A Selection of Harvey Cushing Anecdotes

Collected and Edited by
HENRY L. HEYL, M.D.
Dartmouth Medical School, Hanover, New Hampshire

CONTRIBUTORS

*CHARLES BAGLEY, JR., M.D., Baltimore
PERCIVAL BAILEY, M.D., Chicago
PAUL C. BUCY, M.D., Chicago
LEO M. DAVIDOFF, M.D., New York
*JOHN F. FULTON, M.D., New Haven
WILLIAM GERMAN, M.D., New Haven
HENRY L. HEYL, M.D., Hanover
THOMAS I. HOEN, M.D., New York
RICHARD U. LIGHT, M.D., Kalamazoo

CARLOS GUILLAMO DE GUTIÉRREZ-MAHONEY, M.D., New York
DONALD MUNRO, M.D., Boston
ERIC OLDBERG, M.D., Chicago
BRONSON S. RAY, M.D., New York
JOHN E. SCARFF, M.D., New York
R. EUSTACE SEMMES, M.D., Memphis
MADELINE STANTON, New Haven
JAMES C. WHITE, M.D., Boston

SOME happy paradox seems to propagate stories about a great man, even as the circle of those who knew him grows smaller. To be sure, mythology clouds veracity; but with the years the misty memories acquire a warm nostalgia permeated with the expanding humanity of the image we choose to remember.

It is in such a mood that we have gathered together this vignette of stories about the amazing person that literally founded and fathered the specialty of neurosurgery and whose 100th birthday we celebrate this month. The number of those who actually worked with Harvey Cushing is steadily dwindling; but with their cooperation, we have collected these stories.† There were many colors in the Cushing personality, but none of them was gray, and most of them are represented here.

Dr. Cushing: Host

The first two stories are told by Dr. John E. Scarff.4

"I remember the many delightful visits to the Cushing home in Brookline where we

* Deceased.
† The New York Academy of Medicine in 1954 sponsored a "Harvey Cushing as We Knew Him" evening; since the subsequent publication of those seven reminiscences reached a relatively limited group we are grateful to Dr. Saul Jarcho, the editor of the Bulletin of the N. Y. Academy of Medicine, for permission to retell a few of them.

residents would be invited for Sunday dinner. When the weather was nice we would stroll around the grounds to get the sun before dinner, often the only sun we would get for weeks at a time. I remember one amusing little game that Dr. Cushing played on several of these occasions. He had a trapeze bar in the old barn on the property. He would ask each of us to write on a piece of paper the length of time that we thought we could hang by our hands from this bar, and proposed that we all place a dime or a quarter on the piece of paper. The one who hung closest to his estimated time was to take the pot. It is an interesting thing that Dr. Cushing knew just how long he could hang and invariably won the pot; it was equally interesting that invariably he could hang longer than any of his residents."

"I was particularly delighted to be invited to Dr. Cushing's home for his 61st birthday, which fell on a Sunday; I took with me as a little gift for that occasion Emil Ludwig's new book, The Life of Napoleon. I had been particularly intrigued by the book because the first half of it told of Napoleon's unique genius and his inexhaustible energies as he rose to power and world-wide eminence; but the last half told of his days on St. Helena when there was no outlet for those energies and where his world was slowly contracting. I could not help thinking of the impending parallel in Dr. Cushing's..."
life when he would be retired by the age rule from the pinnacle of power and success to a life of relative inactivity.

"The next morning when I came down to breakfast at the Hospital, I found two envelopes side by side in my mailbox. One was the familiar blue-gray of Dr. Cushing's personal stationery and the other a plain brown manila. I opened the blue-gray envelope first and there was a very nice note from Dr. Cushing which went something like this: 'Dear Scarff: It was so nice to have you with me on my birthday and I want to thank you for the delightful book you brought as a gift. I read the book through last night after you left—and got the point! Sincerely, H. C.' In the other envelope was a terse command 'Come to my office immediately!' and when I got there I was met by a machine gun account of things which I had neglected to do the afternoon before while I had been a guest at his home and which should be done immediately. The two notes, one warm and personal, and the other almost fierce, had been placed in the box at the same moment! Dr. Cushing kept his social and professional lives in strictly guarded compartments."

Dr. Percival Bailey, who was with Dr. Cushing at the Brigham longer than any other assistant except Gilbert Horrax, tells the following story.

"Dr. Cushing loved to advise his residents to 'put their affections on ice' during their years of training. One Sunday at tea in his home he remarked that a young doctor should take example from Wordsworth and study the birds and flowers and other beautiful objects of nature. This was too much for me and I remarked that Wordsworth had studied other aspects of nature also, for I had read in Mercure de France a long account of an illegitimate daughter whom he abandoned in Brittany. Dr. Cushing glared at me, jumped up and growled, 'That's what comes of reading those filthy French magazines. I always had great misgivings about permitting you to go to France to study.'"

Dr. Eric Oldberg has contributed these two reminiscences of Sunday lunch with Dr. Cushing.

