

SCIENCE

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THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION: ITS ORIGIN, PROGRESS AND PURPOSE.¹

BOTH established usage and the by-laws of this association require the presiding officer to deliver annually an address touching such matters as he may deem of importance. In the early years of the association the president's address was devoted to an epitome of the progress of medical science in its various departments during the preceding year. Since distinguished orators are now selected annually to perform this important service, the president's address may be more appropriately directed to subjects relating to the general welfare of the profession and to the purposes for which this great organization was established.

The annual session of the American Medical Association is always an occasion of special moment and universal interest to the medical profession of America. That several thousand physicians from all sections of our broad country assemble annually for the advancement of medical science and the elevation of our profession is a splendid testimonial to the earnestness of professional achievement and aspiration. The occasion can not but command the respect of all who are concerned in the progress of science and the betterment of the human race. The spirit which pervades such an assemblage is the desire for improvement, for the increase of scientific re-

¹ President's address, at the fifty-sixth annual session of the American Medical Association at Portland, Oregon, July 11-14, 1905. From *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

sources, and for the diffusion of medical knowledge. Closely related to these ennobling purposes is that social instinct of our profession, which would elevate and be elevated by interchange of views resulting from common experiences, and by mingling together in pleasant friendly intercourse. Happily our present meeting is held under ideal conditions for the exercise of all the functions of such an organization. Perfect harmony prevails. The differences which at times have divided us have all been satisfactorily adjusted; and we are today as one man in our united effort to advance the science of medicine, to enlarge the scope of its beneficence and to promote the welfare of our profession.

Since our meeting at Atlantic City one year ago, many of our members have ceased their labors and passed to the great beyond. The list is a long one. Among the number is that of Nathan Smith Davis. He was one of the founders of this association, an ex-president; a member of the board of trustees, the first editor of the *Journal*, and for years a power for good in its affairs. He lived beyond the time allotted by the psalmist, and all his years were filled with labor and with honor. I will not undertake at this time to estimate adequately his great services, or appropriately to pay tribute to his memory. This will be done later in the session by one better prepared than I to eulogize our departed leader.

At our last session, Dr. B. C. Pennington, of Atlantic City, was chairman of the committee of arrangements. He was honored with the fourth vice-presidency in recognition of his ability, his high professional standing, and his devoted services to this association. His name, too, is now found among the year's honored dead. A cultured gentleman, a learned and accomplished physician, his memory will ever re-

main as an inspiration for high ideals and noble endeavor.

EARLY YEARS.

When the American Medical Association was organized in 1846 it is doubtful if there were more than 25,000 physicians in the entire United States of America. It was organized as a representative body, composed of delegates from affiliated societies, colleges and hospitals throughout the states. It was a body of delegates from all state, district, county and other medical societies which adopted the code of ethics of the national association. The apportionment of delegates was on a basis of one for every ten members of the societies represented. For a number of years the delegate body thus constituted was not too large for the discussion of important subjects and the ready transaction of business.

With the rapid increase in population, the admission of new states to the union, and the settlement of new territories, came a vast increase of physicians, with a corresponding multiplication of state and county societies. Without change in the apportionment of delegates, the national association developed into a body too large and unwieldy for the transaction of business. Indeed, during the latter years under the original system of organization, practically every member in attendance on the annual sessions was a delegate. While the work of the sections was carried on with increasing excellence, the important functions relating to legislative and other matters, belonging to a great national organization of the medical profession, were neglected. The general sessions brought together hundreds of delegates, forming a convention so large that thorough discussion of important questions and judicious action on the same became practically impossible. Moreover, the delegates attending the annual sessions

constituted a body annually changing in personnel; and the sources of attendance changed with the sections of the country in which the meetings were held. In consequence there could be neither that equal representation of all sections which must obtain in a national body, nor continuation of work from year to year along definite lines.

THE SECTIONS.

During these early years it was the steady improvement in the work of the sections which drew the best element of the profession to the annual sessions. Many leaders of the profession in the various states attended the sections in which they were interested, and took no part in the proceedings of the general meetings. The sections have now reached such a high degree of efficiency that they have attained the standard so much desired, and rank as leading special national societies in the several departments of medical science which they represent.

