

Genius on the Edge: The Bizarre Double Life of Dr. William Stewart Halsted

By Gerald Imber MD

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Now in paperback, the groundbreaking biography of the most influential surgeon in American history.

“Gerald Imber’s new biography is the first retelling of Halsted’s story in many decades and a particularly expert and thoughtprovoking narrative makes the intense strangeness of Halsted’s subsequent career a gripping story.”

—Abigail Zuger, New York Times Science Section

Dr. William Stewart Halsted’s life was fascinating and complex. Halsted, perhaps the most important surgeon America has ever produced, battled a lifelong cocaine addiction and maintained numerous secret relationships while simultaneously devising revolutionary medical innovations. Yet the story of Halsted’s life, one of seemingly irreconcilable extremes, is in many ways the story of modern medicine.

Before Halsted, poorly-trained doctors performed surgery without anesthesia in unsanitary conditions and patients were rarely expected to survive. Halstead transformed the medical practice by inventing local and spinal anesthesia; introducing the use of rubber gloves during surgery; pioneering the use of fine silk thread for sutures; developing techniques for stabilizing blood pressure during surgery; and inventing the radical mastectomy, blood transfusions, and surgical cures for hernias.

Genius on the Edge is an illuminating biography of a complex and troubled man whose brilliance we continue to benefit from today.

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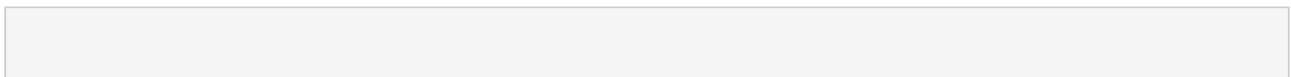
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Editorial Review

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Clearly an homage to the man to whom “virtually every academically affiliated surgeon can trace his or her teachers,” teaching surgeon Imber’s effort is more than a biography. It is a scholarly reconstruction, complete with historical perspective, of the life of a man who managed to revolutionize surgical practices and, indeed, the entire field of surgery, while battling the enduring and debilitating consequences of self-inflicted medical experimentation. To make surgery more efficient for surgeons, safer, and freer of pain for patients, Halsted began to explore various methods of anesthesia, including the then recently discovered drug, cocaine. He became addicted. Failure to kick that addiction played havoc with his professional life and ultimately forced him to turn optimistically to heroin, generally thought at the time to be an effective treatment. The result was lifelong heroin dependence, despite which he was eventually able to not only function but also continue a brilliant career. Imber’s academic style and inclusive approach are solid but may not appeal to all tastes. --Donna Chavez

Review

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"A gripping mixture of medical history and detailed biographical analysis.." "--Huffington Post

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"Gerald Imber has captured in one grisly sweep the barbarism of both early surgery and the manure-trodden streets it grew from. Like Doctorow's RAGTIME, it's evocative in broad strokes....Not just for history buffs, Imber gives any reader a character for the ages. Riveting." --Mary Karr, author of "The Liars' Club

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About the Author

Dr. Gerald Imber is a well known plastic surgeon and authority on cosmetic surgery, and directs a private clinic in Manhattan. An early proponent of prevention and minimally invasive procedures, he has devised many popular anti-aging techniques, and is attending surgeon at New York Presbyterian Hospital and assistant clinical professor of surgery at Weill-Cornell School of Medicine.

Dr. Imber has published many scientific papers and is a regular lecturer at professional meetings. He is also the author of a number of “beauty books” and has written on many subjects for varied publications such as *Departures*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, and appears regularly on network television.

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