

Perspective on Neurosurgery*

Presidential Address

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THE title of a paper serves many purposes. It pleases the author, describes the contents, and serves as a cataloguing device. It may, if sufficiently intriguing to the author, keep him geared to his subject. And it may even serve to stimulate the imagination and interest of his audience.

"Perspective" is a good word in our present parlance. It is, in simple terms, the ability to depict an object or scene in such a way that the observer sees each of the parts in proper proportion to the whole. Language is perspicuous when it readily presents to the reader the precise ideas that are intended. An idea has perspective when proportional importance is given to its component parts.

Dr. Dwight Ingle, Professor of Physiology at the University of Chicago, edits an excellent publication entitled Perspectives in Biology and Medicine. David Brinkley presents what he considers proper evaluation of current affairs in his "Perspectives on the News."

Senator Gale McGee, in the Congressional Record, February 8, 1967, says: "... If I may borrow from a currently popular phrase, the preoccupation with 'gaps'—generation gaps, credibility gaps—may I say that what is threatening to overtake us in the Senate may be the perspective gap." Senator McGee then offers some suggestions:

"The point of (my) proposal would be to permit each Senator... to literally take a leave of absence. I hope that he might visit the campuses of some of the centers of learning, both in this country and elsewhere around the world, where he could expose himself to new ideas. I would hope that he could climb a mountain, sit on the top, and pontificate with no deadline staring him in the face. I would hope that he could find an island where he could read himself full and then think himself empty, and go through this process again and again, because the members of this body, in these times, are more and more compelled to busy themselves with smaller and smaller details in the legislative process.

"Therefore, I suggest to the Senate once again that we close what is a rapidly mounting perspective gap. It is important that we do not lose sight, within the perspective of the moment, of the scope of the issues which surround us today."

One earnestly seeks to present a significant address to a distinguished society of this sort, and inevitably he has certain persecution feelings which are well illustrated by Osborn (Fig. 1). He feels that he may melt into the indefinable mass of the desk at which he works so hard, or be buried by the mass of accumulated papers, as Parkinson has shown (Fig. 2 and 3). But eventually he comes to the determination to: "Write only what you know... Write only what you know..." (Fig. 4).

There never was a golden age when men lived happily, securely, without tensions. One of the fundamentals a citizen must grasp is that every age has had its problems, its dangers, and even its moments of desperation. When we read history, events are foreshortened; a century or more of progress may be covered in a sentence or two. This jet age we are now living in is no different. The times are still turbulent and every day brings a new crisis. The fact is that Rome in any age could not be built in a day. We recognize our need to take the long view toward the rapidly changing scene. The key word is "perspective."

The acquisition of a proper perspective on neurosurgery might well start with statistics. The relatively small size of the Harvey Cushing Society when compared to the American Medical Association, the American College
established in our memories are without significance to millions of Americans: prohibition, for example, or the five-cent bus fare, or the two-cent postage stamp, the five-cent airmail stamp, the Teapot Dome scandal, Clara Bow, the flaxseed poultice, the horrors of an epidemic of poliomyelitis, or for that matter lobar pneumonia and empyema. Most Americans today cannot remember Pearl Harbor. A very large proportion of people have no first-hand recollection of the Great Depression.

By the middle 1970's, 65% to 75% of the population will be under 35 years old. The Southwest Research Foundation of San Antonio and Houston says that we will experience such a change in our national population that a complete alteration in our social organization seems inevitable. One of the biggest questions will be: "After puberty, what?" Will the retirement age be lowered to 40 to get rid of the deadwood? As youth comes to the front, the most urgent question is this: 'By 1975, can we convince the three-