia Polyclinic, now known as the Postgraduate School of the University of Pennsylvania. Always his rare personality made friends. After this he was Resident at the Municipal Hospital of Philadelphia for the Treatment of Contagious Diseases.

In the spring of 1907 the Pacific Coast Steamship Company built two ships at Camden, New Jersey. One of these, *The President*, was going around the Horn, and young Mason, just through with internships, applied for a place as ship's surgeon. The trip was to pay a hundred dollars and a ticket home from Seattle. On arrival in Seattle, after his first and only adventure as a mariner, he found the Northwest July at its best—a new country, a wonderful climate—and his youthful enthusiasm and lack of other plans for the future,

together with total assets of less than fifty dollars, made him seek a job. Within two weeks he found a position as local surgeon for the Pacific Coast Coal Company at Franklin and later at Black Diamond, Washington. There he spent two years, actively engaged in looking after the miners and their families. He always loved people—and these new people, with their trials and their babies, felt that the new doctor was a Godsend. They loved him. He returned to Seattle in 1909 to engage in practice, and the miners in trouble still came to him for the rest of his life. The old timers at Black Diamond loved him so much that many tearfully attended his funeral twenty-seven years later.

On taking up practice in Seattle he rapidly acquired a large but not particularly remunerative following. He worked hard, made friends everywhere, but had little income. Within a few months he welcomed the opportunity to become physician to the County Jail, as well as to the family of the Sheriff, the late Robert Hodge.

In January, 1911, he married Laura DeWolfe Whitteley. Such new responsibilities spurred him to greater professional effort, particularly the arrival of his first-born, James Tate Mason, Jr., and later a daughter and another son.

He was elected Coroner of King County and took advantage of this opportunity to have a large autopsy experience and to start an Anatomical Club with his friends. The Anatomical Club later became the Seattle Surgical Society, now a flourishing organization. In 1914 he was made Superintendent and Surgeon of the King County Hospital, a position which he held until 1922. These eight years gave opportunity for a tremendous surgical experience. He took advantage of it with such diligence that, with visiting eastern surgical centers each few months, he became a finished surgeon. He was an original and unorthodox thinker, and made up for his lack of early schooling by phenomenal ability to observe and get the best out of what he saw and heard.

In 1917, Doctor Mason organized a partnership which later, with additions, became The Mason Clinic. In 1919 he and his associates organized and built the Virginia Mason Hospital, of which he was Chief Surgeon and President of the Hospital until his death.

Doctor Mason's ability as an organizer was abundantly shown in his hospital adventure. A private hospital is always an adventure, and the vicissitudes of high finance were beautifully demonstrated. Financial backing was not to be had for such a venture. He finally sought aid from a mortgage company. The president told him, "Yes, we'll loan you the money, but you won't want it because it will cost too much." This was a terrible set-back, and Mason's face showed it. Suddenly the president said, "Tate, I'll see that you get your money, and I'll have some fun, too, if you will do exactly as I say. We will loan you the money at 8 per cent and 10 per cent commission, and you can have it right now—but of course you won't take it. Leave this office and drop in at your bank. Tell them I have promised to let you have your money. Tell the next bank you know the same story. Tomorrow see a couple of other concerns about borrowing, and, if I am a good guesser, you will get your money on reasonable

terms and I will get a lot of satisfaction. The lender won't make a cent, and I'll have my joke."

It was done. Next day the money was obtained at normal interest, and the Virginia Mason Hospital was launched. A few years later Doctor Mason had the pleasure of burning the bonds in favor of a reasonable savings bank mortgage.

This new venture on so little capital was part of his life's ambition. He loved it and wanted it to prosper. Gradually more and more work arrived, and he became as busy in his own hospital as he had been at the County Hospital.

He was appointed Secretary to the Surgical Section of the American Medical Association, and after this time honors came fast. He was one of the founders of the Pacific Coast Surgical Association, a member of the Western Surgical, Southern Surgical, and American Surgical, as well as the Northwest Surgical and the Seattle Surgical Society. He was a member of the College of Surgeons, the American Medical Association, the Washington State Medical Association, and King County Medical Society. He was past president of the American Association for the Study of Goiter, 1930, and the Pacific Coast Surgical Association, 1931. At the time of his death he was consulting surgeon to the U. S. Marine Hospital, American Mail Line, Alaska Steamship Line, and the Northern Pacific Railroad. He was also President of the American Medical Association, surviving his inauguration *in absentia*, to this high office by five weeks.

