

Years ago, doctors performed very few operations. It wasn't that people didn't need them. They didn't want them. For in those days there was no anesthesia to put patients to sleep. People would rather suffer sickness than go through pain under the knife.

It was an American who discovered anesthesia; or rather, two Americans. Both learned the use of ether at almost the same time. And neither even knew the other.

One was a country doctor named Crawford Long. He lived in the small town of Jefferson, Georgia. One day a lecturer came to Jefferson to give a talk on a substance known as laughing gas. Afterward he let some members of the audience breathe the gas. It made them forget themselves and do silly things. The crowd thought it was all very funny.

Shortly after this, some of Jefferson's young men asked Dr. Long to give them some laughing gas. They wanted to experiment with it. Long had none. But he did have some ether, which affected people in much the same way.

At once people began to gather to try out ether. From time to time Dr. Long joined them. And he noticed some very interesting things about people who had taken ether. He saw them bump against furniture without seeming to feel any pain. And the doctor began to wonder. Perhaps ether was not just an interesting gas to study. Perhaps it could be a great gift to man.

There was one way to find out. He had a patient who had two large lumps on his neck. The man refused to have them removed for fear of the pain. Dr. Long talked him into

having the lumps removed under ether. The operation took place on March 30, 1842. And the man never felt a thing.

It was a thrilling success. However, Long was a careful doctor. He decided not to announce his discovery until he had tested it often. For the next few years he tried ether on patient after patient.

Not until 1849 did Long quietly publish the results of his tests. And by that time another man had startled the world with the same discovery.

The second man was a Boston dentist named William T. G. Morton. Morton tried out many kinds of painkillers. Sometimes he gave whisky before pulling a tooth. Sometimes he gave a strong drug. But neither was both good and safe.

Finally he hit upon ether. First he tested it on dogs. Then, on September 30, 1846, he tried it on himself. It put him into a sound sleep, and it did him no harm. On that same day he put a patient under ether and pulled his tooth without pain.

Morton's first test on a patient took place four years after Long's. And that one test was proof enough for him. He wasn't as slow and careful as Long. Only two weeks later he held a public display. He put a man under ether and let him be operated on. The man reported no pain. In a matter of days all the doctors in Boston were using ether.

Morton wasted no time telling the world about his great discovery. He was too much afraid that someone else would beat him to fame and fortune.

Other men did try to take the credit. But Morton fought them all the way. He got a

patent at last, but he had spent most of his money on the battle. When he died in 1868, he was near poverty.

Morton's story was a sad one. If only he had been as generous as Long and freely given his invention to the world! Like Long, he might have lived a long and happy life. He

too might have died wealthy and honored.

Still, both men were medical heroes. They gave modern medicine one of its three great weapons. Germ-free surgery and wonder drugs are great aids to suffering people. But anesthesia was the first. It was American medicine's gift to the world.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. The gas the lecturer introduced to Jefferson, Georgia, was called
  - A silly gas
  - B laughing gas
  - C funny gas
2. Dr. Long first guessed that ether was a painkiller when he
  - A watched people who had taken it
  - B experimented with it in secret
  - C read a little-known article
3. The first patient on whom Dr. Long tried ether was having trouble with his
  - A arm
  - B neck
  - C knee
4. This first operation under ether was a
  - A mild disappointment
  - B near disaster
  - C complete success
5. Long did not tell the world about ether at once because he
  - A knew it was not legal
  - B wanted to test it further
  - C hoped to gain more profit
6. Morton, the man who first announced the use of ether as a painkiller, was a
  - A doctor
  - B dentist
  - C teacher
7. Morton's first tests of ether were made on
  - A dogs
  - B himself
  - C friends
8. The author seems to think that Morton's announcement of his discovery was made too
  - A quickly
  - B uncertainly
  - C seriously
9. Compared with Morton, Long died a much
  - A wealthier man
  - B more famous man
  - C angrier man
10. Which of the following is not named in the story as a great medical discovery?
  - A Wonder drugs
  - B Blood plasma
  - C Germ-free surgery