WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON, M.D.
ITINERANT NEUROSURGEON
1862–1917*
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The tale of my interest and curiosity in this character had its beginning in the hot summer of 1926. Toward the end of my first two weeks of clinical and geographical confusion at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts as a Volunteer Graduate in Surgery, Doctor Cushing asked if I knew anything about Doctor William H. Hudson. I assumed the question was referable to the burrs and drills designed for trephining the skull. My answer was to the effect that I had seen the instruments used and further that I had even "watered" the skull drillings as a surgical assistant to the late Doctor Charles E. Dowman. He, as many of you know, was an original member of this organization. I am certain, but for his inspiration and interest in me and his enthusiasm for good neurosurgery, I should not be here tonight.

Hoping to enhance my stature in the mind of "the Chief," I made some inexperienced comment on the safety of Doctor Hudson's gimlet. Of course, that was not the correct answer. Doctor Cushing remarked that Doctor Hudson, though no longer living, had been a neighbor of mine and perchance I knew something of the man himself. Atlanta, Georgia, in 1926, was hardly a metropolis, and I thought I knew of every practising physician and surgeon who had lived and worked in that city from the turn of the century. I was sure Doctor Hudson was not among these. I wrote promptly to Doctor Dowman asking him to let me hear all that he knew or could learn about this surgeon. Doctor Dowman replied that William Henry Hudson "was a surgeon who practised in mid-eastern Alabama, just across the Georgia state line." He had "performed quite a number of brain and skull operations around 1900 to 1910." He "developed some rather ingenious skull instruments." He was "no longer living and was known to have been carelessly concerned about his financial obligations."

In the early 1930's, I made a professional visit to Opelika, Alabama. There I met, for the first time, one Doctor Byron Bruce. I asked the doctor if he knew anything of the late Doctor William H. Hudson. This opened the flood gates! Doctor Homer Bruce, an uncle and preceptor of my newly acquired doctor friend, "had been associated with and had assisted Doctor Hudson in many of Doctor Hudson's operations in that community." Hudson's apparent skill, thoroughness of examinations of the sick, his meticulous adherence to the teachings of Lister, and his accomplishments in brain and skull surgery were elaborately discussed by Doctor Byron Bruce. It was with such enthusiasm that I almost felt that this Bruce, and not his Uncle Homer, had been the assistant to Doctor Hudson. Doctor Byron Bruce related a goodly number of Hudson's idiosyncrasies, characteristics, and activities. Most of these were later confirmed in my interviews with people more personally and less professionally associated with Doctor Hudson. I shall detail some of these at the proper place in this story.

Later on that same day of my initial visit with Doctor Byron Bruce, he opened a large wooden box. The size of this container and its build were those of a large slant-top container. The type of this box was one in which