

# Pol N. Coryllos

*November 2, 1880 — July 26, 1938*

On July 26, 1938, a cerebral hemorrhage closed the career of Pol N. Coryllos, since 1923 a professor of Clinical Surgery in the Cornell University Medical College.

Dr. Coryllos was born in Patras, Greece, on November 2, 1880. His college and medical education was obtained at Athens, where he received a medical degree in 1900. In the same year he went to Paris, became a French citizen, obtained a bachelor's, a master's and a doctor of Philosophy degree from the Sorbonne, and a second degree of M.D. from the University of Paris in 1914. During this time he served as an instructor in Anatomy from 1902-1910, an instructor in Pathology from 1909-1911, and an assistant in Gynecology under Dr. Jean Louis Faure from 1910-1912.

In 1912, during the Balkan war, he went to Greece as a volunteer. He was commissioned captain in the medical service of the Greek army, and was appointed director of an ambulance unit of 75 beds. He organized this ambulance unit as a mobile hospital, thus bringing surgery to the wounded, which was contrary to the principle of that time of transporting the wounded to the surgeon. This hospital was the precursor of the underground advance posts that were used during the World War. He was thus able to treat abdominal, thoracic, and head wounds within a comparatively short time after injury. His experiences were published in a number of articles and in book form in Paris in 1914 under the title *Preventive Trepanation in Bullet Wounds of the Skull*. For this he was awarded the gold medal of the Academy of Paris.

At the end of the Balkan War he resumed his hospital position in Paris. In 1914 he was a lieutenant in the French army, serving from August 1914 to December 1916 at Dieppe, Bar-le-duc, and Verdun. In December 1916 he was sent by the French Government as a member of a special mission to Russia to organize the surgical service at the Russo-Rumanian front. He was given the medical direction of the section of Padureni and organized the combined Russian and Rumanian hospitals at the front. In March 1918 he was recalled to France, was promoted to the rank of major, and served at Chateau-Thierry until the Armistice. Immediately after the Armistice, at the request of the Greek Government he was sent to Greece on a special mission to organize the surgical service in the Greek army. He was appointed a professor of surgery in the medical college of the University of Athens and surgeon-general of the army. During this time he devoted himself principally to the study of wounds of the chest, for which he had organized a special surgical center. As evidence of the appreciation of his services during these

years he could wear, although he never did, seven decorations from the country of his nativity, one from Serbia, one from Montenegro, three from Rumania, four from Russia, and three from France, a total of nineteen.

The question naturally arises, why did Dr. Coryllos, occupying such high positions in his native country, leave Greece and come to America. It was the same reason which has directed so many to our shores since the very beginning—politics. Dr. Coryllos was by birth, training, and personal conviction a believer in the principles of democracy, and so became a friend and supporter of Venizelos, the leader of the antiroyalist or republican party of Greece. In 1922 this party suffered an eclipse and Dr. Coryllos had to follow his leader into exile, not a permanent exile, for he was repeatedly besought by his countrymen to return and was decorated by the Greek Government as late as 1936.

Such was the remarkable career of a remarkable man. In a way it was a handicap, for unless one knew the intensity of his training, the breadth of his experience, his linguistic accomplishments, and his unparalleled memory for literature and clinical cases, it was impossible to believe that one mind could encompass so much, and this of course led to mental question and reservation concerning him. His incomplete mastery of spoken English made it difficult to follow him, thereby increasing the listener's difficulty in evaluating the man. But to those who knew him well enough to gain an insight into his vast and varied experience, who knew the background and ideals of the man, he stood revealed as an example of the highest type of Old World gentleman. If hard work is the essence of genius, then Dr. Coryllos was a genius, for there could not be a more energetic and indefatigable worker. Interested in all phases of medicine, he was especially enthusiastic in his chosen field of Thoracic Surgery, an interest which, as we have noted, began in Athens. During his connection with Cornell he did a great amount of research in this field. Time alone can be the ultimate judge of the value of any such work. It can be said now, at any rate, that his work stimulated many others to an interest in the problem. His work was honestly, thoroughly, painstakingly performed.

We can share with his native country a sincere regret that one of the best sons of the land which has produced so many men of note for so many centuries should be taken at the comparatively early age of 57. We can extend to his widow and daughter our profound sympathy. This much only can we do. We can never replace him.