"In 1930, I was the last of the Cushing residents to work solo. After that there were generally about four on the service at once, each desiring to get a piece of the great man prior to his retirement in 1932. Dr. Cushing required his residents to do chores that would never be tolerated today, such as taking eye fields on all patients, even spinal cord cases, or measuring and recording the exact number of diopters of choked disc on every patient at least every 48 hours. One can imagine the exhausted but happy state of the resident when Sunday morning came along. Alas, about once out of every three Sundays, I would receive a call about 9 A.M. and the stentorian voice would come over the telephone, 'Oldberg, come out to lunch,' and that was the end of the time I had set aside for catching up. There was always one consolation. This was the possibility that there would be some foreign luncheon guest who had never seen corn on the cob. All during the season, it was Dr. Cushing's delight to serve these gentlemen with a well-buttered cob, and then watch them try to eat it with the least possible spattering, sucking noises, and bits of whatever it is between the teeth. Only those close to Dr. Cushing knew the malicious glee with which he watched the embarrassed debacle."

"When I came to the Brigham as a house officer, I brought with me several books of piano music for four hands. Marshall Fulton, who is now in Providence, was then a resident in medicine at the Brigham, and we used to play these pieces, Marshall on the treble, and I on the bass, in the upstairs sitting room of the Brigham house staff quarters. Dr. Cushing heard about this, and we were ordered to appear at his house in the late morning one Sunday to exhibit our prowess and to stay for lunch. No one could have felt more embarrassed about this than Marshall and I, but orders were orders, so we took some Mozart overtures and went out to the Cushing house to perform for him on his ancient and untuned upright piano.

"Now the effect of our efforts, not to mention those of the great composer, was that John Fulton and Dr. Cushing, who sat alongside, spent the whole time discussing the speed with which the visual input from the printed musical score could be transferred to cortical impulses and sent along
down the peripheral nerves to make our fingers wiggle so fast.

“When it was all over Marshall and I heaved a sigh of relief, our only real regret being that cocktails were not a part of the luncheon ritual.”

There are many stories about Dr. Cushing’s rapport with animals. Dr. Henry Heyl contributes this new one.

“During 1936 while I was Cushing Fellow at Yale, I had the pleasant assignment of working up former patients who came to see Dr. Cushing; I would present them to him, he would size up the situation and, if necessary, send them on to one of his disciples for treatment.

“That summer the original Major Bowes Amateur Hour was at its peak as a radio program and Dr. Cushing was an enthusiastic fan. Every Sunday evening Margot Montgomery, who was then secretary of one of the Yale alumni organizations, and I would join Dr. Cushing at his home for an early supper followed by the Amateur Hour. In those days the performers weren’t so carefully selected and Major Bowes would ring a gong if he felt an act was too bad to continue. Dr. Cushing felt the gong was not used often enough.

“So one night when we gathered before the radio Dr. Cushing had in his lap a long New Year’s eve horn; he also had installed his dachshund sitting upright in the opposite end of the sofa. When a really bad amateur act was allowed to continue he let loose a series of blasts on the horn which were answered by howls of anguish from the dog at the other end of the sofa. Several performers got this harsh treatment, and it was fortunate for their egos that they could not hear the protest from the Cushing fireside.

“After the show I asked Dr. Cushing how the devil he trained a dog to do a thing like that. ‘Why Henry,’ he said ‘there’s nothing to it. All that’s necessary is just to have a few more brains than the dog.’”

H. C.’s Unpredictability

For much of his time at the Brigham and all of it at Yale, Madeline Stanton was Dr. Cushing’s indispensable secretary. No one knew his professional characteristics better. And no one was more dedicated to him. She tells us the following story.

“H. C.’s reactions were often completely unpredictable. He could be unnecessarily grateful for negligible tasks; and then again he could be an apparently ungrateful and stern task master.

“One morning, at about 9:30, we sat down opposite one another with a small table between us, I on the window seat in his office, he on a straight chair. He had the page proofs of The Pituitary Body and Hypothalamus, and I, a block of lined foolscap. He was dictating the index for the book. Anything approximating alphabetization as we proceeded was difficult, and as time went on my hesitation while locating the proper spot for the entries was not received too patiently. Finally, around 1:30, he looked up from the proofs and said, ‘Had your luncheon, Stanton?” After a rather weak ‘No, Sir’ and the further advice that it was actually my afternoon off (being the week in which I had to work Saturday P.M.) I was allowed to depart; we had actually reached the end of the index in any event.

“Thinking it best to unscramble the tortuous entries as soon as possible, I went home and worked far into the night; but next morning I was able to present H.C. with the typed index. He accepted it without surprise or comment, which I suppose was a compliment of sorts.”

And yet he was whimsically aware of some of the difficulties his personality caused others. Thus, in 1926, in acknowledging a group of reprints which John Fulton had sent him, he replied: “Thanks for your ipsilateral, decerebrate, myotatic, viscous, plurisegmental, contractious, inseparable, break-shocking and inhibitory communications. Since receiving the same I am conscious of the fact that the latent period of my skeletal muscles, at no time of the best, has been much increased, and that true latency and rigidity have been observed by my long-suffering secretary and others.”

