

William Bennett Bean

The Background

The arrival of an invitation to contribute to a festschrift honoring William B. Bean, MD, was a pleasant surprise. My friendship with Bill and the other members of his family has continued for more than 40 years. I have the privilege of a first-hand knowledge of his years in medical school, and, as a long-time resident of Charlottesville, Va, have ready access to records at the University of Virginia (which, fortunately, include a taped interview in which Bill reminisced about his early life in Charlottesville). These considerations persuaded me that my most valuable contribution would be one related to his early life, family, and education.

What influences in a man's early years are the most important? What things mold his beliefs, determine his aims, and direct his efforts? Genes, family relationship, social environment, community, geography, climate, health, schools, church, literature, teachers, wife, friends—who can ever quantitate them? Whatever the relative importance of these influences, Bill Bean was more fortunate than most people in all of them.

William Bennett Bean was born in Manila in the Philippine Islands, Nov 8, 1909, at a time when his father Dr. Robert Bennett Bean was director of the Anatomical Laboratory at the University of the Philippines. In 1916, after six years at Tulane, the family

moved to Charlottesville, Va, where Dr. Bean became head of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Virginia, a post he held until his retirement, which was a short time before his death in 1944.

That Dr. Bennett Bean exerted a strong influence on his son is evident in the obituary tribute to his father that Bill wrote (*Science* 101:346-348, 1945) in which he said:

His relationship with his students is epitomized in his nickname "The Baron." Anecdotes were freely used to bring home a point, and . . . teachings of Sir Thomas Browne, Osler, Pasteur, Darwin, Hunter and others were mingled with his own. A host of students recall the "area of abdominal romance" where the head of the pancreas lies [folded] in the arms of the duodenum and has its feet tickled by the spleen when they have forgotten more erudite aspects of anatomy. . . . He had more regard for underlying principles than dogma. An abiding belief in simple Christian virtues characterized his dealings with his fellow man. He was always a friend and often a counselor of his students. . . . During a period when morals and scientific standards have often given place to laxity and opportunism, he remained true to the highest ideals; and his teachings and examples were such that memory of him is a reaffirmation of faith in human dignity and honor.

Dr. Bennett Bean and Adelaide Leiper Martin were married in 1907 and their life was a happy one. She

was the author of children's stories and active in the life of the university, St. Paul's Memorial Church, and the town. The household of Bill, his sisters Mary Archer (Mrs. James Eppes) and Helen (Mrs. Natt Emery) and his brother, George, now an Episcopal clergyman, was a lively one. There was much laughter and gaiety, many puns and limericks. The family custom of reading aloud made a strong impression on all its members. Although a university professor's salary set the standard for society in the community in those days before the influx of wealth into Albemarle County, money was in short supply; distant travel in this country and abroad was a rarity. Instead, there were summer parties, visits to friends, and months at the family cottage at "Swannanoa" atop the Blue Ridge Mountains 25 miles away.

Charlottesville in the 1920s and 1930s was an attractive university town of some 15,000 inhabitants. In many respects, life there was small-town living, southern style; in the middle of the day, business and professional men went home to dinner and students collected at their boarding houses. The Bean home, until after Bill was graduated from medical school in 1935, was a substantial brick residence planned, and to some extent built, by Dr. Bennett Bean. Located on Wayside Place, on the edge of the university community approximately one mile from the medical school, it bordered on open farmland. Here Bill grew up. He earned money by tending furnaces for neighbors and by delivering books for a Faculty Wives Book Club, which is still in existence. During World War I, he watched students drilling in Lambeth Field a few blocks away, and a summer's work in the family "War Garden" netted him \$25. Recreation was unorganized—neighborhood baseball games, overnight camping trips into the nearby countryside, and similar activities.

Undoubtedly Bill's early education, which was planned with the life of a clergyman in mind, influenced his career. Following schooling at Miss Nancy Gordon's School and the Charlottesville Public Schools, Bill entered

Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Va. Here he had a vigorous introduction to Latin and Greek and was influenced by some excellent English teachers. At the time he entered college at the University of Virginia, his parents hoped that he would become an Episcopal minister. He continued to study Latin and advanced Greek and concentrated on English, both composition and literature. He became an associate editor on the college paper. As his college career progressed, the desire to become a minister gradually weakened and was replaced by the desire to study medicine. This change meant a heavy concentration on science courses during the last year before entering medical school.

My friendship with Bill Bean began in the autumn of 1931 when we enrolled in the School of Medicine at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. At that time, the enrollment of the entire university was 2,522. He has described the occasion in a talk at the 25th year class reunion as follows:

The entering class then was small by today's standards, being about 60. Likewise, the medical school faculty was small. The faculty was full time, but the numbers in each department, basic science and clinical, ranged from two to six. The faculty and the students knew each other and evaluated each other. There was no depersonalization and no neutral ground. Despite the small size of the departments and the limitation on funds, all of the members of the Basic Science Department somehow managed to carry on research; all of it was of top quality and much of it broke new ground, some of which has been appreciated fully only in recent years. Likewise the Clinical Departments carried a heavy load with patient care and teaching; in addition most of them found time to carry on some clinical investigation (*Va Med Mon* 87:669-680, 1960).

