

# Dr. George Richards Minot—Known Today for His Cure of 'P.A.'

Dr. George Richards Minot  
(1885-1950)

(Minot is a private medical ward on second floor)

George Richards Minot was born a Bostonian of the First Order. The "Minot" name had figured for many years in the history and progress of that city, and wealth and influence were associated with it. It also is interesting to note that George Richards is one of many distinguished New England physicians to be found in the Minot family tree.

Minot received both his A.B. and M.D. degrees from Harvard and was house physician at Massachusetts General Hospital. He then spent two years at Johns Hopkins Hospital, returning in 1915 to Massachusetts General, where he had received a fellowship to conduct research on blood diseases. Almost two years later, however, Minot became quite interested in continuing his research activities at the Collis P. Huntington Memorial Hospital, only five years old and known as a "cancer hospital." He became an official member of the staff in 1918 and in the fall of 1921 was selected to take over as chief of the medical service at Huntington Hospital. He was then only thirty-five years old.

## Course of Life Altered

Within a month after accepting the new position at Huntington, Minot was to have the entire course of his life changed. He was told that he had diabetes mellitus. It was a frightening discovery for Minot, and it came as quite a shock; for only six months previously he had been given a clean bill of health. He had never been a robust man, and it was questionable how much his thin frame (over six feet tall, he weighted only 135 pounds) could withstand. His research was time and energy consuming and all-important to him—and, as it later turned out, he was on the verge of a major medical discovery.

His whole pattern of living had to be changed. This was before the days of insulin, and the treatment of diabetes was largely dependent upon a very controlled diet. His diet was reduced to about a third of what a man requires for his mainte-

nance if he stays quiet in bed." The diabetes was severe.

Then, in May, 1922—about fifteen months after Minot discovered he had diabetes—the new product insulin was made available to the world by Dr. Frederick G. Banting. Its advent brought new hope to diabetics.

And its arrival came none too soon, for a friend of Minot's later wrote: "George was awfully thin. He was drinking black coffee and smoking many cigarettes in the effort to curb his appetite. He struggled to the hospital each day, but he was tired and irritable. He was allowed to eat only 1675 calories each day, and that was not enough to maintain proper nutrition. His weight was down to 120 pounds, and his blood sugar was up to 240 milligrams percent . . . There is no doubt that this new treatment saved George Minot's life."

It is a comment on his courage to add that Minot kept his illness a closely guarded secret, and only a select few knew of his bout with diabetes.

It was also in the fall of 1921 that Minot began to branch out into private practice. He had done little in this area, for he was far more interested in his research and in teaching. However, he soon realized that seeing patients would give him the opportunity to apply his knowledge, to broaden his experience, and to "help the patient and the family doctor."

## Had Love for Patients

In one of the Minot biographies written by a cousin, it is pointed out that Dr. Minot had an unusual love for people and especially for his patients. And in this same biography there is a description of the manner in which the doctor worked with his patients that indicates a great deal about "Minot the Doctor":

"Private patients received excellent care from George Minot. He spent a long time with the histories; every detail of the symptoms was noted. Always, he was curious to learn what sort of person the patient was; where he or she lived; what he or she did all day; whether life was happy and congenial or whether conditions in the family

were difficult in some way. And then, above all, he would ask, 'Tell me about your diet. What do you have for breakfasts? Where do you eat breakfast? Must you catch a train shortly afterwards—and do you rush for it—or can you sit for a minute and then walk to the station comfortably and at ease? The study of the total food intake was usually of paramount importance: 'Do you eat meat every day? What kind of meat, and how much of it? What about milk and eggs and vegetables and fruit? And how are these latter prepared?' And, finally: 'Do you enjoy your meals or do you eat because you have to eat?'"

In the teaching of students, Minot stressed this same manner to his students. Teaching was important to Minot, and he took this responsibility quite seriously, devoting much time to it.

## Interested in Blood Diseases

But even with his many hours of teaching and his time-consuming private practice, Minot was never very far removed from

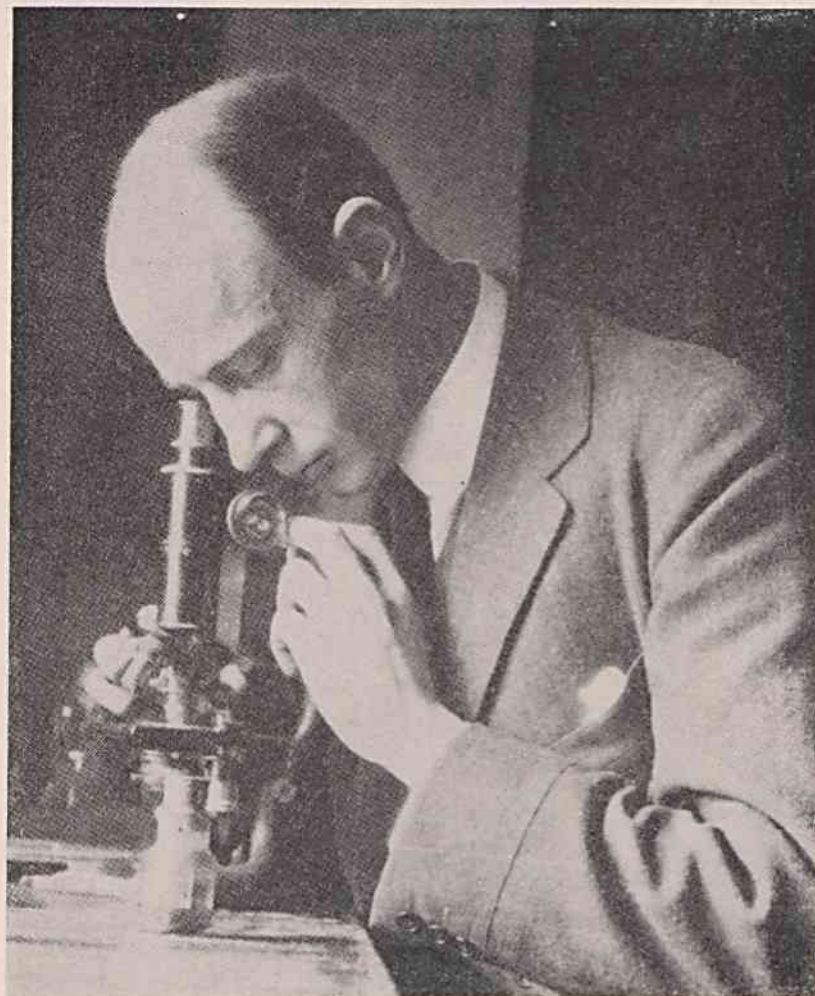
his research on blood diseases, and in 1925—he was then forty years old—he revealed to a friend some of the conclusions he had drawn from his research:

"You know," he said, "that pernicious anemia is a disease which is fatal invariably. Patients who develop it live for only a few years. I keep thinking that the diet may have something to do with the cause. I believe that . . . the disease pernicious anemia depends upon a disturbance of bone-marrow function, which results in blood cells inferior both in quality and in quantity . . . I believe that the bone marrow needs food of some special kind. In other words, our patients with 'P.A.' are deficient in some item in their total food intake."

## Influenced by Dog Diets

Prompted by the research findings of a Dr. George H. Whipple of Rochester on the success of liver diets fed to dogs that had become anemic after repeated loss of blood, Dr. Minot tried feeding liver to his "P.A." patients. They improved!

The research was then intensi-



George Richards Minot . . . a man of quiet courage and much determination.