The next three stories are told by Dr. Donald Munro. While reading the first one, it is interesting to recall that in 1922 Cushing had expressed reservations about Walter Dandy’s introduction of ventriculography,
lest it encourage careless neurological examinations.

"Soon after I started the Neurosurgical Clinic at the Boston City Hospital I visited Harvey Cushing at his Brigham office to get his help in reading a ventriculogram, which was a very new procedure. However, I never got to first base at this visit because I had injected the air through frontal trephines which was not the customary way and which irritated him so much that he refused to give an interpretation and permitted me to leave forthwith."

"I was once a speaker at a surgical meeting in Connecticut at which Cushing was the moderator. I presented a paper on extradural cerebral hemorrhage in the course of which I mentioned, I believe for the first time, that these clots were sometimes created by a ruptured vein. In Cushing's discussion of the paper he made the blunt dogmatic statement that this was not so. This flat denial was so final that it effectively silenced everyone for an embarrassingly long time; suddenly, the audience recovered, burst into laughter, and the discussion was once more picked up by others."

"One morning, the date of which I have forgotten, I was watching Dr. Cushing operate when a stranger came into the theatre and joined me in the stands. Cushing shortly finished, turned to me, and calling me by my first name asked me to join him for a cigarette. Seeing the other spectator, he asked him to come too; so we both joined him in his dressing room. After some desultory conversation, the other visitor suddenly stood up, clicked his heels together in the then German manner, stepped to a position of attention in front of Dr. Cushing, thrust his hand out, and said in a very German-English accent 'Vat iss the name please? Goot bye!' And he left. I have never forgotten the expression on Dr. Cushing's face. I suppose it was the only time that a visitor had ever asked him his name in his own operating suite at the Brigham and he was rendered perfectly speechless."

There is much in his biography to suggest that Dr. Cushing sometimes was pretty stubborn in his adherence to a belief, no matter what the contrary evidence. Dr. Percival Bailey, although a loyal and grateful Cushing disciple, was on occasion critical of this quality in his chief. Dr. Paul Bucy, a pupil of Percival Bailey, tells this revealing story.

"Cushing believed that the pars nervosa of the pituitary gland secreted pituitrin directly into the fluid in the third ventricle, as indicated by the experimental studies of his pupil McLean on the oxytocic factor. H. B. Van Dyke, P. Bailey, and I, however, had demonstrated that the oxytocic substance in ventricular and spinal fluid was calcium, not pituitrin. In 1930 when I was serving as a clerk under Dr. Gordon Holmes at the National Hospital, Queen Square, London, Harvey Cushing paid a visit to the service. He had always referred to me as his 'grandson' as he did to some others who were pupils of his former pupils. After completing rounds, he invited me to have lunch with him at the Holborn. At the conclusion of a very pleasant luncheon and discussion of a variety of topics, he stopped, thought a moment, and then said, 'Bucy, I have long since learned that when someone proves that you are wrong, the best thing is to say nothing about it.' Although he had never referred specifically to the pituitrin-calcium conflict, both he and I knew very well what he had in mind."

Dr. James C. White tells this touching story.

"I never worked on Harvey Cushing's service, but I shall never forget his charm and unexpected kindness when my three-year-old daughter fell out of a window and landed on her head on the brick sidewalk six feet below. This happened when I was only a third-year Harvard Medical student. How he heard about it I have never been able to ascertain, but he arrived at our house in Boston within an hour, spent a long time examining her, and then reassured my wife and me that all was well. So it proved, and we both remained everlastingly grateful."

The Chief in the O. R. and at the Bedside

It was in the operating room and at the bedside that unforgettable things really happened. Apparently no one ever forgot his own first days as instrument man on the Cushing team.
Dr. R. Eustace Semmes recalls Johns Hopkins as well as Brigham days in the next three stories.

"During my internship at Johns Hopkins Hospital, I was the only one of the surgical interns interested in the nervous system and the only one who had any inclination to work in Dr. Cushing's operating room; so I was fortunate in getting most of the experience.

"One incident that made a profound impression on me was a case of a cerebellar tumor in a boy anesthetized with a mixture of ether and chloroform. The latter was added to keep down the pressure and was the usual procedure at that time. The patient was breathing slowly and his color a little dusky. As the dura was exposed, he stopped breathing and his blood got black. Dr. Cushing told me to get up on the table and give him artificial respiration. This I did with more vigor than skill but his color improved and Dr. Cushing continued with the operation. After he had evacuated fluid and opened the dura, the patient began to breathe again and Dr. Cushing completed the operation. Dr. Davis, who was the anesthetist at the time, had gathered up his paraphernalia and left the operating room after the patient stopped breathing. When he came in the next morning, he remarked that it was too bad that the boy died on the table. Dr. Cushing suggested that it wasn't quite that bad and that he go down on Ward H and have a look at him."