One of the strong influences in Bill's life must have been the Department of Internal Medicine. It is probably difficult for present-day students to believe that there were only five members: Dr. J. Carroll Flippin, Chairman; Dr. Henry B. Mulholland; Dr. James E. Wood, Jr.; Dr. Staige D. Blackford; and Dr. Oscar Swineford. These five men gave all the lectures

in the medical courses, a goodly number that extended from the second year through the fourth year; they did all the teaching on the ward clerkships, which the student had in the third year and again in the fourth, and in the out-patient department. In addition, they were involved in teaching the house staff and carried on sizeable clinical practices in the hospital. These men were altogether superior. Their ideals and character, their competence in teaching, and their superior clinical knowledge were an inspiration for many. Now, it is hard to see how they accomplished as much as they did, for their lives still had time for sports and social activities. Of course, they were fortunate in many respects; there were hardly any committees or clinical conferences; there were relatively few regional or national societies, travel to medical meetings was limited, and "site visits" were unknown. Paper work—clinical, academic, and administrative—was miniscule compared to the present day; three secretaries did all the secretarial work of the whole Department of Internal Medicine and the dean's office. They took all of the electrocardiograms as well.

Contacts between the faculty and the students in the classrooms, in the hospital, and outside were frequent. There were student-faculty games in baseball (hard ball), touch football, and basketball. The faculty met groups of students in their homes at night for some elective classes during the fourth year and for special sessions in connection with the regular teaching. Many faculty members were regular attenders at parties and dances given by the medical fraternities and other groups. Members of the faculty felt tremendous concern for each individual student.

In the "Depression Days," few medical students were married, usually only two or three in a class before graduation. Although nearly all of the students came from what might be called substantial families, there were few without money problems. Summer vacation was a time for jobs of some sort; a job that brought money that could go toward the cost of an education, or even a job in the

hospital that provided only board, was considered desirable, more so than one in research with a faculty member, a position that carried no stipend or perquisites.

Grades based on frequent tests, essay-type examinations, oral examinations, and personal opinion were given in all the courses, and class standings were published every year. However, there was not the intense competition among medical students that characterizes most medical schools today, even though everyone realized that the students with the best records would get the best internships, by custom and by communication between the local faculty and that of other schools and hospitals. Men going into practice in those days usually faced a period of difficult living, and one was considered fortunate if he were able to pay both his office expenses and living expenses at the end of two years.

During the third and fourth years in school, each student was required to write a thesis or do some problem in research, write it up, and submit it to the faculty. The problem that Bill selected concerned the nerve supply of the heart, pleura, and pericardium, with reference to pain. This work was the first of many studies on cardiac problems that he continued at the Boston City Hospital after his internship at Johns Hopkins.

Bill's career in medicine has been

outstanding from the beginning. In medical school, his class standing was never lower than third and he was elected a member of Alpha Omega Alpha as well as the Raven Society, a University of Virginia Honor Society. Although many of his classmates would have predicted an outstanding career in academic medicine for him, probably as a cardiologist, few, if any, would have predicted his literary life, his success as an editor, author, and critic. Even now his output of papers (450) largely single-authored, books and chapters (87), and reviews (673) seems formidable. If there is a surprise in his career for those who have known him since school days it is not the ability that has been revealed but rather the industry that has been manifested.

His interest in Osler and medical history probably came from his father's influence and Cushing's biography of Osler, which was published shortly before he entered medical school. What he read of Osler and what he heard of Osler at home must have been sources of inspiration. In many ways, his life seems to be patterned after that of Osler, a fine model for an internist if there ever was one. His interest in medical history and old manuscripts, his breadth of literary interest, his extensive reading, his voluminous correspondence, and his numerous friends throughout the world indicate a kin-

dred spirit if not a disciple.

His many talents, industry, and personality have combined to produce an unusual and outstanding career. When one looks at Bill's early life it is easy to convince oneself that he sees a pattern for what followed. What better preparation for a literary career than Latin, Greek, and English in depth, even though it was pre-ministerial rather than premedical? Or for science than a scholarly, scientist father who repeatedly emphasized the importance of research? Or for medicine than a medical school environment where doctor-patient and faculty-student relationships were intensely personal?

To these assets he had the wit and good fortune to add another, a charming, understanding wife, Gail Shepherd Bean of Cincinnati. Educated at Sweet Briar College and the Sorbonne, she has been an inspiration, a good companion, and a healthy critic who is an all-important, probably essential element in her husband's success.

Looking back after more than 40 years, some impressions stand out. Bill has enjoyed life, attained success, and not compromised his principles. More talented than most, he has made the most of his talents.

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