NEUROLOGICAL SURGERY
ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE*
WILLIAM J. GERMAN, M.D.
Department of Surgery, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut
(Received for publication June 8, 1958)

I wish to express my deep appreciation of the honor of serving as your president this year. May I thank you also, at this time, for the great privilege of being one of your representatives on the American Board of Neurological Surgery during the past six years. This address will be, in part, an accounting of my stewardship to you. However, I would like it to be more than that. With this meeting the Harvey Cushing Society has “come of age;” it is twenty-one years old. It has acquired responsibilities as well as size and maturity. As the largest organization of neurological surgeons in the world, the responsibility for the future of the art-science to which we are dedicated is ours. The principal means of projecting the present into the future is by training those who will follow. We all owe such a debt to the past, which we must pay to the future. As I wrote this I suddenly realized that I was, generation-wise, between the present and the past; and, in the words of Plutarch, “It was hard for him who had lived in one generation of men to plead before another.”

But I will plead my case, for it is a good one. The case is neurological surgery, its past, present and future, and more particularly the American Board of Neurological Surgery.

THE PAST

For a glimpse of the field of neurological surgery in the 1920s we should start with a small gathering on March 19th and 20th, 1920, at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, when the Society of Neurological Surgeons was organized. Present at this meeting were Cushing, Frazier, Lewis, Sachs, Adson, Towne, Harvey, Horrax, Dowman, Bagley and Mixter. The purposes of the Society were: “1. The development of the field of neurological surgery. 2. The education of the medical profession and particularly the surgeons in the idea that neurological surgery requires a special training in addition to that of the general surgeon.” There can be little doubt that these objectives have been in large part attained. Fig. 1 shows some of these pioneers at their meeting in 1922.

During the 20s young neurosurgeons were being trained in about fifteen centers throughout the country. By the early 30s “the idea that neurological


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surgery requires a special training" was being preached by being practiced. "Those fellows in the laboratories" of anatomy, physiology, pathology, the radiologist, ophthalmologist and neurologist were seen with increasing frequency in the company of the neurosurgeon. That a new team was being formed was evident by 1932, when some of this "second generation" appeared in the operating room of the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital on the morning of May 6, 1932, to watch the "Chief" do a third ventricle tumor. Later, at the business meeting in the auditorium of the Children's Hospital (and not without labor pains) the Harvey Cushing Society was born. Its object was: "The promotion and advancement of neurological surgery." This is followed in the Constitution by the following pertinent statement: "The past accomplishments in neurological surgery have been effected through the close cooperation of all those interested in the science of neurology and its collateral branches. The specialized field of neurological surgery can be further advanced by close cooperation of these various groups."

The 1930s saw tremendous development in the field of neurological surgery and in the number of neurological surgeons. In April 1939 the Harvey Cushing Society gathered in New Haven for the 70th birthday party for the "Chief." A glance at a photograph (Fig. 2) taken on that memorable occasion will confirm that this Society as well as the specialty had grown up.