"Shortly after I started working in Dr. Cushing's operating room, he had occasion to operate on a Canadian guide with tic douloureux. He cut a meningeal artery and the blood squirted in my eye. I dodged suddenly and Dr. Cushing remarked without looking up, 'That was a bad reflex.' 'Well,' I said, 'Dr. Cushing, what should I do when blood squirts in my eye?' Without looking up he retorted, 'Shut your eye.'"

"During an early meeting of the Cushing Society in Boston, Dr. Dan Elkin of Atlanta told me a story about an experience when he was resident in general surgery at the Brigham. He came into his room one night and found the neurosurgical resident, who was his roommate, packing his suitcase. Dan asked him if he was going on a vacation and he replied that the worst had happened and he was about to be fired. Dan asked him how come and the stricken resident then related the appalling circumstances. Apparently the day before while they were operating upon a cerebello-pontine tumor Dr. Cushing had put a pledge of cotton in the angle and he had not seen him take it out. He began to worry about it; but only after Dr. Cushing had closed the dura, muscle, subcutaneous fascia, and skin with his usual meticulous care, did he say, 'Dr. Cushing, did you mean to leave that piece of cotton in the angle?' Dr. Cushing picked up the scissors and without a word, removed every stitch, looked up in the angle, removed the piece of cotton, and closed the wound again, layer by layer.

"The resident neurosurgeon then went on to say, 'Today we did another posterior fossa tumor and Dr. Cushing again put a piece of cotton in the angle to control the oozing. I kept my eye on it for four and one-half hours and again hesitated on the verge of calling Dr. Cushing's attention to it until the last stitch had been put in. Just as before, Dr. Cushing reopened the incision painstakingly, looked in the angle, and what do you think he saw?' Dan said, 'I don't know. What?' The resident groaned, 'Not a God-dammed thing!'"

Dr. Bronson Ray gives us this new and refreshing glimpse of Dr. Cushing in the famous Brigham operating room.

"One story I have cherished refutes accounts of the Chief's austerity in the operating room. It was on a warm day in early summer. Several of the long French windows facing Van Dyke Street in the Chief's operating room at the Brigham had been opened by Adolph to provide a breath of air. While Gil Horrax was opening the wound I, as first assistant, saw out of the corner of my eye two small boys climbing into one of the poplar trees just outside the window to a limb that gave them a good view of all that went on.

"When the Chief arrived in the room shortly thereafter to take over the operation he apparently did not see the boys though they were but a few feet from the open window. Everyone else was aware of their pres-
ence and wondering what would happen. His back was to them as he uncovered the brain and at this point the boys' excitement certainly gave them away. The Chief walked to the window and looking over his glasses said sternly, 'If you boys can't keep quiet I'll have to send you home.' They stayed to the end."

Dr. Richard Light was a resident under Dr. Cushing at the Brigham. He has a host of stories of which the following two add to the O. R. portrait.

“One of Dr. Cushing's most amazing qualities was his tolerance of beginners and his willingness to break in new people. Every three months two new surgical house officers started their duties at the Brigham, one assigned first to general surgery, the other to neurosurgery, so that Cushing had a new instrument man every six weeks. When one realizes that a new man would take about three weeks getting acquainted with the job, it becomes clear that Cushing had a trained instrument man barely half the time. My own experience perhaps exaggerated his troubles, because I came from a medical school where students did not scrub in at operations and I was more than usually green. That first morning the nurses needed three tries to get me into sterile gown and gloves; I didn't know a hemostat from a shoe horn, and yet there I stood at my first surgical operation trying to hand Dr. Cushing instruments. The nurse helped, and about half way through the operation I decided I had the trick, so I pushed a hemostat down onto his waiting fingers, and really shoved it home. It took most of the team to get it back off his knuckles. A few minutes later I spilled the basin of Zenker's solution over the open brain. Yet, later that same week he invited me for dinner, and greeted me at the door with 'Hello, you spiller of Zenker's!'"

"Cushing's irascible outbursts toward one or another of the assistants in the course of an operation are legendary; and yet I do not recall any specific occasion, and have the impression that most people took these as a matter of course, feeling that they were normal reactions under difficult conditions. One man who reacted differently was William Henderson from Edinburgh. He was a light-hearted soul who found the Chief amusing when he lost his temper, and would step back from the table to have a good chuckle. This merely fueled the fire and as Dr. Cushing glowered at him, Henderson would burst into laughter. It was a stand-off, but usually Dr. Cushing had to give up and return to work before Henderson was able to. Henderson, incidentally, was invited to stay a second year."

The name of the Harvey Cushing Society has been subject to several modifications, not always as ponderous as the recent formal shift to American Association of Neurological Surgeons. In 1967 after the Society of Neurological Surgeons' meeting in Portland, a group went salmon fishing in the Columbia River. By mysterious means Dr. William German, distinguished historian of the Cushing Society, acquired a huge fish which was promptly named "Harvey" and for whom a seat was purchased so that he might accompany the fishermen on their flight that evening to San Francisco for the annual meeting of the Cushing Society. The next night a select group gathered at a gala banquet featuring "Harvey" and the founding of the "Harvey Fishing Society." This same Bill German tells us the next two O. R. stories.

