I have built a monument more enduring than bronze and loftier than the Pyramids' royal pile, one that no wasting rain, no furious north wind can destroy, or the countless chain of years and the ages' flight.

Horace, Bk. III, Ode XXX

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On December 2, 1958, just a few brief weeks before attaining his 80th birthday, Ernest Sachs quietly passed away in New Haven, Connecticut. He will be buried in Keene Valley, Essex County, New York where, encircled by the peaks of the Adirondacks, he will rest, surrounded by the scenes of his happy youth and even happier mature years. Always a strong and powerful man physically, mountain climbing offered him a great and challenging enjoyment, and the Keene Valley mountains will shield him, unforgotten.

He was born January 25, 1879 in New York City, into an unusually gifted family which numbered among its members a famous neurologist, a distinguished professor of Fine Arts at Harvard, and others who have gained distinction. His father, Julius Sachs, was a classical scholar and the founder of a school which bore his name but which he left later to become Professor of Secondary Education at Columbia University and one of the founders of Teachers College. There were many friends who visited the Sachs family both in New York and in their Keene Valley home, among whom were outstanding scholars, scientists and musicians, and these contacts gave the young Ernest Sachs a unique opportunity to absorb and develop cultural zest. Thus was born his deep appreciation for the classics, literature and history. He had a passionate love of the beautiful in all things and music gave him particular pleasure. He began the cello at the age of six, played superbly, and there were few times in his long life when he did not play. He loved travel, combining an eager interest in peoples and customs with a zestful knowledge of esoteric foods and little known places. No one who was present will ever forget his vigorous and infectious enthusiasm, when at the meeting of the Harvey Cushing Society several years ago, he recounted his visit to the Mediterranean and the “Dead Sea Scroll” area.

After graduating from his father’s school and Harvard College, young Ernest went to the newly founded Johns Hopkins Medical School, and was graduated with high honors in 1904. Here, too, it was a fortuitous time of great teachers and stimulation. Osler, Welch, Halsted, Finney and many others left their imprint upon him. From 1904 to 1907 he was a house officer at the Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York. Here his most remembered teacher was Dr. Arpad Gerster, who instilled into him high principles of postoperative care. Then, acting upon the advice of his uncle, Dr. Bernard Sachs, famous and distinguished neurologist of Tay-Sachs fame, he sought and obtained an appointment with Sir Victor Horsley at the National Hospital in London, first, however, spending six months in Berlin preparing himself in neurology and neuroanatomy by working with the outstanding men of their time, and later working for several weeks in Vienna, stopping on the way to visit Roussy, Babinski and Pierre Marie in Paris. A frequent visitor at Sir Victor’s home, the young Dr. Sachs developed a deep affection amounting to veneration for his teacher. There for nearly two years he had an unequalled opportunity to associate with the foremost neurologists and neurophysiologists of the great English School.

These were fruitful and happy days for the eager and alert Ernest Sachs. During this time he personally prepared thousands of microscopic slides of electrolytically created lesions in the monkey brain, from which he prepared his fundamental study “On the Structure and Functional Relations of the Optic Thalamus,” which appeared in Brain (1909). Prior to this work, the thalamus had been a relatively unexplored area of the brain. During this period he developed a very great affection for the English people and their culture, and the friendships he formed at that time lasted throughout his life.

He witnessed the construction and development of the Horsley-Clarke stereo-
taxic instrument and had one made like it which he brought to the United States. With this he continued his studies of the hypothalamus and cerebellum with electrolytic lesions. It was this instrument that served as a model for Ranson’s work, and which Dr. Sachs recently presented to Dr. Magoun of Los Angeles. Thus he bridged in his own person a period of fifty years to witness the renaissance of interest in stereotaxic methods applied to the human brain. Through Ernest Sachs the stream of English neurology and neurosurgery was directed to the middle of the American Continent and indeed as far south as the Argentine.

Shortly after returning from England, Dr. Sachs was asked to go to St. Louis to help plan and develop a new type of medical school on the ashes of the old Washington University School of Medicine. Here he gave 35 years of stimulating and exciting teaching to over 2500 students. He still is a legend to generations of house officers at Barnes Hospital. Forceful, demanding the best, perfectionist in postoperative care, he developed one of the outstanding neurosurgical centers in the world, numbering among his students and Fellows many who have attained distinction both here and abroad.