As chairman of the committee on sections and section work, I have carefully studied the workings of the sections. As a result of this experience, I would repeat the recommendation of my distinguished predecessor in this chair, that the secretary of each section should be elected for a term of years. No national society can maintain its efficiency which changes its secretary annually. And again, I would suggest that the officers of the several sections meet together in conference as soon as practicable after the adjournment of the session at which they are elected, in order that definite plans may be formulated for the scientific work of the next annual session. The conference of section officers in New York last November contributed much toward the development of the admirable scientific program now before you for the present session.

It should be the aim and purpose of every member of this association to aid the officers of the sections in elevating continually the standard of scientific work. Every American physician may have pride in the work done year after year in the sections of this association.

THE JOURNAL.

It would be a difficult task were we to undertake a definite estimate of the influence of the *Journal* in the great work which this association has accomplished during the past two decades. When it was decided to discontinue the annual volume of transactions, and to establish a weekly journal, the change was viewed with apprehension by many. The influence of this publication, the property of the association, in stimulating research, diffusing knowledge, elevating professional thought and conduct, and building up this great organization can not be computed. This part of my discourse is so replete with suggestion, that I fear the time and space at my command will not permit such consideration as should be devoted to it.

The volumes of the *Journal* mark the steady and continued growth of the association, and likewise bear testimony to the fact that the *Journal* itself has been a potent factor in that growth. Under the judicious direction of the board of trustees the *Journal* has steadily advanced as a scientific publication. By the untiring daily services of the present able editor, it has leaped into the very front rank of scientific publications, and in all that a great weekly medical journal should be it has no superior in the world. The power exerted by such a publication as a medium of communication among the members of the association is inestimable, to say nothing of the other more important functions performed by a great weekly journal. It has been

the most potent instrument in building up this association to its present proud position as the largest medical organization in the world. No other American medical periodical has a circulation so distinctly national, and no other journal can sustain the same relation to the great body of the medical profession. It is a great engine whose power is constantly increasing, constantly extending. With such increased power comes increased responsibility, much of which rests with the house of delegates in the selection of proper men to fill the responsible places of the trustees. No other office should be regarded higher in honor than that of the trustees, as no other affords greater scope for unselfish labor and efficient service to the association. Under the conditions of our organization more power is invested in this board than the combined power of all other officers.

THE NEW ERA.

At the annual session of 1900 a committee on reorganization was appointed, and one year later, at St. Paul, the report of the committee was submitted and adopted. It included a new constitution, which altered the basis of apportionment for delegates, so as to reduce the delegate body to 150, and definitely established a close relationship between the national organization and the state, district and county societies. For the first time a practical scheme of complete organization of the medical profession of the United States was provided. This is the fourth annual session held under the new plan of organization.

Previous to the reorganization, the valuable scientific work of the sections constituted almost the sum total of the effective work accomplished by the association. Matters appertaining to medical education, to the public health, to national legislation and to the welfare of the profession re-

ceived no deliberate consideration; and in consequence no decisive action was carried out. This condition existed for the reasons already mentioned. In a word, the very objects and aims for which the association was organized were thwarted by the growth of the association into an unwieldy delegate body. Under the reorganization, the house of delegates, in which the membership of the state societies is proportionately represented, now gives deliberate consideration to those important matters, already indicated, which under the former organization were neglected.

The influence of the revised plan of organization was immediately apparent in the increased attendance at the annual sessions, and the stimulus felt in every purpose of the association. And each year this influence has grown, until some idea can now be formed of the great possibilities to come from organization on a definite and practical plan. The good results which accrue to the profession as a whole, and to every member as an individual, are so positive that no subject can deserve more careful consideration by this body than that of medical organization. Indeed, it is the fundamental question before us, and on its decision depend the results of all our other efforts in all directions.

In order that we may thoroughly appreciate the origin and purpose of the association, and thereby be better prepared to meet its present and future requirements, I have very imperfectly outlined the history of its earlier years. During the more than half century of its existence it has always brought to its councils the ablest and best men in the profession of America. Among its leaders from the beginning are found the most eminent physicians and surgeons of the day. In the list of its active members are the names of Samuel D. Gross, Paul F. Eve, Austin Flint, Marion Sims,

N. S. Davis, Alfred Stillé, Lewis A. Sayre and many others which adorn the annals of American medicine. It has from the beginning been a great power with the profession of America. Its greatest influence, as I have already indicated, was in the growth and diffusion of scientific knowledge through the splendid work of the sections. In elevating medical education, in promoting legislation and advancing the powers of public health organizations, its influence was most felt in the development of a helpful public professional opinion. The extension of the influence and advantages of organization to the masses of the profession was gradually lost sight of in the annual meetings, and the work relating to matters of public policy was spasmodically considered and imperfectly executed. Whatever was accomplished along these lines worthy of mention was the work of committees. The necessity of reorganization was appreciated by the leading members of the association long before it was accomplished. In 1888, Dr. N. S. Davis, as chairman of a committee appointed for the purpose, reported a scheme of reorganization very similar to that adopted in 1901 at St. Paul.

