CLOVIS VINCENT

HIS LIFE AND MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEUROSURGERY

JACQUES LE BEAU, M.D.,* AND J. B. TAVERNIER, M.D.

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HIS LIFE

Clovis Vincent was the son and grandson of country doctors. He was born at Ingré, a few miles north of Orléans, on September 26, 1879, and died in Paris, first Professor of Neurosurgery, on November 14, 1947. He was an exceptional individual in every respect, animated with an inspiring passion in his search for progress in science, and surrounded by utterly devoted pupils and friends. As happens to any great man, he made some enemies. But it is not our purpose to try to describe the unselfish tenacity thanks to which he created French neurosurgery; nowhere can a better description of it be found than in his biography by his friend Professor René Moreau, and in his own famous inaugural address delivered in 1939. He was par excellence the man to whom should be applied the very words he used there to describe Cushing: "He interests himself only in the cure of the patients and the advance of science." Add to that natural charm, some shyness, a never failing kindness of heart, and Clovis Vincent's outstanding

prestige will be understood. Physically he was an athlete with a passion for arduous sports; he was absolutely fearless and in the first world war promptly became as famous among the soldiers as he already was in peace time among the neurologists. During the second world war his life was described in this *Journal* by his pupil Rabinovitch.\(^9\)

Vincent's scientific life from 1905 to 1926 was devoted essentially to neurology. Still very young he met Babinski, understood at once the greatness of this difficult and silent master, and followed his teaching with the same patience and insight during his whole career. There is no doubt, as Vincent used to say, that the precise knowledge of neurology he thus acquired was decisive in allowing him to be not only a neurosurgeon, but a neurosurgeon who contributed to the advance of brain physiology. Vincent was then *Médecin des Hôpitaux de Paris* at Tenon, and not a surgeon.

Since 1926 at least, as one of us who had the privilege of being Vincent's friend for 30 years can testify, Clovis Vincent had wanted to create real neurosurgery in France. In 1937 he went to the United States and spent less than a month with Harvey Cushing. There was the same understanding as with Babinski, but here language differences were somewhat of an obstacle. However, Vincent observed every single gesture of Cushing, saw their meaning, and fully appreciated the greatness of his new master. Back to Paris, surmounting innumerable difficulties, he started modern neurosurgery, first with de Martel, and later alone. His outstanding accomplishments led to the unprecedented event of building surgical theatres for him in his medical service at *la Pitié* in 1933. In 1938, with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, a chair of neurosurgery was founded in Paris, to which Vincent was the first to be appointed. Now, in his turn, he was held as a master all over the world, and, what counted more, Vincent's admiration for Cushing was then reciprocated, as has been told in Fulton's Biography\(^7\) and in Jefferson's article.\(^9\) To Clovis Vincent, the words that Cushing used were the greatest praise that one could wish for.

In December 1948, about a year after Vincent's death, the Société de Neurochirurgie de Langue Française was founded in Paris, with Prof. Petit-Dutaillis as President. No such thing would have been possible without Clovis Vincent's achievements. In March 1948, neurosurgery, already established at the Faculté de Médecine by the founding of a chair, was officially recognised by the Hôpitaux de Paris in the creation of *Neurochirurgiens des Hôpitaux de Paris*, and three of the four nominated were the first three surgical pupils of Clovis Vincent. The tribute of French neurosurgery to Vincent will be endless.

**HIS CONTRIBUTIONS**

We would like to mention as briefly as possible the main contributions of Clovis Vincent in the field of neurosurgery. Some of them are well known abroad, many others are not. It is not possible to include here a complete list of references to his works. They comprise not only his own many publica-