Dr. Sunderman, honored guests, fellows and members, ladies and gentlemen.

Some time ago, Dr. Sunderman asked that I conspire with him to bring our friend and colleague, Dr. Wallace H. Coulter, to this meeting so that we may join together in conferring upon him the honor of our Association that is embodied in the Gold-headed Cane. I am happy to say that my insistence prevailed over Dr. Coulter’s modesty, and he is here now with us for this purpose.

From early times, the staff has been a symbol of spiritual and secular authority. How natural then, in the 17th Century, for it to become the badge of the physician by the addition of a spherical gold head that contained an aromatic vinaigrette for warding off the noxious and contagious vapors of the sick room.

By the 18th Century, the successful physician took to riding in an elegant carriage and, in addition to his Gold-headed Cane, sported a scarlet silk coat and full-bottomed wig. As to the appropriateness of these accoutrements in today’s society, it appears that the use of the elegant carriage has become firmly entrenched; the scarlet silk coat is quite out of fashion, and the requirement for a full-bottomed wig I must leave to the judgment of this audience. However, in the matter of the Gold-headed Cane, as a symbol of both excellence and eminence in the world of medicine, I would aver that the Cane and the honorable qualities and professional attainments of Wallace Coulter make a most harmonious conjunction.

After I had acceded to Dr. Sunderman’s invitation to make this presentation, I felt trepidation at having to describe a man with whom I have worked for almost 20 years. Indeed, I
was struck by the truth of Samuel Johnson’s words, “They only who live with a man can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination; but few people who have lived with a man know what to remark about him.” As a result, Wallace, I hope you will accept this tribute in the spirit of the further words of Samuel Johnson who might have described my effort as, “Sir, it is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well but you are surprised to find it done at all.”

Wallace Coulter has presented our profession with two gifts. The first of these is his invention of techniques for counting, sizing and characterizing cells and a wide range of other particulate materials. This technology, deceptive in its apparent simplicity but remarkable for its actual sophistication, has truly revolutionized many aspects of medical practice. It has had, I believe, as profound an effect on the practice of hematology as did the invention of the microscope 300 years earlier. The potential of the technology is far from being exhausted. Today, there are more applications and new and quite fundamental forms of measurement being made with it. Just to keep pace with the rapidly expanding bibliography of work that uses the Coulter Principle is a formidable task in itself.

Great inventions spawn imitators. Every Daimler-Benz has its Lexus. I can assure you that, in industry, we do not regard imitation as the sincerest form of flattery. We regard it as an exploitation of our pioneering efforts. However, we take great comfort in the knowledge that there is one part of the Coulter Principle that cannot be imitated. This is the man, Wallace Coulter, himself. It is said that great inventions must be driven forward by great men, and it is obvious that Wallace Coulter is one such. We all know that greatness is not achieved only through the work of one’s own hands. True greatness lies in the ability to inspire others to work together for the achievement of great goals. In this regard, Wallace has been ably supported by his brother, Joseph Coulter, Jr. As president of our Company, Joe nurtures the unique corporate environment in which innovation and creativity are the norm.

I think the most important ingredients in this form of leadership are honesty, humility and dedication. In my many years of work and, I hope, friendship with Wallace Coulter, he has held steadfast to these virtues and, since he is a rather obstinate person, I don’t see him changing much in the future. Let me also say that he wears these virtues with style and grace.

And so our Association pays tribute to this man whose work has helped many of us achieve our own professional goals. Here is the symbol of this tribute. Take this, Wallace Coulter, as a sincere expression of our gratitude for your work and your life. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I give you Wallace Coulter the holder of our Association’s Gold-headed Cane.

On November 16, 1989, the Association of Clinical Scientists engaged in two most notable and agreeable events, each the revival of a notable custom. The Madeira party was the epitome of elegance, suavity, and impeccable execution. The presentation of the Gold-headed Cane was (for me) a glossed-over turmoil of uncertainties. Many months earlier, Sunderman had asked me to do this thing in his most nonchalant fashion, as though locating and acquiring the cane was a task of trivial dimension,—it wasn’t. Therefore, for the instruction of future generations of gold-headed cane hunters, look to the premises of Swaine, Adeney, Briggs and Sons, Ltd., whip and glove makers to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. You may find them in Picadilly. Be tolerant as to the measurements but peremptory as to the materials. Let the head and band clearly show the mark of the Guild of the Goldsmiths and the shaft be of finest Brazilian rosewood. If, from curiosity, you enquire as to the uses her Majesty might put her whips and gloves, be prepared to be answered, as I was, “The usual purposes, sir.”