

TRIBUTES TO



MRS. LAURETTE McMECHAN

1878-1970

## Laurette Van Varsveld McMechan

Mrs. Francis Hoeffler McMechan, Honorary Assistant Editor of *Anesthesia and Analgesia . . . Current Researches*, died Friday, May 22, 1970, at the Santa Monica Convalescent Center in Los Angeles, California. The former Laurette Van Varsveld had lived in Cleveland and Rocky River for thirty-four years prior to her retirement in 1956.

Laurette Van Varsveld McMechan played a pioneering role in the world-wide development of the specialty of anesthesiology and its literature in more than a half-century as a medical editor and an executive of the International Anesthesia Research Society.

Mrs. McMechan was born in Italy on May 15, 1878, and raised in Paris, France. She was attending the Schuster-Martin School of Acting in Cincinnati, Ohio in the early 1900's when she met the late Francis Hoeffler McMechan, M.D., one of the first physicians to specialize in anesthesiology, and the founder of *Current Researches in Anesthesia and Analgesia*, the official Journal of the International Anesthesia Research Society.

Dr. McMechan, in addition to maintaining an active practice in the specialty of anesthesiology, served as Director of the Schuster School of Acting. Laurette Van Varsveld usually took parts in the plays he produced and also provided critical judgment of the many plays Dr. McMechan wrote as a hobby.

They were married on June 5, 1909. Eighteen months later, Dr. McMechan was stricken with an illness that confined him to a wheelchair for the remaining 28 years of his life. He died in 1939.

In the first year of his convalescence, Dr. McMechan recognized the need for a journal devoted to anesthesiology. In 1914 he began editing a Quarterly Supplement of *Anesthesia and Analgesia* for the *American Journal of Surgery*, and in 1922 this supplement became the journal, *Current Researches in*

*Anesthesia and Analgesia*. It gained international prestige as a source of information on the clinical progress of the specialty. It is the oldest journal in the world devoted to the specialty of anesthesiology, and since 1957 has been known as *Anesthesia and Analgesia . . . Current Researches*.

The continued success of the International Anesthesia Research Society and the journal owes much to the unstinting help of Mrs. McMechan. Her unselfishness and devotion to her husband greatly contributed to his success. She accompanied him everywhere in their world-wide travels on behalf of the specialty.

Because Dr. McMechan's physical condition worsened in 1929, Mrs. McMechan assumed the responsibilities of the journal. Even though Dr. McMechan improved within two years and again became active in its publication, she continued to carry a substantial portion of the daily work associated with the journal. After Dr. McMechan's death in 1939, Mrs. McMechan assumed full responsibilities for the editing and business affairs of the journal work which she continued for 17 years.

She retired from active participation in the journal and the Society in 1956, and was appointed Honorary Assistant Editor by the Board of Trustees of the International Anesthesia Research Society, in recognition of her many years of loyal service and contributions to the journal and to the specialty of anesthesiology.

The tangible expressions of respect received from the many individuals and societies, such as:

"Countless numbers mourn the passing of Laurette McMechan, the beloved mother of world anesthesiology. We cherish her memory and example"; and, "Laurette was a very able woman, a fine worker for anesthesiology, an internationalist, and a lady" — attest to the high regard in which Mrs. McMechan was held by everyone.

## Tributes to Mrs. Laurette McMechan

LAURETTE, widow of Francis Hoeffler McMechan, died in Santa Monica, California, on May 22, 1970 at the age of about 92 years.

Mrs. McMechan, known affectionately as the "Mother of Anaesthetists," had a world-wide reputation. Her husband, the first Secretary-General of the International Anesthesia Research Society, played a unique role in the organization of anaesthetics as a world-specialty. To this end, he visited most of the 'developed' countries of the world, including Australia in 1929. Since he was crippled by arthritis, much of his travel was done in a wheelchair. This was made possible by the devotion of his wife, who tended him in every way. Further, she gave active help in his organizing work and his editorship of *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, the organ of his Society. After his death in 1939, she continued for many years as an assistant-editor of the journal.

Laurette McMechan was well-qualified for work in what might be termed the diplomatic side of anaesthetics. She was a *Parisienne*, a descendant of Baron Larrey, Napoleon's surgeon-in-chief. Her father, a colonel in the French army, had a home on the Champs Elysées. There, he entertained many prominent people, from the then Shah of Persia downwards. Laurette was thus born to the use of an international language and to the ways of high society. If her marriage to a doctor from the American Midwest entailed exile in some respects, it held the compensations of mutual affection and

opportunities for pioneering in an important field.

In person, Laurette was the *Parisienne* of legend; *petite*, fair-complexioned, of features irregular but so animated as to appear handsome. She dressed with true Parisian *chic*, and her energy was unbounded: on her last visit to Sydney in 1962, at the age of 85 years, she insisted upon seeing the sights on foot and unaccompanied. Her conversation can be described only by the French word *spirituelle*. Behind this attractive facade lay zeal, idealism, infinite kindness, and great knowledge of the world. Like her husband, she was an internationalist. Their internationalism aimed rather at common civilization than at common technology.

Laurette McMechan was one of a group — Bourne, McKesson, Waters, Lundy, Clement were amongst its American leaders — which pioneered the modern, scientific approach to anaesthetics. She carries with her to the shades the esteem, as well as the affection, of 'her boys' in many countries. Amongst those 'boys,' the present writers are proud to have been numbered.

Harry J. Daly, C.M.G., M.B., Ch.M.  
8, The Parapet  
Castlecrag,  
Sydney, Australia

Geoffrey Kaye, M.D.  
78A Cromwell Road  
S.E. 1  
Melbourne, Australia

---

IT WAS kind of you to let me know of the passing of Laurette McMechan in Santa Monica — not an occasion for sadness but rather one for warm and happy recollections of a wonderful personality who did much for anesthesiology.

I shall always be proud of having been counted as one of her legion of friends.

John Gillies, M.D.  
Edinburgh, Scotland

