

WIRT (Wm. E.)

al

COMPLIMENTS OF
DR. WILLIAM E. WIRT,
122 EUCLID AVE.,
CLEVELAND, - OHIO.

LIBRARY
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

SEP. 13. 1899

643

INAUGURAL ADDRESS CLEVELAND
MEDICAL SOCIETY*

BY WM. E. WIRT, A. M., M. D., PH. D.

President of the Cleveland Medical Society; Professor of Orthopedic Surgery in the Medical Department of University of Wooster, etc. Formerly House Surgeon, Hospital for Ruptured and Crippled, New York City, N. Y.

GENTLEMEN : The Cleveland Medical Society begins its third year of existence under the most flattering conditions. As recently stated by our retiring president, Dr. Humiston, the society had an average attendance last year, including the quarterlies, of one hundred and thirty-five, the average of the latter half of the year being higher than the first. There was an average of eight discussions on each paper. At no time in the brief history of this society has there been any retrogression whatsoever ; it has been one continuous story of progress and development.

The question that now arises in our mind is, Can we keep up this high standard set us in the past ? It is my pleasure to state that I believe this can be done. We are guaranteed, for another year, the use of the beautiful and commodious quarters in which we are holding our meeting tonight. This in itself, I consider has no small influence in bringing about a large gathering of physicians to our meetings. The experience of other societies has shown that poor places of assembly or frequent changes of meeting room absolutely prevent a growth of interest in society work.

The expense of membership in this society is not great and there is no valid reason why every eligible physician in this city should not become a member. The very spirit of combination and union is in the air, and why should we not follow the example of others in this tendency, especially as it is for a most laudable purpose ? At no time, to the best of my knowledge, has there been a greater need for a perfect unity of action on the part of the medical

* Cleveland Medical Society, January 24, 1895.

presented by the author —

profession than the present moment. I am hoping that we will soon be as firmly united and as strong a force as our brother physicians at the other end of the state, who claim that they directly defeated a politician running for judicial honors who had shown himself to be a vicious character and the unqualified enemy of honest medicine. When the Cincinnati Academy of Medicine was asked by the politicians the question, "Gentlemen, what do you want?" their answer was, "We want simply justice," and justice they got.

To keep up interest in our society among the profession, it is necessary that we make each individual member feel that the society is of some benefit to him. This benefit may be in the form of scientific knowledge acquired, or it may be the benefit and pleasure of social intercourse with others of the profession, or again it may be entirely non-scientific in character. This latter is a field of usefulness which, though mentioned in the constitution of our society as one of its purposes, has been almost entirely neglected, and this is one of the topics to which I propose to call your attention tonight. I will classify it under the general heading of "Medical Abuses." The medical journals throughout the country denounce these abuses from time to time, but, on the other hand, the inactivity of medical societies in this direction is simply astounding. I fully realize that to attempt reforms, even in medicine, is no simple task. The very instant you begin the work you will find that you are treading on somebody's toes, and you will very quickly hear from them. Yet simply because the work is disagreeable shall we give up in despair without even making an attempt to remedy these evils?

In the past two years many have spoken to me about our doing something along this line, but I have always advised waiting until we were a strong enough body to cope with these problems, lest in trying to down these evils they down us. Are we not strong enough now to undertake a part of this work at least? If not, when will we be strong enough? And, further, if the medical

profession make no attempt to reform itself, who under the wide heavens will take interest enough in us to do so ?

I would first call your attention to that very large subject entitled "Corporation Medicine." I am sorry to say that we frequently find the leaders in our profession aiding and abetting such institutions (used in its broadest sense). To bear out the truth of my statement I have only to remind you of several conspicuous examples. For instance, there is the case of the ex-surgeon-general of the army, who organized a corporation composed of Washington capitalists, under a title something like this, "The American Medical Sanitarium or Institute." A number of well-known medical men from several cities allowed their names to appear on the list of the consulting staff to give it respectability, and it was only when the medical press throughout the country denounced the whole affair in most scathing language that these gentlemen had the use of their names withdrawn. Again, there is the case of the several prominent physicians of Cincinnati, who allowed their names to appear in the advertisements of a corporation calling itself the "Physicians' Syndicate," which corporation agreed to furnish medical services at about a net price of fifteen cents a visit ; and it was not until the Cincinnati Academy of Medicine told these gentlemen that they would have to withdraw from the syndicate or be expelled from the Academy that they retired from said corporation. Gentlemen, I hold in my hand the advertisement of a medical corporation, calling itself the Steuben Sanitarium Association, whose resident doctors are mere employees, and I am sorry to find well-known names of physicians living hundreds of miles from the institution on its consulting staff, used, of course, to give it standing. Who of us can compete on ethical grounds with corporation medicine ? What do any corporations know or care about medical ethics ? I have frequently heard the remark within the last few years that the time is fast approaching when they who practice surgery will do so by the

