

The Great Cotzias

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Synopsis

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Dr. George Cotzias lived a large life. He stood over six feet tall; he drank Metaxa like milk; he smoked cigarettes as if eating candy. He bullied patients, sometimes looming over their wasted bodies. He had a stare as strong as death. His passion for women, his wife, and others was infamous. His voice boomed through the halls of the hospital where he was chief of physiology research.

Cotzias also had a large ego which launched him into battles with the NIH, which persuaded him to try experiments never before done on patients. One such set of experiments discovered the treatment for Parkinson's disease, for which Cotzias hoped to win the Nobel Prize.

One of Cotzias's colleagues wrote the story of this unknown famous man. *The Great Cotzias: Discoverer of the Treatment for Parkinson's Disease* is Dr. Bernard Patten's tribute to his colleague. Patten served as an intern to Dr. Cotzias one fate-filled summer, an interim in Patten's career influencing him for the rest of his life.

Patten has a near-photographic memory and had the foresight to take notes while working with Dr. Cotzias. The novelistic tone to this nonfiction account gives the feeling of being in the middle of meetings about diagnoses, of going on rounds with the doctors, of listening to harangues by Cotzias, of having arguments with the nurses, of being in a near meltdown of the local nuclear plant and other adventures.

Even political ties to China come into the story. It seemed that Mao Tse Tung - whom Cotzias continually referred to as Mouse Tongue - had Parkinson's, and the US was able to offer a treatment to Mao for certain considerations.

Because of Dr. Cotzias's attitude of "come hell or high water", he forged on with his medical knowledge and intuition, stepping on feet, not toes, shouting his way to resolution, shoving his face into the faces of the moneymen, pushing into arguments about protocol. He stopped at nothing, and he found the treatment for Parkinson's in the 1960s.

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