

# Alexis Carrel

Surgeon, biologist, Nobel Laureate (1873 – 1944)



Son of a Lyons silk merchant, chunky, bald, beret-wearing Carrel could reputedly thrust his thumb & index finger inside a matchbox, tie a catgut knot impossible to undo with two hands. In nearest-complete secrecy, he experimented in his black-toned, dustless Manhattan laboratories, later on isolated St. Gildas Isle off France. A wit, connoisseur, inspired but abstemious gourmet and longtime agnostic, he received the last rites of the Roman Catholic Church; his final illness prevented his trial for collaboration with the Nazis.

*Time*, November 13, 1944

Carrel was a French surgeon and biologist. Born in Sainte-Foy-lès-Lyon, Lyon, Carrel received his medical degree from Université de Lyon, and practiced in France and at the University of Chicago and the Rockefeller Institute. He collaborated with American physician Charles Claude Guthrie in work on vascular suture and the transplantation of blood vessels and organs. Capping off a year in which he was elected to the Century, Carrel was awarded the 1912 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work.

During World War I, Carrel and the English chemist Henry Drysdale Dakin developed the Carrel-Dakin method of treating wounds based on chlorine (*Dakin's solution*). Preceding the development of antibiotics, this was a major medical advance in the care of traumatic wounds. For this, Carrel was awarded the Légion d'honneur.

In 1935, Carrel published a best-selling book titled *L'Homme, cet inconnu* (*Man, The Unknown*) which advocated, in part, that mankind could better itself by following the guidance of an elite group of intellectuals, and by implementing a regime of enforced eugenics. Carrel claimed the existence of a "hereditary biological aristocracy." Four years later, Carrel published *The Voyage to Lourdes*, in which he defended the believers and the miracles that occurred there.

Carrel worked with Charles Lindbergh in the mid-1930s, and in 1938, the two co-authored a dense monograph entitled *The Culture of Organs*. They appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine together on June 13, 1938.

In 1941, he lobbied for the creation of the *Fondation Française pour l'Étude des Problèmes Humains*, which was created by decree of the Vichy regime in 1941. Carrel served as 'regent.' It was given financial autonomy and a budget of forty million francs, a remarkable sum given the occupation. After the liberation of Paris, Carrel was suspended by the Minister of Health; he died in November 1944.