

Robert Anthony Hatcher

February 6, 1868 — April 1, 1944

Robert Anthony Hatcher died suddenly of angina pectoris at his home on the evening of April 1. For the preceding nine years, 1935-1944, he had been Professor of Pharmacology, Emeritus, but despite his retirement from active teaching and research, his wise counsel was often sought and freely given; his death at the age of seventy-six is, therefore, a serious loss.

Born in New Madrid, Missouri, Robert Anthony Hatcher was the son of Richard Hatcher, an attorney and clerk of the County Court, and Elizabeth Marr Hatcher. His paternal uncle was a member of the House of Representatives of the United States, and the uncle on his mother's side was Judge Robert Marr of the Louisiana Supreme Court. When only eleven years old, Hatcher lost his father and went to New Orleans to live with Judge Marr, who at about the same time had lost his judgeship as the result of a political upheaval, leaving the family virtually penniless for several years. At the age of fourteen, Hatcher found it necessary to stop school, taking a job in a box factory where he worked ten hours daily six days a week; next he went to work for the drug firm of I. L. Lyons, with which firm he remained until 1887, when he entered the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy; he was graduated in 1889. Upon obtaining the degree of Ph.G. he returned to Lyons' where he remained for several years, during a few of which he also ran a pharmacy of his own. Thereafter he studied medicine in the School of Medicine of Tulane University of Louisiana in New Orleans, obtaining his medical degree in 1898. From 1899 to 1904 he was professor of *Materia Medica* at the Cleveland School of Pharmacy. He was also demonstrator of Pharmacology at the Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland in the years 1901-1903, where he was associated closely with Dr. Torald Sollmann, with whom he wrote a *Textbook of Materia Medica* (1904).

In 1904 Hatcher was called to Cornell as instructor in pharmacology and *materia medica*. He became assistant professor in 1906 and from 1908 to 1935 was professor of pharmacology. His effective teaching and extensive researches won him recognition as one of America's foremost leaders in his chosen field. His work on digitalis and its allied drugs is recognized throughout the world. Together with Dr. J. G. Brody he developed a method for the assay of the digitalis bodies which, in a modified form, is the official method of the current Pharmacopoeia of the United States, and is the basis of the International Standard of the League of Nations. Through his investigations of the actions of digitalis he became interested in the physiology of emesis, to which he and his students and colleagues made many fundamental contributions. He regarded this work as his most important accomplishment

in the field of research. Other of his pharmacological investigations were studies on the absorption and elimination of drugs from the animal body, more especially with reference to strychnine and the local anesthetics. He also made extensive studies on the synergistic and antagonistic actions of many drugs.

In 1915, he, together with Martin I. Wilbert, published the *Pharmacology of Useful Drugs*. Later he edited *Useful Drugs* published by the American Medical Association. During his long professorial life he inspired several of his students and staff to enter the research and teaching fields in which they have held fast to the rigid standards of integrity and truth that were always his. Among those was the late Soma Weiss, Hershey Professor of Physic in the Harvard Medical School.

Hatcher was an indefatigable worker, as was so well demonstrated during his struggles for an education, and he retained this unflagging energy and interest in his work until well after his retirement from active teaching duties. He was a member of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association from its establishment in 1905 until his retirement in 1943 at the age of seventy-five. The Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association paid him the tribute of making him a life member of the Council, the first man ever to receive that honor. Among other honors that of Master in Pharmacy was conferred upon him by his Alma Mater in 1928 and Columbia University made him Doctor of Science one year later.

Besides being a fellow of the American Medical Association, he was a member of the American Pharmaceutical Association, the Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, the American Physiological Society, the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, the American Society of Biological Chemists, the Harvey Society, and the New York Academy of Medicine. From 1915 to 1916 he was chairman of the Section on Pharmacology and Therapeutics of the American Medical Association.

He married Mary Q. Burton of Lewes, Delaware, on December 28, 1904, who survives him, together with their only son, Robert Lee Hatcher.

His many colleagues of the Faculty and of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry will miss Hatcher's outstanding soundness of judgment and great wealth of pharmacological knowledge which, coupled with his unswerving devotion to the truth, made him a man with whom association was a highly prized privilege.