ORGANIZATION.

The object of this association shall be to federate into one compact organization the medical profession of the United States, for the purpose of fostering the growth and diffusion of medical knowledge, of promoting friendly intercourse among American physicians, of safeguarding the material interests of the medical profession, of elevating the standard of medical education, of securing the enactment and enforcement of medical laws, of enlightening and directing public opinion in regard to the broad problems of state medicine, and of representing to the world the practical accomplishments of scientific medicine. (Article II., constitution of the American Medical Association.)

If every physician worked alone, relied on his own unaided observation for his

knowledge, never looking outside his own scope of view, ignorance would prevail and there would be no progress in medical science. Medicine is not an exact science, and until perfected by extorting from nature all her secrets, it must from the nature of things continue to be a progressive science. Never before in the history of medicine has such marked progress in all its departments been made as during the present age. Theories have been supplanted by facts; laboratory research and clinical investigation have taken the place of tradition and authoritative opinion. To rely on the accomplishments of the college period is to be left behind in hopeless incompetency. The advance of medical knowledge is to be observed first in our medical societies, and afterward in our scientific medical journals. In the medical societies innovations are subjected to criticism and discussion by those competent to judge the merits of scientific contributions. Moreover, there is a stimulus to study and investigation from association with workers in the same field; and one obtains a broader view of every subject so considered. The physician, more than any other professional man, is isolated by the conditions of his life, and to no profession is the educating influence of society work so essential and invaluable. This same condition of isolation is at the foundation, for the most part, of the jealousies and petty bickerings so prevalent in our profession. These troubles are, as a rule, the result of misunderstandings, and are both prevented and corrected by coming together in a society composed of physicians. The lonely worker in any calling is prone to become narrow, suspicious and morbid. Our medical societies are the great post-graduate schools of the profession, where knowledge is increased and individual character developed.

But the promotion of scientific investiga-

tion, and the diffusion of medical knowledge are not the only objects of organization. Our profession has a most essential and important duty in relation to the public health. Through no other agency can municipal, state and national health authorities formulate and secure recognition of laws to prevent and control disease. Another duty no less essential is so to regulate and to control medical education that the ignorant and unworthy shall not be admitted to the privileges of the profession, thereby preserving the time-honored standard of professional honor and scientific capability. In this age of organization, without it the profession is powerless to secure the enactment of humane sanitary laws, by which alone the people can be protected from preventable diseases. The welfare of the profession collectively and individually can only be subserved by organization. Without such organization, our profession, as a body politic, will be without unanimity of sentiment or action in relation to the important scientific, ethical and social questions which confront us; and consequently without influence politically, socially or otherwise.

In the declaration of the constitution adopted at St. Paul, which I have just quoted, the American Medical Association has undertaken to place within reach of every reputable medical practitioner in the United States these incalculable advantages of medical organization.

The committee on reorganization appointed in 1900 has treated this subject in a masterly manner. After a careful study of the condition of the profession throughout the states with relation to organization, reports have been made to the association showing the needs of the profession and the extent of the work required. A uniform plan of organization for state and county societies, making the county society the

