

CHARLES LAUBRY

1872–1960

Professor Charles Laubry died in his country house at Flogny on August 11, 1960, at the age of 87. It is difficult to convey, to those who never knew him personally, an adequate idea of the man himself, of the extraordinary hold that his personality exercised over those around him, and of the great affection and admiration with which he was universally regarded.

Born at Saint-Florentin on November 11, 1872 he devoted several years to classical studies before starting on a medical career in Paris. He became *externe des Hôpitaux* in 1894, and *interne des Hôpitaux* under Achard in 1899. It was during his *internat* at the Saint-Antoine Hospital that he first came under the influence of Vaquez, with whom he worked continuously from 1904 to 1921, in company of such men as Clerc, Esmein, Bordet, Aubertin, Lecomte, Giroux, Heitz, Donzelot, and Pezzi, to mention but a few of his associates in Vaquez' clinic. Nominated *Médecin des Hôpitaux* in 1911, he did not obtain his own independent hospital service until about 1921, and after several moves he finally settled, in 1925, at the old Broussais Hospital, an ancient building in the south of Paris. By this time, he had published with Pezzi the *Traité des Maladies Congenitales du Cœur*, described by Maude Abbott as a great clinico-pathological treatise, and his *Leçons de Sémiologie Cardiovasculaire*, perhaps his most characteristic work, of which one might truly say *le style est l'homme même*.

Already a teacher of repute in Vaquez' clinic, Laubry now rose to his full stature as a brilliant and outstanding *chef d'école*. The easy charm of his personality cast its spell on all around him and his clinic became a happy and united family of devoted disciples, and before long one of the foremost cardiological centres in Europe.

In 1926, when I spent an all too short time at the old Broussais, I was welcomed in most friendly fashion into his family circle which at that time included Routier, Walser, Chaperon, Deglaude, and Thomas. Cardiovascular radiology was one of their major interests, and Chaperon was developing the technique of radio-opaque injection of the various heart cavities and great vessels *in situ* in the cadaver, later continued by Routier and Heim de Balsac; and this work was eventually incorporated in their monumental *Radiologie clinique du Cœur et des gros Vaisseaux* published in two volumes in 1939. Other interests included the pathology of the pulmonary artery to which Thomas devoted his thesis in 1927; *myocardie* a very personal conception that Laubry developed with Walser; the ventricular complex in myocardial disease on which Deglaude was working, and of course gallop rhythm on which subject Laubry and Pezzi wrote a well-known monograph in 1926: this was the subject also of his St. Cyres Lecture in London in 1937. The driving force behind all these research activities was the dynamic personality of the *Patron*, and watching over them was the eagle eye of Daniel Routier who saw to it that the laws of science were strictly followed.

As a physician, Laubry was a supreme exponent of the Hippocratic art and his humanity, sympathy, and understanding of mankind inspired confidence and affection in every kind of patient from Clemenceau to the most humble and illiterate inmate of the Broussais. No matter how trivial or how serious the illness, Laubry's presence at the bedside had a magical effect in calming anxiety and dispelling fear. To him, medicine was a part of life and demanded a knowledge of the complete patient, his body, his mind, and his heart.

He had little taste for the formal lecture, but as a clinical teacher in the wards or with out-patients he was unsurpassed. The alert mind, the happy facility of speech, the vivacity and spirit



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of gaiety captivated his audience and there was never a dull moment during his rounds. He liked nothing better than to provoke discussion amongst his assistants and when he crossed swords with the redoubtable Routier, a sparkling debate would ensue in which Walser would counter the most vehement assertions of his colleague with impassive calm. Such was the *école Broussais* in 1926, and such were the three men whom Lenègre has aptly called *la Trinité de la Cardiologie Française*.

Never a *professeur agrégé*, Laubry was not normally eligible for a professorial chair, but in order to retain his services a Chair of Clinical Cardiology was specially created for him in 1936. In the same year, the death of Vaquez left him the undisputed leader of French cardiology and he lost no time in re-organizing the *Archives des Maladies du Cœur*, and in founding the *Société française de Cardiologie* of which he was elected the first president with Clerc and Gallavardin as Vice-Presidents.

The War inevitably restricted his activities but the Archives and the Society were kept in being and, with Soulié, he wrote an important book on coronary artery disease published in 1943, with a second edition in 1950. In 1942, Laubry retired from his hospital and professorial duties, occupying his leisure in studying the Latin texts of Harvey's work and in 1950, he published an original translation of Harvey, prefaced by a historical introduction to the discovery of the circulation (Keynes, 29a).