"Carl Rand (of Los Angeles) told me this incident which took place in the old Johns Hopkins O. R. in the very earliest days of blood pressure recording. The Riva-Rocci blood pressure apparatus was the first instrument for the clinical determination of blood pressure and had come to the United States from Italy. It had been given to Dr. Cushing by an associate of Riva-Rocci in 1901 and was a prized possession, kept in a special place near the operating room, and used only rarely. On this particular day, in the midst of a long difficult operation, Dr. Cushing began to wonder about the patient's ability to tolerate further surgery because of the unusual blood loss. He, therefore, asked that the Riva-Rocci apparatus be brought and put on the patient's leg. The message was whispered throughout the operating room and presently an assistant appeared at the door with the apparatus. There was considerable indecision on the part of those present as to what should be done with this unfamiliar piece of equipment. By this time Dr.
Cushing was so absorbed in the urgent details of the operation that he was unaware of what was transpiring. After considerable whispering back and forth among the various assistants, one instruction, a little louder than the others, was heard. 'Put it on his leg.' A few moments later Dr. Cushing reared back, stamped his foot, and exclaimed: 'Damnation! What's that?' The O. R. assistants exclaimed 'What's what?' and Dr. Cushing retorted, 'That thing on my leg!'”

“In 1926, the irrepressible and lovable Hugh Cairns, later professor at Oxford, was senior resident in neurological surgery at the Brigham; Dr. Cushing used to refer to him as ‘Mr. Cairns.’ I was just starting on the service and so usually served as instrument man at operations. One day I had been holding a retractor for several hours and just as I was relieved of this cramping assignment Dr. Cushing asked me to pull a French needle. Extending my shaking arm I missed the needle, whereupon the Chief shouted: ‘You smoke too much! Too many cigarettes! You have a tremor. I know, I have one too. Cigarettes! I can always tell a cigarette smoker.’ Up to this point Mr. Cairns had been a silent observer; but he then spoke up: ‘I say!’ he exclaimed, ‘Can you tell the brand?’”

Dr. C. G. de Gutiérrez (Wil)-Mahoney reminisces contentedly as follows:

“I remember rather distantly but clearly how very happy I was working for the Chief. I cannot recall an unhappy occasion although some of my contemporary colleagues have recounted days of dreaded ‘abuse’ and recrimination from Dr. Cushing. Of course he had mellowed by my time since I was at the end of the line and that was my good fortune.

“I considered the instrument man’s job as a close contest to keep up with the Chief’s requirements or even to beat him to the draw on occasion; he seemed to enjoy the game as much as I did. I still chuckle about the day when he signaled for a suture with the usual pronator twist of his arm, and I gave him the scissors instead. Without a sign or word of disapproval he went through the detailed motions of putting in the suture which he did not have.

“During my year of residency with him not once did I use my season ticket to the Boston Symphony; but this was a privation which I hardly noticed since I was otherwise so happy and realized that I was happy because he was pleased. The way to keep him pleased was easy; simply have all the visual fields done, all the records up to date, know the condition of every patient when he called, and be available every moment.”

Closely related to the O. R. stories are those that originated at some patient’s bedside. Dr. John (Ted) Scarff vividly recalls a particularly revealing incident of this sort:

“On one occasion, after a long day in the operating room, about seven o’clock in the evening Dr. Cushing sent for me and asked me to make rounds with him. We came to a patient who was just beginning to awaken from the anesthetic after a brain operation; he had vomited in the bed and was lying in the vomitus. It was a very difficult hour in a ward that was full of sick postoperative cases; dinner trays had to be cleared away, day nurses were attempting to complete their reports before the night nurses arrived, and everyone was tired. Dr. Cushing sized up the situation quickly and said: ‘Scarff, you and I will handle this.’ With that he went to the utility room, got a basin of warm water, washcloths, towels, fresh linen, and bedclothes for the patient. He then bathed the patient, dressed him in clean pajamas and changed all of the bed linen, at the same time instructing me in how to do these things properly.”

Dr. R. Eustace (Pappy) Semmes reminds us of Dr. Cushing’s broad medical interests in the following colorful incident.

“In the early years I used to spend a week or two in Boston each summer watching Dr. Cushing work. One Saturday morning during grand rounds, the orthopedic surgeon took us by a patient with septic infection of his knee joint; there was a drain in the joint but the patient looked distressed. Dr. Cushing remarked that he had seen French surgeons get such patients up on the good leg and then have them swing the bad one to improve the drainage. The orthopedist noted that the man could hardly turn over in bed, much less get up. Dr. Cushing took the pa-
tient's hand, helped him to stand up on his good leg and then suggested that he swing the other slowly. Pus squirted out with each movement, while Dr. Cushing waved his hand and passed on to a neurosurgical patient."