A busy and active professional life, with his phenomenal ability to make and hold friends and patients, and much professional travel, began to take its toll. He was so much beloved that he was always a toast. As a story-teller he excelled, and as a speaker he had a unique style that everyone liked. Nurses adored him and brought him all their troubles—and he always had time for the ladies. He rarely spoke a cross word to anyone—in nearly twenty years' association he never had an argument with his partners. Yet at times he felt keenly any suggestion of a slight. A partner on one occasion had exploded on learning of a false accusation by a fellow practitioner and had announced that he was "going to tell that fellow what I know about him." Doctor Mason said, "Don't do it. If you ever need to use what you know about him it won't do any good if he knows that you know it"—showing the kindly politician that he was. Doctor Mason was deeply emotional inside, a fact known only to his close friends. He loved people, all people except a few, and the few usually never found out how he felt. He was kind and sympathetic and for this reason heard innumerable troubles of a non-professional nature. He usually saw a funny side to every situation, and always had a story to fit the occasion.

In 1932, he had a nervous breakdown and was out of the office for months. His blood pressure was up a little, and this disturbed him. At times he complained of extrasystoles and chest pains. He felt that he suffered with angina, though his partners could never agree with his own diagnosis. He recovered to the extent that he resumed his activities completely, though at times a little nervously depressed. He had been for years delegate from the Surgical Section to the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association, and this led to further political interest. In 1935 at Atlantic City he was made President-Elect of the Amer-

ican Medical Association. In November of that year he made a speaking tour for the Association, delivering a number of addresses before large audiences. He came home tired.

On Christmas Day, 1935, he went to pieces nervously and was admitted to his own hospital. Nervous symptoms predominated, and he went through a very trying time for a number of weeks. In March, he returned home, feeling much improved. He was struggling hard to regain his health in order to be inaugurated President of the American Medical Association.

After being home for about three weeks, on April 6th, he lunched with his partners and after lunch announced, "Boys, I believe I'm well. I am going to put in a full afternoon in the office"—and he did, admitting several patients for operation. That night lightning struck—an arterial thrombosis in the left leg—and forty-eight hours later, a left-sided paralysis (right cerebral thrombosis). Amputation of the leg followed, but there was no recovery. Five days after operation right arterial thrombosis and gangrene of the right leg—later other areas of gangrene—and suffering be-

yond human endurance. The last few weeks were lengthened and comforted by morphine and by wonderful nursing—and a devoted family who stayed by him constantly to the bitter end. The last weeks of his life were widely publicized. His inauguration *in absentia*, his listening by radio to the Kansas City meeting, the unanimous action of the House of Delegates to over-rule the ruling of the Judicial Council and to inaugurate a dying man as President—all are now matters of sad history, tributes by loving and grieving friends to comfort one about to die, and to help his family endure their sorrow.

Tate Mason never gave up hope of recovery or admitted the inevitable. He joked with his nurses and sent messages to his friends. Five days before his release from suffering he caused the writer, his closest associate, to make a rushing and emotional exit from the sick room. "John, I can't walk much this summer without any legs, and I love to be out of doors. Take me out a lot with you on your boat this summer."

J. M. B.

SECTION XI—*Societies, Programs and Proceedings*

AMERICAN PROCTOLOGIC SOCIETY

The American Proctologic Society held its annual meeting in Kansas City on May 11th and 12th, with an attendance of 175. The following were elected to Associate membership:

Dr. Harry W. Christianson, Minneapolis.

Dr. C. C. Hickman, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Dr. Lester P. Johnson, Ann Arbor.

Dr. Kenneth E. Smiley, Los Angeles.

Dr. Tom E. Smith, Dallas.

Dr. Victor K. Allen, Tulsa; Dr. Malcolm R. Hill, Los Angeles, and Dr. George H. Thiele, Kansas City, were

elevated to Fellowship in the Society. Dr. Louis J. Krouse of Cincinnati was made a Fellow Emeritus.

The following officers were selected for 1936-37:

President: Dr. Marion C. Pruitt, Atlanta.

Vice-president: Dr. Clement J. DeBere, Chicago.

Councillors: Dr. Edward G. Martin, Detroit; Dr. Martin S. Kleckner, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Secretary-treasurer: (re-elected) Dr. Curtice Rosser, Dallas.

The next annual meeting will be held in Atlantic City in June, 1937, with Dr. Homer I. Silvers as Chairman of Arrangements.

Curtice Rosser, M.D., Dallas, Secretary.