

HALFDAN SUNDT

In Memoriam

Halfdan Sundt, chief surgeon, died on the 18th of January, 1951. He was born in Finland on the 12th of August, 1873. He graduated in medicine in 1900. Then he worked as assistant doctor in the different departments of Ullevål Hospital in Oslo and in the Women's hospital in Bergen. Later on he was assistant doctor to different medical officers in large and exposed coastal districts in the west of Norway and in the North, and was also employed as medical officer in Gol in Hallingdal. In this way he obtained a thorough knowledge of the living conditions of people in different parts of Norway, a knowledge that was of importance in his later work.

In 1908 he was appointed resident surgeon at the Medical Fund's hospital at Vadsö. There he conceived the idea of building a coastal hospital for Finmark. The hospital was however not opened before he left Vadsö to take over his new appointment as chief surgeon of the Coastal Hospital at Stavern on September 1st, 1911, after Dr. Sinding-Larsen's retirement.

From this time onwards his life's work centered round this hospital. With its excellent position it was called a model hospital during Sinding-Larsen's time and Dr. Sundt carried on the medical side of the tradition, improving the high standard. If the maintenance of the hospital buildings did not quite keep pace with modern requirements the fault was not Dr. Sundt's. With his gift for making apposite remarks he commented: "The river of gold which flowed so freely during the early years after the First World War left our hospital untouched. Departmental rocks prevented us from turning some of it in this direction".

Dr. Sundt's extensive scientific publications are well known. His thesis for his doctorate in 1920,—*Malum coxae Calvé—Legg—Perthes*—is known in most civilised countries, and the follow-up examination he carried out 25 years later deservedly awoke much interest. This was printed as a supplement to the *Acta Chir. Scand.*, 1949, entitled: "Further investigations respecting *Malum coxae C. L. P.*, with special

regard to the prognosis and treatment". The investigations showed that the cases treated gave no better results than the untreated cases.

During the whole of his time—33 years—as chief surgeon of the Coastal Hospital, Dr. Sundt continued his always very thorough scientific research. The criticism was made that his works were too long, but there was much truth in the words of the first editor of the *Acta Orthopædica Scandinavica* "When Dr. Sundt has written a study the subject is so thoroughly investigated that there is no more to be said about it at the time."

This was the consequence of Dr. Sundt's urge to find the truth and examine it from all points. He was against, and despised, all dogma, both medical and non-medical, but his disdain was not less in evidence when new badly-formed opinions were put forward with the typical self-confidence of the half-scientific.

In his considerable study "*Über Diagnose und Häufigkeit der tuberkulösen Kniegelenk-Erkrankungen*" in 1932, he condemned the old medical dogma, which had been prevalent up to that time.

It would take up too much space for me to make detailed reference to his extensive scientific production—but his great work "*Arthrosyfiles congenita tardiva et acquisita et arthrometasyfiles*" should be mentioned.

He finished this work after retiring from the hospital. It is regarded as a standard work, and he received the Gold Medal of Oslo University for it.

Dr. Sundt also found time for interests outside his medical work. He wrote many articles about social-medical questions in Norwegian medical journals, and in the press about social questions. Having acted as medical officer in many parts of Norway's wide-spread country, he had acquired considerable knowledge in these matters.

He also found time for historical interests and in collaboration with a historical scholar he wrote an excellent little book "*Et Kystvern*" which deals with the history of Frederiksvaern—the oldest naval base in Norway.

Dr. Sundt had many public responsibilities. From 1939-46 he was President of the Norwegian National Association for Tuberculosis, and from 1933-34, President of the Norwegian Medical Association. He received many honours. He was an honourable member of the Scientific Academy. In 1946 he was created Knight of the Cross of St. Olav by King Haakon. The same year a statue was erected to him in the hospital's park.

He was an honourable member of the Scandinavian Orthopedic Association, and when he became the first honourable member of the



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young Norwegian Orthopedic Association in November 1950, we felt that ours was the greater honour.

Dr. Sundt was a fighter, even outside the medical sphere, and his pen could be severe. He was always fighting injustice. In the finest tribute paid to him at his funeral it was said that his heart always went out to the small, the lonely and the helpless. He defended their interests against all oppression, whether it appeared in the form of tyrannical prejudice or snobbishness or insistence upon red tape in all its different aspects.

With the death of Halfdan Sundt we have lost one of the great humanists of the medical profession, who undoubtedly owing to the modern demand for intensified specialisation, have become increasingly rare today. He was a scientist who sought always for the truth, and a great and unique personality.

Stavern, June 1951.

H. Stören.