unit of organization, and federating all state societies in the national association in harmonious cooperation, has been prepared by the committee. The able chairman of this committee has with remarkable tact, patience, and good judgment given his personal supervision to this great work in almost every state and territory. In his latest report it is announced that all the states and territories, except three, and including Hawaii and Porto Rico, are now organized on a practically uniform plan, with universal local societies, and coincident membership in them and the state associations as the cardinal feature. To illustrate the magnitude of this work, I mention that, under the stimulus of reorganization after the plan of the committee, the Michigan State Medical Association increased in membership in one year from 452 to about 2,100. Texas increased the membership in the same time from 382 to 2,510, while several states quadrupled their membership. While these results are phenomenal, and elicit our admiration, it will be realized how much remains to be done when it is considered that few of the states have over 50 per cent. of the eligible members of the profession enrolled as members of the society. Indeed, the work is yet almost in its infancy. What has been accomplished is an assurance for the future; and considering the brief time since reorganization began, is a high tribute to the enterprise of the national association and the work of its able and efficient committee. The possibilities of this work are stupendous, and as it proceeds the association can confidently undertake the great reforms of such incalculable moment to the profession and the public. In his official report to the house of delegates one year ago, the chairman of the committee on organization, after reporting the splendid results of his labors during the year, said:

The real test of our organization will come in each state when the first out-burst of enthusiasm has passed, and county societies, the foundation for everything, are likely to disappear as rapidly as they have been formed, unless their usefulness to the rank and file of the profession can be demonstrated in a very broad way.

In recognition of this fact, it is of the utmost importance that the personal attention so effectively given to this work throughout the states by the chairman of the committee be continued.

MEDICAL EDUCATION.

When the American Medical Association was founded in May, 1846, the delegates assembled in response to the following preamble and resolutions of the Medical Society of the State of New York:

WHEREAS, It is believed that a national convention would be conducive to the elevation of the standard of medical education in the United States, and

WHEREAS, There is no mode of accomplishing so desirable an object without concert of action on the part of the medical societies, colleges and institutions of all the states, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Medical Society of the State of New York earnestly recommends a national convention of delegates from medical societies and colleges of the whole union, to convene in the City of New York, on the first Tuesday in May, in the year 1846, for the purpose of adopting some concerted action on the subject, set forth in the foregoing preamble.

From this it is apparent that this association was founded with the avowed and specific purpose of elevating the standard of medical education in this country. This subject has constantly received consideration from the association throughout the years of its existence; and while no distinct and positive reform marks its action, the perpetual demand for improvement undoubtedly molded the public sentiment of the profession which ultimately stimulated action on the part of the medical colleges. Since the addresses of my two distinguished

predecessors, who immediately preceded me in this chair, were devoted to the consideration of medical education, I shall only make brief allusion to this subject. The several national organizations and the many state boards which are now dealing with this important professional problem invest the changing conditions with peculiar interest. The present is a transition period in the advancement and reform of medical education in America.

The consideration of this subject in the house of delegates culminated in the establishment last year of the council on medical education of the American Medical Association. During the past year the council has taken up its work with exceptional energy and good judgment, and is directing its efforts along most practical lines. The first annual conference was held in Chicago, April 20, last. Representatives of many state examining and licensing boards, of the American and Southern Medical Colleges associations, and of the government medical services, attended and participated in the discussions of the papers presented. The plan and scope of the work of the council can be best appreciated by a consideration of this extract from the address of the distinguished chairman of the council delivered to the conference:

What we need is cooperation, especially the cooperation between the medical profession, represented by the American Medical Association, and the state and county medical societies, and the state authorities, represented by the state licensing and examining boards. The most important question, therefore, before this conference is, How can the American medical profession and the state licensing bodies cooperate to elevate and control medical education? It is believed that such cooperation is possible. In such cooperation it will be the function of the American Medical Association to represent and possibly mold the opinion of the medical profession, and employ its influence and the influence of the county and state medical societies in obtaining proper medical legislation. In such cooperation it will be the function of the

state licensing bodies to protect the interests of the public and the profession by seeing that the medical laws are properly interpreted and enforced, and from their intimate knowledge with the medical acts they can often be of service in securing or modifying medical legislation.

It is not the purpose of the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association to attempt to arrogate to itself any special powers, nor does it desire either to criticize or interfere in any way with any of the agencies which are already in the field. If its creation is to result in good, it must be the means of obtaining cooperation between the medical profession, and the medical schools, the colleges of arts, the state examining boards, the government services, and all the factors which are interested in elevating and controlling medical education.

By securing cooperation of the various state and national bodies engage in this important work, recognizing the varied interests involved in the numerous states of the union, and fostering an intelligent public sentiment, so essential for every great reform, the influence of the association will be of the most effective character.

MEDICAL LEGISLATION.