Throughout his life he maintained an interest in general surgery, matched only by his love of teaching and his love for young students. As Hans Zinsser wrote about Dr. Sachs’s father, “Oh Julius Sachs! The terror of him!” So his son’s famous weekly clinic in basic surgery crackled with electricity and tension as the students waited to be called into the “Pit.” But he taught them basic principles never to be forgotten, and generations of students almost without exception hailed and continue to hail him as their greatest and most inspiring teacher—the fear replaced by affection, the tension by myriads of delightful anecdotes, such as the patient brought in with a leg ulcer—but whose point of interest was a glass eye!

Brilliant technician, masterful because of his ambidexterity, he would compromise with no deviation from basic surgical principles. He resented the crutch of chemotherapy and antibiotics as excuses for poor technique. His operating room was well organized, he insisted upon absolute discipline and in this was a severe taskmaster. He demanded the best from his team to match the best that he always gave. He was rapid but gentle with tissues. He contributed much to the understanding of brain tumors and his volumes on “The Diagnosis and Treatment of Brain Tumors” and “The Care of the Neurosurgical Patient, Before, During and After Operation” are classics of detailed experience.

In 1913 he was made a member of the American Neurological Association and in 1943 he was elected its president, an unusual distinction for a neurological surgeon, being only the fourth to be thus honored. He was the first secretary of the Society of Neurological Surgeons founded in 1920, a post he held for 6 years, later to become its president. He was a member of most of the major surgical societies at home and held honorary membership in the Royal Society of Medicine and in the Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher.

Thus the full life of Ernest Sachs encompasses the entire history of neurological surgery from its founding to the present time, and we of another generation can scarcely appreciate the courage to withstand the difficulties and obstacles that this pioneer overcame and solved. The deep affection which he felt for his many neurosurgical colleagues and which they felt for him is evident in the tribute paid him by Gilbert Horrax in this Journal at the time he left St. Louis (1949), but the deepest bond was with the Neurosurgical Fellows whom he trained—thirty of them—whom he held in deep affection.
Through all these years of adventure into a new field, his constant companion, partner and editor was his wife, “Aunt Maisie” to their many friends, students and colleagues. Theirs was a uniquely beautiful love story which also began in Keene Valley. A recent graduate of Smith College, 1912, Mary Parmly Koues was interested in a career of service—teaching, writing and social work—and in the summer of 1913 was in charge of the social work in the small community hospital where a village lad in need of an emergency appendectomy had been brought. “Dr. Ernest,” who had just arrived from St. Louis to visit his family in their summer home, was called in, operated upon and restored the boy to health, and “never,” as he put it, “did a patient get such intense postoperative care.” The following October this warm-hearted, kindly, gracious girl became Mrs. Ernest Sachs, and never was there a more ideally happy marriage, based as it was on doing for others. The development and achievements of their two sons were a source of great pride: Ernest, Junior, now a neurological surgeon at the Hitchcock Clinic, Hanover, New Hampshire, and Thomas Dudley at present studying for his doctorate in physics at the University in Innsbruck, Austria. So far there are six grandchildren. Dear to the “Chief’s” heart, and somehow always present was the memory of his daughter, Mary, whose untimely death when only 13 had left its deep hurt.

Several years after Dr. Sachs became Emeritus Professor at Washington University, he was invited to the Yale Medical School where he enjoyed the stimulating atmosphere of the beautiful Historical Library as well as the contact with old friends and colleagues, among whom were John Fulton, Louise Eisenhardt and others whom he had known for many years. To the end he remained intensely interested in his chosen specialty of neurosurgery, saddened only that he could not participate more actively in the teaching of students. During these years at Yale, he added six articles to a list of over 170 already published, and three books: “The History and Development of Neurological Surgery,” “The Prerequisites of Good Teaching and Other Essays,” which characteristically he dedicated to the members of his “Thursday Clinic,” and “Fifty Years of Neurosurgery, a Personal Story,” all written with rare wisdom based on long experience and tempered with kindliness and good will.

As he was the oldest living neurological surgeon in the world, as well as one of the most distinguished, he was asked to give the opening address at the First International Congress of Neurological Surgery in Brussels, 1957, an invitation to which he responded with delight, his theme being the work of his beloved teacher, Sir Victor Horsley, the great pioneer in this field. He was deeply affected by the plaudits he received at that time as well as at the meeting of the Society of Neurologists in Durham last spring and at the Harvey Cushing Society meeting in Washington a little later. Whenever he appeared, all the members rose to their feet. “Why are they so nice to me?” he asked. “Guess it’s because I’m getting old!”

Ernest Sachs, pioneer neurosurgeon, master craftsman, dedicated physician, incomparable teacher, lover of flowers and music, we, a new generation of neurosurgeons, salute you!

**Edmund A. Smolik, M.D.**