The sudden death of Frederic W. Schreiber, December 2, 1959, was a great shock to the entire community and particularly to the staff of Harper Hospital.

Dr. Schreiber was born in Saline Township, Michigan, in 1897, the son of Frederic Robert Schreiber, a Lutheran minister, and Mathilde Schreiber. At the age of 18 months, his family moved to Grand Rapids, where he spent his boyhood and adolescent days, and happy ones they were too as evidenced by his own cheerful disposition and the cultural attitudes of his mind. His premedical education was received at the University of Michigan and his medical degree from Harvard University.

Following graduation from Harvard Medical School, Dr. Schreiber came to Detroit and served his internship and part of his residency in surgery on the Surgical Staff of Harper Hospital under Dr. Max Ballin. At the conclusion of his sur-
gical residency at Harper Hospital, he was undecided as to what specialty of surgery he would enter. One of his friends who knew of a vacancy on the staff of Dr. Harvey Cushing at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, persuaded him to make application for that residency, which he did, and fortunately for Dr. Schreiber's subsequent career he was accepted.

On completion of his residency at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, under his surgical master, Dr. Harvey Cushing, he returned to Detroit and was appointed to the Harper Hospital Medical Staff in 1926. A Division of Neurosurgery was created and Dr. Schreiber served as Chief of the Division of Neurosurgery from 1948 until his death.

He was the first surgeon in the city of Detroit to devote himself exclusively to neurosurgery. Previously the neurological surgical problems had been handled by the general surgeons. His background and surgical training soon advanced him to the forefront in his specialty. He enjoyed the confidence not only of his conferees in his daily association with them, but also the confidence and respect of innumerable patients who passed through his hands during the years of his practice.

His specialty board certifications included the American Board of Surgery and the American Board of Neurological Surgery. He held memberships and offices in many medical societies, including the Harvey Cushing Society, of which he was past President, the Michigan Society of Neurology and Psychiatry, the Central Surgical Society, the Detroit Surgical Association, Detroit Academy of Medicine (past President), Detroit Medical Club (past President), Wayne County Medical Society, and many national organizations including the American Medical Association, the American College of Surgeons and the American Academy of Neurology.

Among his outstanding attributes were his kindness and human understanding which enabled him to cut through a maze of details to the kernel of a problem. This faculty was at times mixed with a lighter touch—thus, for example, when a younger associate would find an inevitable mortality hard to face and the going rough, Dr. Schreiber’s soothing words would be in the form of one of his favorite quotations: “Life is just a bowl of cherries; it’s so mysterious, don’t take it seriously.” Certainly out of the bowl of cherries of life, Dr. Schreiber was able to distinguish between worth and pretense. He exercised this attribute in all of his scientific and social qualities.

He contributed much to the medical literature dealing with neurological phases. His outstanding contribution and one which should endear his memory forever to the medical profession, particularly obstetricians, was his epoch-making paper entitled “Cerebral Injury in the Newborn Due to Anoxia at Birth” (1938). In this paper he pointed out the grave dangers brought about with the use of analgesic medication, particularly in pregnant women. While the analgesic medication relieved the pains of childbirth, the damage to the newborn’s brain was not too fully appreciated until he pointed this out. Shortly thereafter, in a paper on the use of analgesia, a very prominent obstetrician wrote: “Our complacency in this matter was somewhat shaken by the opinion and work of Doctor Schreiber who concludes in his work as a brain surgeon that the baby’s brain is damaged by the anoxia that occurs as a result of the drugs used.”

Dr. Schreiber lived and practised the highest quality of medical professionalism. This can be no better expressed than by quoting from an address that he gave as retiring President of the Detroit Academy of Medicine less than two months before his untimely death. “Those of you who play chess know that a gambit is the opening
move to meet or block the move of an adversary. Surgeons whom I have known all develop definite gambits in handling certain situations and answering questions raised by patients. Since most patients and their surgeons are more or less thrown together on short notice, it is most important that a rapid transference takes place so that the two understand and trust each other before embarking on a serious surgical adventure. Each must give full attention to what the other has to say so that various pitfalls may be avoided. It is very disconcerting to be talking to a patient, looking him in the eye, and have the house officer break in and ask the patient a question. . . . The ball is fumbled right there and may never be recovered. My surgical master, Dr. Cushing, used to say that the surgeon should be 'the bride at the wedding and the corpse at the funeral,' and he would brook no interruption while he was talking to a patient.

"Patients have no good way to judge the professional ability of their surgeon so they observe him very carefully socially. It is a poor introduction to be called out on an emergency just after having had a Martini or two before dinner if the patient and his family are alcohol haters. On the other hand, a patient or his family who have had a drink before dinner themselves, do not notice a Martini breath.

"Even the way a surgeon dresses may be important in the patient's first appraisal of the man into whose hands he is to place his life. I have had two patients shy away from the able surgeons I referred them to because one doctor did not wear a tie and the other wore Argyle socks. One hot day early in my practice I made a house call dressed in an unpressed seersucker suit, red bow tie and flat straw hat, carrying my bag. A small boy opened the door and called, 'Mama, the policy man is here!' After that I dressed more conservatively.

"A good bedside manner is an asset but some patients judge their surgeons entirely by this yardstick and get themselves into trouble."

In addition to his many excellent qualities as physician and surgeon, he was a very fine friend and possessed a great sense of graciousness, humility and kindness.

Dr. Schreiber is survived by his wife, Helen; two sons, Mayo and Robert; two daughters, Mrs. Daniel E. Pugh, Jr., and Doris; four grandchildren; and three sisters.

The unsurpassed brilliance, companionship and friendship of Dr. Schreiber won the admiration and respect of all who were privileged to know him. He left us too soon.

Lawrence Reynolds, M.D.