Obituary

Reid Hunt
1870–1948

Reid Hunt, emeritus professor of pharmacology at the Harvard Medical School, died on March 7, 1948, after a long illness.

Dr. Hunt was born in Martinsville, Ohio, and received his early education there and at Wilmington College and Ohio University. He received his baccalaureate at Johns Hopkins, where he served as student assistant to Newell Martin. From his training with Martin he acquired a broad biological outlook on the problems of the physiological sciences which strongly influenced all his later work. After a year in Europe under Binz and Nussbaum he returned to Hopkins and received his doctorate in 1896, simultaneously acquiring his M.D. from the University of Maryland Medical School. From 1896 to 1898 he served at Columbia University Medical School as tutor in physiology. The next two years were spent in Egypt, studying the embryology of *Polipterus*. This work took him to the Upper Nile, where Kitchener was operating; indeed, he met Major Marchand at Fashoda. This incident is characteristic, since Dr. Hunt's acquaintance with important personages outside the field of science was phenomenal, despite his shyness and reticence.

On his return from Egypt he began his work in pharmacology on joining the department at Hopkins under Abel. His first work was concerned with adrenal gland extracts and with the pharmacology of epinephrine. His next paper, on the toxicity of methyl alcohol, is a classic and proved to be of great importance during the Prohibition Period, as did his *Studies in experimental alcoholism,* published in 1907.

In 1902 he went to Frankfurt to study with Ehrlich and remained there for two years. It was here that his interest in the detoxifying action of various agents was awakened and his interest in the fundamental problem of pharmacology—the relation of chemical constitution to physiologic action—firmly fixed. His preoccupation with these two problems continued throughout his life and found expression in his work on the cholines, begun not long after his return from Europe in 1904 to assume the post of chief of the Pharmacological Division of the Hygienic Laboratory, U. S. Public Health Service. In the course of this work he discovered the amazing activity of acetyl choline, and his studies made possible the rapid identification of this substance as the active principle of Loewi's "Vagusstoff"; thus, his work enabled the humoral theory of nerve impulse transmission to secure a firm chemical background almost as soon as it was enunciated. From 1907 to 1909 he studied the relation of the iodine content of the thyroid gland and its preparations to their physiological activity and demonstrated that the activity was proportional to the iodine content. In the course of these studies he was able to demonstrate for the first time the presence of the thyroid hormone in human blood.

In 1913 he left the Hygienic Laboratory to assume the chair of pharmacology at the Harvard Medical School. Here he completed his work on the cholines and contributed a further study of quaternary ammonium compounds.

His many general activities included chairmanship of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association, the presidency of the Pharmacopeial Convention, and the chairmanship of the Northeastern Section of the American Chemical Society. He was the first secretary and the third president of the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics and also chairman of the section on Pharmacology and Therapeutics of the American Medical Association. Until his retirement in 1935 he was consultant for the Chemical Warfare Service, U. S. Army, the Massachusetts State Board of Health, and the Hygienic Laboratory. He was also a member of the drug standardization Committee of the League of Nations. His membership in scientific bodies was extensive.

In his personal contacts he possessed great charm and was at his best in conversation with small groups. He brought to the physiological sciences a broad background of biology and chemistry and an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature. His memory will be a stimulating one for American pharmacology.

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