Chapter VII., Section 3, of the by-laws provides a permanent committee on medical legislation 'to represent before congress and elsewhere the wishes of this association regarding any proposed legislation that in any respect bears on the promotion and preservation of the public health, or on the material or moral welfare of the medical profession.' This committee was appointed in 1903, and under the leadership of its accomplished and energetic chairman proceeded at once to organize the auxiliary committee provided in the by-laws. This being a permanent committee, its work will be continued from year to year. With the auxiliary committee, representing every state in the union, and the several medical departments of the government service, every representative of the people in congress can be reached directly. The impor-

tance of this work is so apparent that I need only call attention to it at this time, and urge on all members of the association the necessity of aiding and cooperating with the committee at all times. The disregard of the good work of the medical profession in the public service (to say nothing of the indignities offered) on the part of congress is notorious; and it is only by such concentrated power of the profession, intelligently directed, that such injustice may be overcome. I commend to your consideration the report of this committee in order that you may appreciate the important work already projected.

COUNCIL ON PHARMACY AND CHEMISTRY.

The use of proprietary medicines in the treatment of diseases has become one of the most confusing and demoralizing questions of the day. All proprietary medicines must not be classed as secret nostrums, for there are many honestly made and ethically advertised proprietary preparations that have therapeutic value and that deserve the approval of the medical profession. But there are many preparations offered the profession, which are protected by copyright or trade-mark, with formulæ more or less fictitious, and for which are made extravagant claims, which are in fact secret remedies. These preparations are so exploited by the manufacturer that the physician is persuaded to use them instead of writing a prescription; and since they usually bear popular names and plausible therapeutic claims, they appeal to the fancy of the laity. The field is an enticing one for commercial enterprise since these preparations in many instances are simple mixtures and contain the most inexpensive drugs. The use of such remedies is both unscientific and unjust, alike to physician and to patient.

The separation of the legitimate pharma-

ceutical preparations from the class of fraudulent nostrums described is a most difficult undertaking. This perplexing problem forced itself from year to year on the attention of the board of trustees in the effort of the board to keep the advertising pages of the *Journal* free from unethical advertisements. In order to have thorough protection and to make no unjust discrimination, the board has established the council on pharmacy and chemistry to make the necessary investigations. The council is composed of pharmacists and chemists of national and international reputation. It will be the aim of the council to publish in book form, a list of the preparations which are not official, yet which conform to the proper ethical standard. The work of the council will be similar to that of the Committee on Revision of the United States Pharmacopœia.

The magnitude and importance of this work is such that I desire to direct attention to it here, and to commend it to the members of the association as deserving every possible aid and advancement. It is the only practical way to deliver the profession from one of the greatest curses that ever came on it.

It has been my endeavor on this occasion to outline the plans of the founders of the association, briefly to trace the evolution of those plans throughout half a century of progress, and to recount some of the purposes that invite our active exertions at the present time. From a small body of delegates our association has increased until it is now the largest medical organization in the world. It owns valuable property, has accumulated a considerable fund, and has a large annual income, all of which belongs to, and is subject to the control of, the members who through their delegates select the board of trustees to manage their funds.

The possibilities of the work before us

are almost beyond calculation. In acting as the representative and agent of the 120,000 physicians of the United States, the association is assuming great responsibilities, which will increase from year to year. It will require administrative and executive ability of the highest order to meet these demands; but there is both prophecy and proof in the work already accomplished that men will appear as needed to discharge the supreme duties of a great profession in behalf of science and humanity.

LEWIS S. MCMURTRY.

LOUISVILLE, KY.

THE RELATION OF PHYLOGENESIS TO
HISTORICAL GEOLOGY.

FEW persons would be so bold as to offer serious objection to the great thesis of evolution, to the theory of common descent or to that of the competitive struggle of individuals and species for existence and its selective results, so ably enunciated by Darwin half a century ago. It is, nevertheless, true that of late years there has been an increasing distrust of the theory of the origin of species by natural selection which he therewith proposed, and which was long universally accepted with even less reserve than the author himself expressed. This distrust is especially felt in endeavoring to apply the latter theory to certain lines of paleontological investigation. A number of selected facts are stated at some length on following pages which show abundant reason for regarding that theory unfavorably in such cases. It is there shown that genera, families, orders and classes of animals and plants have, during geological time, usually originated with such comparative rapidity as to make it necessary to infer that species have originated suddenly; that the ratio of progressive development in the different faunal and floral divisions