Dr. Charles Bagley, Jr., who went to Boston with Dr. Cushing in 1912 told this story about one of H. C.'s last operations at Johns Hopkins.4

"Near the conclusion of a long hazardous removal of a cerebellar tumor from teenage Mary Shea, a transfusion became imperative. It had been arranged that the father be used as a donor, but he had not been hospitalized and a search for him disclosed that he was stretched out on the lawn of the hospital far gone under the influence of whiskey. You recall that this was during the period of direct transfusion. His alcoholic state made the necessary cooperation difficult and called upon Dr. Cushing's most persuasive powers. Though weary with the morning operation, Dr. Cushing, assisted by Dr. Emil Goetsch, the surgical resident, succeeded in connecting the artery of the donor to the vein of the recipient whose pulse was now faint and pupils dilated. As the heavily charged alcoholic blood began to flow, Mary revived quickly and her first reaction was to start conversation with her bibulous father. Dr. Cushing was still working hard to keep the donor quiet while a sufficient amount of blood flowed into Mary's vein. Finally, in vexed fashion, he said: 'Pat, everything is going all right but you must be still a little longer,' whereupon Mary who by now was pretty happy herself said: 'Don't keep still for him, Pappy, move all you want!' Dr. Cushing then said: 'Pat, if you don't keep still, you'll spoil things yet,' to which Mary replied: 'Don't keep still for him, Pappy. Spoil it for him. Move all you want.' However, the crisis had passed and the tension of the operating team dropped as Mary's arterial tension rose."

Harvey Cushing, M. Ch. (Dublin)*

The fame which came to Dr. Cushing led to many an encounter with other exciting persons of world renown. Dr. John Fulton, who has contributed so much of significance to neurosurgeons including the bible of Cushing lore,6 tells the following story; its cast of characters have historical as well as human interest.6

"Dr. Cushing insisted that if I were going to be a good physiologist, I could not get on without a medical degree and an internship. I took the latter on his service in 1927. One day, Gilbert Horrax and I assisted Norman Royle in doing a sympathectomy on a patient with Raynaud's disease, the first therapeutic sympathectomy to be done in the United States.

"The operation was carried out on Dr. Cushing's invitation but not in accordance with his painstakingly meticulous technique. In the good tradition of British surgery, Royle exposed the patient's kidney with one dramatic slash of his scalpel, losing scarcely a drop of blood, and had the right lumbar sympathetic chain dissected and severed within about three minutes of the time he started. Dr. Cushing stood by amazed and somewhat horrified. After that, Royle backed out and left us to close the wound, which took some twenty-five minutes to accomplish. Royle was obviously impatient during this time, but Dr. Cushing at least had a chance to regain his composure."

Ted Scarff has contributed another story that deserves to be retold in this context.4

"This story was told to me by Dr. William MacCallum, the great and beloved professor of pathology at Johns Hopkins, and one of Dr. Cushing's close friends, at a small dinner for Dr. MacCallum in New York. When Dr. Cushing and Dr. MacCallum were young medical men they had enjoyed a good holiday together in Paris and talked over their plans and hopes for the future. At that time they said: 'Let's meet in Paris ten years from now and talk things over.' And they agreed that they should meet on the Fourth of July at high noon on the top of the Eiffel Tower. For ten years neither man ever mentioned the pact. But on the appointed day Dr. MacCallum happened to be in Paris and thought that it would be great fun to pay a quick visit to the Eiffel Tower and then, on his return to the States, to gently reproach his old friend for having failed to keep their ten-year engagement. So he went to the Eiffel Tower a little before noon and took the

* One of the many honorary titles that came to Dr. Cushing and the one he used to designate the author of Homo Chirurgicus on the occasion of receiving the Bigelow Medal in May, 1933.
elevator as high as it would go, to the top station where there was an observation deck and promenade. He spent fifteen or twenty minutes here walking around and looking out over Paris and enjoying the exhilarating sight. Then feeling he had made his point and would have some fun chiding Dr. Cushing when next he saw him, he started to leave. Some deep instinct, however, compelled him at this point to ask the guard if this was 'the top' of the Tower. The guard said: 'Well, yes, for all practical purposes; there is a rickety iron staircase that goes up about a hundred steps to a small look-out, but visitors rarely go up there.' Dr. MacCallum's instinct stayed strong, and he decided to go on up to the top. Just as he got his head above the floor he heard a familiar voice say: 'Well, Willy, I had almost despaired of your getting here.' It was, of course, Dr. Cushing.

Sir William Osler's wife once started a letter to her close friend, Mrs. Harvey Cushing, with a reference to 'our two Vesalius lunatics.' Dick Light refers to a moment in the origins of this madness shared by the two great collectors.