In 1941, the following notice appeared in a Swiss medical journal—*In Nantes verstarb der bekannte Herzspezialist Prof. Laubry*. News of his death spread outside occupied Europe, and an obituary notice was published in the *British Heart Journal* (1941, 3, 145). At a memorable reunion at the Avenue Victor Hugo shortly after the War, I presented him with a copy of this notice, which he received most favourably remarking at once that it implied the best possible prognosis; and so happily it proved.

Aged over 70, when the War ended, Laubry took up the reins of leadership with undiminished vigour, attending the Cardiological Congress in Mexico in 1946, the International Conference of Physicians in London in 1947, and taking part in the foundation of the European Society of Cardiology in Brussels in 1948. In 1950, he organized the first World Congress of Cardiology in Paris where he was unanimously elected first President of the newly formed International Society of Cardiology.

On his 80th birthday, colleagues from many countries presented him with a bound volume containing their greetings and good wishes, which gave him great pleasure; and the following year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. Aged over 80, he journeyed to Washington to attend the second World Congress of Cardiology, where Sir John Parkinson delivered the Laubry Lecture in his honour, appropriately entitled *Leadership in Cardiology*.

During his later years, Laubry viewed with some concern our increasing preoccupation with complicated technical investigations. He saw Cardiology in danger of becoming separated from Medicine, of forsaking the bedside for the laboratory, and of replacing clinical wisdom with the decimals of science. He feared that scientific curiosity generated from the laboratory might transgress the fundamental laws of Hippocratic medicine. He was in no way opposed to technical procedures as such, but he saw them as no more than means to an end, and means that should be employed with discrimination under *la haute surveillance de la clinique*. It may well be that, when viewed in the perspective of history, his warnings will not be judged out of place.

When I called on Charles Laubry at the Avenue Victor Hugo for the last time, a few months before he died, I found that age had at last carved its inevitable mark on him, but once we got talking, his old vivacity returned and the mellow tones of his voice flowed as rapidly as ever, while he regaled me with anecdotes in his best style. Though he had long ceased to practise, old patients still called to confide in him and to find comfort in his sympathy and wisdom. He felt, however, that his task had been completed and that there was nothing more for him to do. After half a century of teaching Cardiology in Paris, he had lived to see his pupils become senior teachers in their turn. In the hands of such men as Lenègre, Soulié, Doumer, Heim de Balsac, Lequime, Van Bogaert, Agostoni, Puddu, Grossi, and his friend Chavez, to mention only a few, he felt that the torch of clinical cardiology would continue to burn brightly and he was content.

When his final illness came, he died and was buried quietly as he wished, in his native land of Burgundy which he loved so much. In the course of his long career, Laubry received many honours and distinctions, and his innumerable scientific contributions have left their mark on the cardiology of his day, but his pupils and friends will remember him not so much for what he did as for what he was, a great physician, an inspiring teacher, and a most lovable man.

D. EVAN BEDFORD

Publications

Charles Laubry published several hundreds of papers and reports, and we have thought it best to indicate his main interests over a wide field by a list of his published books.

- 1921 (With Pezzi, C.). *Traité des Maladies congénitales du Cœur*. Paris.
 1924 *Leçons de Sémiologie Cardio-vasculaire. Les Troubles fonctionnels*. Paris.
 1925 (With Mougeot, A., and Walser, J.). *Les Syndromes d'Aortite postérieure*. Paris.
 1926 (With Pezzi, C.). *Les Rythmes de Galop*. Paris.
 1930 (With Routier, D., Walser, J., and Doumer, E.). *Traité des Maladies du Cœur et des Vaisseaux*. Paris.
 1935 *Collection des Initiation Médicales-Appareil Circulatoire*. Paris. 2nd edition, 1941.
 1939 (With Cottenot, P., Routier, D., and Heim de Balsac, R.). *Radiologie Clinique du Cœur et des gros Vaisseaux*. 2 volumes. Paris.
 1943 (With Soulié, P.). *Les Maladies des Coronaires. L'Infarctus du Myocarde. L'insuffisance coronarienne*. Paris. 2nd edition, 1950.
 1950 Guillaume Harvey. *Étude Anatomique du Mouvement du Cœur et du Sang chez les Animaux. Aperçu historique et Traduction française*. Paris.