

Dr. Frank Baker

[originally published in *American Anthropologist*, 21:186-188, 1919]

JOHN R. SWANTON

ALTHOUGH primarily a biologist the subject of this sketch, whose death occurred on September 30, 1918, was one of that group of Washington students who were instrumental in laying the foundations of the science of Anthropology in America, and he is deserving of particular notice in this journal since he was Chairman of the Editorial Committee having in charge the publication of the original *American Anthropologist* from 1893 until 1898 when it gave place to the present organ. The following account of his life and activities is compiled from a memorial sketch by Dr. Fielding H. Garrison, printed in the *New York Medical Journal* for November 16, 1918, and information contained in the resolutions on his death adopted by the Faculty of the Medical Department of Georgetown University of which he was Vice-President.

Doctor Baker was born at Pulaski, N. Y., in 1841. His ancestors came from Gloucestershire, England, to New England where they took part in the Revolutionary war. His schooling was private and local, but his father, Thomas C. Baker, was a man of wide reading. Immediately on the outbreak of the Civil war he enlisted in the Thirty-seventh New York volunteers and served until 1863 when he was transferred to Washington, where he later entered the government service and began the study of medicine. Sept. 13, 1873, he married Miss May E. Cole, of Sedgwick, Me., who survives him together with six children, one of whom, Col. Frank C. Baker, was a member of the medical corps in the U. S. expeditionary army in France.

In 1880 Doctor Baker received the degree of M.D. from Columbian (now George Washington) University. In 1883 he became Professor of Anatomy in Georgetown University, D.C., and continued to occupy the chair until his death, a period of thirty-five years. This institution conferred upon him the degrees of A.M. (1888), Ph.D. (1890), and LL.D. (1914). To his active cooperation and counsel as a member of the building committee, the University is largely indebted for the present building of the medical school completed in 1886.

Having entered the U. S. Life Saving Service, he became Assistant Superintendent in 1889. In 1890 he was made Superintendent of the National Zoological park and retained this position until 1916, when advancing years caused him to resign. Doctor Baker was one of the founders of the local anthropological (1879), biological (1880), and medical history (1913) societies. He was president of the Association of American Anatomists in 1897, of the Anthropological Society of Washington, 1897-1898, and of the Medical History Club of Washington, 1915-16, and for twenty-one years (1890-1911) secretary of the Washington Academy of Sciences. As stated above he was Chairman of the Editorial Committee of the *American Anthropologist* (old series) from 1893 to 1898. He was a member of several societies in addition to those above mentioned.

Among the various literary activities of Doctor Baker may be mentioned the following. He was one of the collaborators of Billings's *National Medical Dictionary* (1890), supplied the definitions of anatomical and medical terms in *Funk and Wagnalls's Dictionary*, and contributed several monographs on regional anatomy to the *Reference Handbook of Medical Sciences*. His first contribution to medical literature comprised two papers on President Garfield's case (1881-82), in which he showed that the wound was caused by the second bullet and correctly diagnosed its course in a well-accredited diagram made two days after the event. This was followed by a number of papers on anatomical and anthropological subjects, the most notable of the former being *The Rational Method of Teaching Anatomy* (1884), *What Is Anatomy?* (1887), *Some Unusual Muscular Anomalies* (1887), and *Nomenclature of Nerve Cells* (1896): Doctor Garrison states that "his monograph on the *History of Anatomy* published in *Stedman's Handbook* compares favorably with the well-known article of Sir William Turner (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*), which has remained the ranking contribution in English," and he also says that "since the death of the later Dr. Robert Fletcher [another prominent founder of the Anthropological Society of Washington], he was probably the most erudite physician in

Washington.” His later publications were devoted mainly to studies connected with the history of anatomy and medicine.

Doctor Baker’s anthropological work was confined to his earlier years, his principal contributions to anthropological literature being the following: Anthropological Notes on the Human Hand, *American Anthropologist* (O. S.), Washington, 1888, vol. I, pp. 51-75; The Ascent of Man, *American Anthropologist* (O. S.), Washington, 1890, vol. III, pp. 297-319; Primitive Man, *American Anthropologist* (O. S.), vol. XI, pp. 357-366.