"When I finished medical school my family presented me with a good copy of the second edition of the Vesalius Fabrica, which I treasured and took with me to the Brigham. One day it occurred to me that Dr. Cushing might like to see such a valuable work, and I lugged it out to his house. He looked it over approvingly, then pointed to his bookcase where there was a long row of Vesalius copies, including all of the editions and piracies, some twelve or fifteen in all. Then he told me this story: Soon after he entered Johns Hopkins Medical School, Dr. W. G. MacCallum gave him a copy of Vesalius; it was a first edition but not a very good copy. Thinking that Dr. Osler might like to see the precious book he took it to his house. Osler examined the copy, then turned to his bookcase where one whole shelf was loaded with editions of Vesalius. He took Cushing's book, slipped it into the bookcase, and then presented him with a much better copy."

The following story, also told by Dick Light, must have happened only a short time before the heart-rending death of the Oslers' son, Revere, practically in Dr. Cushing's arms, in a field hospital in France.

"Cushing told me this story involving Sir William Osler, William H. Welch, and himself. It occurred during World War I, when the Osler home in Oxford became the refuge of many an American medical man in the U. S. armies abroad. A young chap in the ambulance corps, the son of one of Osler's Philadelphia friends, was an overnight guest in the Osler home. When Osler said good night he warned him that breakfast might be a little irregular because all of his help had left, and there were none around except two beginners that didn't know very much. Next morning as the guest was sitting down to breakfast two servants appeared from the kitchen. One was a little fellow clad in an oversize waiter's coat, with the usual black bow tie; the other was a corpulent person whose suit was obviously too small. As one of the waiters put down a plate of fruit and the guest was about to eat it, the other clumsily took it away; and thus the breakfast went, the boy getting hardly anything to eat, and some of that spilled on him. After it was over Osler took him out on the lawn and introduced the Army private to his erstwhile waiters, Colonels Welch and Cushing."

Dr. Merrill Sosman, you will recall, was the Chief of the Brigham X-ray Department who mounted a framed stethoscope over the entrance to his department with the label "The Stethoscope, an ancient instrument once used in the diagnosis of chest conditions." Dick Light tells of one of his exchanges with the Mosely professor.

"In the winter of 1931–32 Dr. Cushing was laid up for several weeks with arterial trouble in the legs, and was hospitalized in that single third-floor room off C-ward. One morning around eleven o'clock, just when Merrill Sosman had his eyes adjusted and was busy with fluoroscopy, Cushing sent word asking him to bring the portable x-ray right up and take some films of his leg, explaining that he would be embarrassed to be taken down to the x-ray department. When Sosman came the leg was bandaged from hip to foot; he took the films, which revealed chiefly that Cushing had placed a long clay pipe and a string of beads under the bandage. Sosman returned to Cushing and told him that he was unfamiliar with the portable
machine, and had forgotten to close one switch, so the films had come out blank. Cushing then unwrapped his leg, confessed that he had been trying to trick him, and showed him the pipe and the beads. Sosman studied them carefully and simply commented that they were too soft to show on x-ray anyhow. He then promptly posted the clearly labeled films on the x-ray viewing box on the second floor where Cushing couldn't see them, but where all the rest of the hospital personnel could pause to chuckle."

This story, told by Dr. Leo Davidoff, reminds us not only of the steady stream of internationally famous surgeons that trooped through the Brigham, but of the sly humor and vanity of their famous host.

"While I was resident in neurosurgery at the Brigham I puttered around with the acromegaly cases and was seeking some way in which we could demonstrate objectively the changes that take place in these patients following the removal of the pituitary tumor. This led me to make plaster casts of one of the patients' hands before and after operation, and thus demonstrate the appreciable loss of soft tissue edema. Dr. Cushing was interested and went further by applying the same technique to a little idea of his own. He had made the first cast of his own hand way back in his medical school days. You see, he was inordinately proud of his hands; as a matter of fact, they were the most virile pair of hands that I have ever seen, strong, muscular, dextrous, and skillful. He now wondered whether other great surgeons also had unusual hands and decided to collect some plaster samples.

"Sooner or later most famous surgeons in the world visited Dr. Cushing; it was, therefore, quite easy to have access to the hands. But the way he went about obtaining the casts was characteristic. He would take his guest for a short walk down Huntington Avenue where they would eventually come to the display window of an Italian sculptor. When Dr. Cushing and his guest reached this window, the Chief would say casually, 'This looks like a rather interesting place, why don't we go in for a few minutes?' So, in they went. As they began to look at the Roman replicas the storeowner would approach them to ask if they wanted anything particular. Dr. Cushing would reply, 'Oh, no, we're just looking around.' The storeowner would then invite them to look all they wanted to, but would immediately turn to the visitor and exclaim, 'Sir, you must be a surgeon!' The visitor would be somewhat surprised and say, 'How do you know that?' And the owner would state that he thought his hands were unique. 'In fact,' he would go on to say, 'I have made it a hobby to collect plaster casts of the hands of great surgeons and I wonder if you would permit me to do yours. There is no charge, of course; it is for my own amusement.' The visitor would look to Dr. Cushing, who would urge him to go ahead and do it. This took only a few minutes and they would then continue with their walk. Later of course, the plaster cast was delivered to Dr. Cushing."

