Oettinger (B.)

Anent an Urgent Duty of the Profession.

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DENVER.

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While the medical bill for which executive assent was recently withheld, ostensibly failed to become a law because it lacked this official approval, that which really decided its fate, and, of equal importance, the difficulty that would have been encountered in its enforcement in case the bill had become a state law, may be attributed to superficial judgment born of a widespread dearth of knowledge, to a considerable public opinion into which there enters no intelligent conception of the laws of health and disease, as well as to a cast of mind common to many persons in our communities who know no more of the facts proven by the science of biology than perhaps the name given to its successive developmental phases, and which even in such a case is tersely supposed to mean that "man is descended from the monkey."

To-day, as in all times past, in the wake of that method of investigation which ignores exact objective research and wholly relies upon interrogating self-consciousness, there necessarily follows a philosophy based upon facile imagination and ofttimes much empty pride. Such a system adopts the metaphysical idea that since man stands for a separate and distinct work in the creation, bearing dominion over all other life-forms on account of a pristine innate superiority, and is, in short, as has been said, "the measure of the universe," the study of his being can have nothing in common with that of living things lower in the

scale of life, but must needs be solely directed towards ferreting man's resemblance to an indulgent Creator, who, by according him so exalted an earthly place, has thus evidenced an exceeding preference. With due appreciation of a principle that has been the inspiration of much exalted human effort, we nevertheless may not shut our eyes to the fact that, whatever the progress in the study of the relation of man to his Creator from Aristotle's time to our own, such advance attained as the result of *purely subjective* modes of investigation has not materially influenced man's life-experience or his conceptions concerning it. On the other hand, in reference to the latter, scientific research consequent to the development theory of Darwin, presented evidence which proved man's relation to lower life-forms and environment; and thus it happens that all that stands for the best of modern psychology, where not based upon, at least pursues its investigations within lines which are compatible with, established structural and physiological data—and this despite the fact that even in our day we may note the efforts of ill-trained minds of metaphysical trend who talk in beautifully rounded circles, and much, of the sole existence of spirit and mind, and yet are content to dismiss the theory of evolution with twenty words.

The physician of to-day needs be interested in these conditions as the representative of a branch of natural science whose teachings are in strict accord with the truths of evolution; moreover, because he may daily note that adherence to the belief in the miraculous of which some pretenders cunningly make use by publishing in the name of medical science, and with occasional coarseness of diction that violates public decency, untruths meant to intimidate. Others attract their followers by the exploitation of some one principle of therapy, elaborated into a system which is guaranteed to cure all disease. And lastly, the physician's interest is demanded because he must remark the rapid growth of a sect whose founder, entertaining theories which have much in common with some systems of idealism and principles propounded by mystic schools, has adapted them, in general, to the history of that religious revolution whose eventual outcome

was Christianity, in particular, to the cure of disease, and, by announcing these principles as new, relies upon the superficial education and the active imagination of her followers to do the rest.

No one of us but claims that the modern physician more than fulfills the place of a mere dispenser of drugs, and that the surgeon uses the knife upon other grounds than did the mediaeval barber. By the same token, aside from his particular office to advance ideas and evolve sound plans to promote the status of public health and by his knowledge to contribute to the usefulness and well being of the individual, the physician must assist in holding aloft, for its own sake, the banner of truth in the march of human progress. I am well aware that in pursuing such an ideal he is met with prejudice and superstitious credulity among classes of men and women who, perhaps successful within the narrow limits of their endeavors, are often erroneously regarded as representative; or by persons that in the process of devouring much print, in which is included the wonderful medical novel as well as the pseudo-scientific and psychologic, become permeated with fashionable fads upon which is based much complacent erudition. Another class, considerably less dangerous however, who passively oppose scientific progress, are the truly illiterate, who swallow whole the self-announced deeds of the wonder-workers, be they the delusions of a sect, or the knowing frauds of advertising fakirs alleged for pure gain.

