

## JAMES ANDREW GUNN

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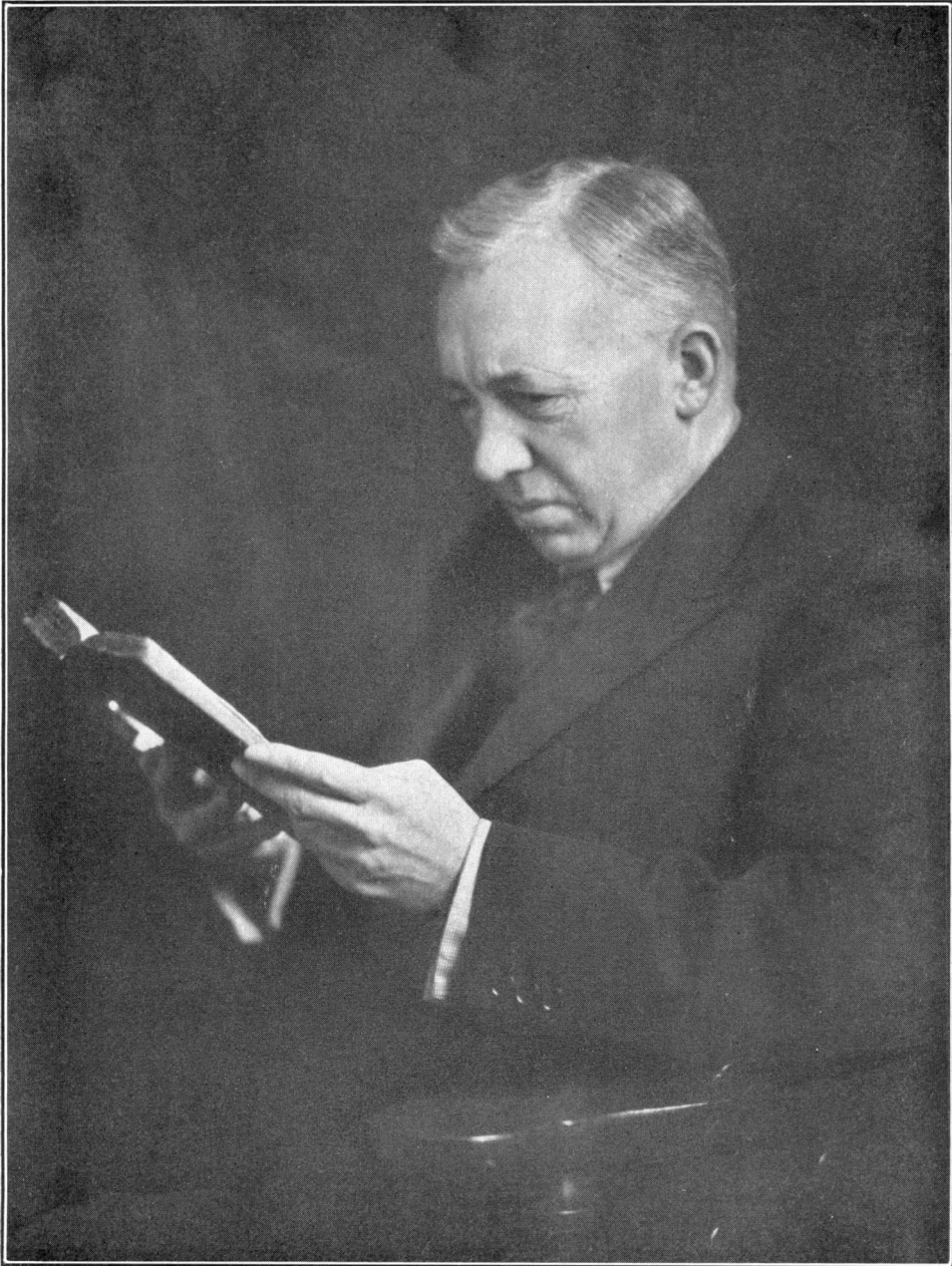
Professor J. A. Gunn was the father of the British Pharmacological Society, and his death on October 21, 1958, caused great sorrow among his many friends. He was born at Kirkwall on January 26, 1882, and never lost his attractive Orcadian accent. He attended Kirkwall School, where he learned to write good simple prose and to tell a story well. Gunn was always ready to acknowledge how much he owed to the influence of his father, a well-known ornithologist in the Orkneys. At Edinburgh University he won many prizes and distinctions as a medical student and had acquired five degrees by the time he was twenty-eight. He had some experience of medical practice in the islands of Scotland and then joined the staff of the Department of Materia Medica in Edinburgh under the famous Sir Thomas Fraser, who was by this time a busy physician. Gunn and Sillar did all the teaching, and Gunn was active in research on arsenic, yohimbine, cobra venom, and harmine. In 1912 he was awarded a Beit Fellowship and authorized to work on four different problems, but before he could do this he was appointed Reader in Pharmacology in Oxford. His lectures were popular and he started a Practical Class; and in 1917 he became Professor. He held this post for twenty years and was then Professor of Therapeutics till 1946, living and working in the building which was once the Radcliffe Observatory and is now the Nuffield Institute for Medical Research. During World War I, he served with the R.A.M.C.

Gunn's main scientific interests were the alkaloid harmine and the sympathomimetic amines. Harmine acts on plain muscle, but also on the central nervous system, where it causes hallucinations and dreams; recent speculations have suggested that these effects depend on the presence of an indole nucleus. Gunn showed that sympathomimetic amines containing a *meta*-methoxy group stimulate the central nervous system in mice and this also has become important since it has been shown that such compounds are formed in the body.

Gunn edited the 12th edition of Cushny's *Textbook of Pharmacology and Therapeutics*. His own *Introduction to Pharmacology and Therapeutics* was popular because it was short and simple, and nine editions appeared in 30 years. He was appointed Chairman of the British Pharmacopoeia Commission in November, 1939, and was responsible for six addenda to the 1932 *Pharmacopoeia* and for the 1948 *Pharmacopoeia*. This involved a great deal of hard work in difficult times, and his care and energy contributed much to the great success of this work.

In the last fifty years Pharmacology has become an important science and the British contribution to this advance owes much to Gunn. It was on his initiative that a group of about twenty pharmacologists met in Oxford in 1931 and founded the British Pharmacological Society. There seemed to be very few pharmacologists at that time, and some people thought that the subject should disappear and be merged in the Departments of Physiology and Medicine. The foundation of the Society and its vigorous growth have done much to raise the prestige, not only of Pharmacology, but also of British Medicine.

J. H. G.



James Andrew Gunn (1882-1958)