Dr. Thomas Hoen reminds us how much Dr. Cushing hated the game of kow-towing which even then was a serious factor in fund-raising.

"Although Dr. Cushing had a real flair for the dramatic, artificiality was very distasteful to him. I remember well one spring afternoon at the Brigham when he was closeted for some time with a very talkative and stylish middle-aged woman, a possible benefactor of the Brigham. He had finally managed to terminate the conversation by piloting the lady gently from his office and out the back door to her waiting car. But before he succeeded in depositing her in her limousine, a rose from the lady's corsage had been transferred to his lapel. Miss Stanton and I were watching the proceedings from the window and were amused to see him wave goodbye wearing a smile which lingered only until the car had turned the corner. He then snatched the rose violently from his lapel, threw it angrily to the sidewalk, and stamped on it as he stalked back into the Hospital."

In a strange way Dr. Cushing's fame reached and appealed to the man on the street. Henry Heyl recalls a characteristic episode.

"One day when still a medical student I was waiting for some repairs on my automobile in a Brigham Circle garage; for no ap-
parent reason the mechanic looked up from the engine, wiped his greasy hands on a rag, and asked if I knew who were the two greatest mechanics in the world. 'Well,' he said, answering himself, 'The War (World War I) proved it. Eddie Rickenbacker is one, and Harvey Cushing is the other.'

Bronson Ray tells two stories that reflect the same phenomenon. It is probably true that this intangible rapport between the common man and the great one had its origins in the obvious concern of the latter for the former.

"During the summer of 1932 I managed to get an afternoon and evening off from the Brigham to drive down on the Cape for a shore dinner. At the restaurant a small group was standing about watching with some fascination the nonchalant handling of live lobsters by a salty looking character who seemed to ignore spectators and comments. When remarks were made by onlookers about an albino lobster in the pen, the handler looked up long enough to declare authoritatively that very few men understood what made a white lobster white; however, he added, it had something to do with the pituitary and Dr. Cushing at the Harvard Medical School could tell us all about it."

"In the late Fall of 1933, Dr. Cushing was to address the University College in London and then receive an honorary degree from the University of Paris. Richard Meagher and I asked him to come down from New Haven where he had only shortly moved from Boston, have dinner with us and be put on the SS Olympic which sailed at 9:00 P.M. So enjoyable was our dinner that we were all aghast to find that the time was a quarter to nine and we were on the upper east side of Manhattan—a long way from the North River Pier. But we started, knowing full well that some special action would be required to avert disaster. The plan had evolved by the time we reached the most disreputable section on the west side; there were still five minutes before sailing time. While I went on with the Chief, Meagher got out to phone a plea to delay the sailing. That he had succeeded was evident when we arrived at the pier to find a well policed aisle through a gaping crowd to a single remaining gangplank. The Chief, sensing this drama, was not to be hurried and a cheer went up as the ship began to move out almost before he had reached the deck.

"But the best part of the story is what happened in the west side bar where Meagher made a frantic call to the pier and warned the officials that there would be trouble if the ship sailed without the man who was father-in-law of President Roosevelt's son and who was also the eminent Professor of Surgery from Harvard. As Meagher stepped from the open phone booth he was confronted by a shabby figure who mumbled that he did not wish to let a mistake go uncorrected; Dr. Cushing, he insisted, was no longer Professor of Surgery at Harvard, but the new Sterling Professor at Yale."

Dartmouth College has given honorary degrees to two neurosurgeons, Dr. Cushing in 1930 and Dr. Penfield in 1960. A month or so before receiving his degree Dr. Cushing delivered his memorable address entitled The Medical Career to the Dartmouth medical students. In it he quoted a prayer uttered one evening in 1798 before the assembled college by its first president, Eleazer Wheelock, who apparently had just come from one of Nathan Smith's anatomy classes. That sonorous incantation still invokes the mystical awe that so obviously appealed to Dr. Cushing.

"O Lord, we thank Thee for the Oxygen Gas; we thank Thee for the Hydrogen Gas; and for all the gasses. We thank Thee for the Cerebrum; we thank Thee for the Cerebellum; and for the Medulla Oblongata. Amen!"

Dr. Cushing's response when he received the Bigelow Medal in Boston in 1933 was in a sense his valediction to the clinical life he loved. Both its title (Homo Chirurgicus) and content were whimsical. It is comforting to realize that he could be so. The shy and wistful farewell wave in the concluding words of that address is ample excuse for the sensations we have indulged in bringing together this collection of stories each of which, regardless of its opening slant, somewhere reflects warmth and affection.

"And finally, while adjusting the dressing and pinning the binder as comfortably as I may, it is unnecessary to remind you that
as a class we chirurgeons often do things better with our hands when our heads and hearts are not allowed wholly to govern our actions. For if I had permitted you to know during the course of this operation, what was really in the back of my head and what lay deep in my heart to say to you, you would have judged me to be a sentimentalist rather than the eminently practical person which every Homo chirurgicus outwardly feigns to be."

References