I am no less aware that these facts are tacitly recognized by the profession, and that, conscious of its duties within its accepted domain, it has rightly been averse to place itself upon a level with many of its decriers. If we have been unwilling to discuss facts which are daily being disclosed by the study of pathology with individuals who, from one point of view or another, oppose its tenets, assuredly it has been because such discussion could scarcely be intelligent or intelligible if one's opponent be entirely without knowledge of his subject. One does not require skilled labor, nor ask an opinion concerning it, of the unskilled. If the world recognizes any value whatever in human knowledge and

the pursuit of it, it must manifestly be impossible to class the work of the advertising quack, or the efforts of the clod of yesterday but the healer of to-day, with the applied knowledge of the educated physician. This is, in fact, *the* point to be made in taking our stand for the profession—be it in delineating the position of modern medicine and surgery in general, or in stating our case for legislation beneficial to the public health, or in making a plea for the advancement of the latter and for views of fair and balanced minds upon lines that will be suggested by this paper. I think this reasonable argument has not been sufficiently urged in the past. Of equal importance is the fact that many erroneous views are countenanced by the public because the energies of medical men, while zealously applied within the limits of their accepted sphere, nevertheless fail to keep the profession in sufficient touch with the growth and direction of public opinion concerning medical science. The fact that certain persons who are unable to competently judge of the merits and demerits of the present status of the latter, or others who are actuated solely by mercenary motives, by diverse methods do attempt to gain the good will of the public at large, is doubtless the main reason that legitimate physicians refrain from so doing. Yet it must be deemed a grave error to thus build a Chinese wall about ourselves, and to neglect to employ reputable means at our command to enlighten the people as to views held by educated physicians and the reasons therefor. Were this done there would be fewer anti-vivisectionists, fewer persons possessed of considerable information concerning many other matters who stand pat with the oft-heard cant statement, "All medicine is an experiment."

How may we reach the public? We may in a measure be guided by the charlatans and the religious enthusiasts, for they have studied well the methods that may be best employed. The former advertise in the daily papers. I found that upon Sunday, May 1, 1899, a date selected at random, a fraction over 28 per cent. of the total amount of advertising that appeared in one of our leading morning dailies was paid for by medical quacks.

clairvoyants, and others of that ilk. Shall we advertise in the daily papers? Certainly not; but a representative medical body might, as it sees fit, employ their columns to legitimately disseminate truths established by scientific research. That religious sect of mushroom growth that purports to heal the sick by denying the existence of disease makes proselytes by aid of free lectures, delivered throughout the country by special representatives. Through the same media, with demonstration of facts and an appeal to reason instead of the imagination, it behooves us to educate the people in the matter of a reasonable discrimination of cases.

Our first need relates to a proper organization of the medical profession of the state, by counties or in any other systematic way, whose object shall be the widespread promulgation of some essential scientific data. Beginning as have all movements which have ultimately been successful, let there be small meetings where, in the light of patent fraud or the physiological basis upon which they rest, let there be explained the fallacy of modern miracles. Let there be free distribution from the office of the association of pamphlets explaining specific cases. Let the searchlight of common sense be thrown upon that therapeutic marvel relating to special principles of massage which its disciples teach was revealed by cadaverous study upon the plains of the noble red man and his victims, and whose claims for recognition are presented by quite the most picturesque balderdash of any quack body. Again, let the dogma that "there is no life, truth, intelligence, or substance in matter" be applied to the relation of man's senses to his every environment, and thus, by an absolute and universal denial of their evidence, permit the principle to lead, as it logically must, to the conclusion that the existence of insane delusions presents no evidence of an abnormal mind.

As a means employed by many influential and representative societies, let this body of physicians publish an attractive sheet devoted to the interests of modern medical science in its relation to the public at large.

The cost of placing such an organization upon a working basis would not require a large sum of money, since it would almost entirely be confined to the expense of placing its utterances before the people. Volunteers would not be lacking when the need of concerted action on the part of the profession, upon lines at least approximating those which have been designated, were once clearly comprehended. Modern medicine's proper status can never be attained by legislation alone; since enforcement of the latter needs be supported by an intelligent and appreciative public opinion, a factor which, under existing conditions, will scarcely be created by efforts that will emanate from any other source than our own ranks.

These suggestions may appear radical, but I plead in justification therefor a firm conviction that the medical profession of to-day has a clear and pressing duty aside from its accepted field of labor. May it be generally recognized and ultimately performed with a well directed zeal born of active and most hearty coöperation.