grace of some corporation. I place hospitals and dispensaries in this category, for the management of most of these institutions is in the hands of non-medical boards, and in the eastern cities these institutions are competing with the general profession in a most unethical manner. It has come to my personal knowledge to know that a number of New York hospitals bid for wealthy patients, offering them a room, board, attendance, nursing and the services of their staff for a given sum, the patient of course supposing that the staff is paid, while in reality the attending physician gets nothing. If the doctor objects he is told to get out, that there are plenty to take his place. I am informed that the same methods were carried out at John Hopkins, and it was only when the staff, as a body, protested, showing the board of managers that this was unjust to outside practitioners, that any concessions were made. And how do scientific medicine and honesty fare in the hands of corporations? The answer to this question is given by relating the experience (published in the *Kansas City Medical Index*) of Dr. Geo. Emerson of Winfield, Kansas, an employe of the Santa Fe railroad, who, when ordered to give the men cheaper medicine, replied that he would not do so; that a portion of the wages of employees was withheld to pay for the drugs, and that they were entitled to as good treatment as he gave his other patients. The railroad, foiled in the attempt to save a few pennies at the expense of the health of the men, had the doctor dismissed. The surgeon-in-chief of the railroad, Dr. Hogeboom, in recommending a new man to fill Dr. Emerson's place, wrote, "He should be a graduate of the regular school, competent in practice, and as you are well aware, *one that will make a good witness.*" The last clause, (written in italics,) tells the whole story—*one that will make a good witness.*

Other questions of practical importance that might be handled are: Patent medicines, quackery, counter-prescribing, refilling of prescriptions by druggists without orders, etc., etc.

Many of the members of this society have spoken to me about the forming of a dead-beat list, such as is used by grocery firms and all business houses. This is a subject, that, according to the judgment of this society, might be taken up. I will now turn from this subject, which from its very character naturally causes contention, to more agreeable work.

To keep up the interest in the scientific work of this society and to improve its character, I have several suggestions to make. I would recommend that the program committee, after a careful going over the subject, make out a provisional program for six or twelve months ahead, under topical headings and approximate as to dates; when said program is made up that it be printed and sent to each member of the society. For example, suppose that it is announced that for the first meeting in March there will be papers read on "Diseases of the Kidney;" that for the second meeting in March there will be papers on "Diseases of the Heart and their Relation to Diseases of the Kidney;" that for the first meeting in April there will be papers on "Diseases of the Stomach," etc., etc. On the receipt of these programs I would recommend that you look them over carefully, marking those subjects that you would care to discuss; then at the proper time study them up and come here to give us, as no doubt you will, discussions of the highest order.

There is something else we can do to keep up the scientific character and enthusiasm of our meetings, and that is by having stenographic reports of our meetings which should also be published. As you all know, last year we gave one hundred dollars to the Medical Library Association. Now, for this year we could take one hundred dollars and with it get a stenographic report of the society meetings; and in another way do as much for the Library Association. This can be done in this wise: The journal publishing our proceedings, at the time of making the last proof, can run off a number of copies of the proceedings exclusive of the journal;

and I am told that if these copies, or proofs, as you might call them, are sent to other journals, the editors will send us their journals in return. These exchanges could all be turned over to the Medical Library Association; and, further, at the end of the year, we could give the medical library a bound copy of the proceedings.

Under this heading, i. e., the advancement of interest in our scientific work, I will mention some of the programs we are contemplating. The council of this society has recommended that a meeting be given up to "School Hygiene." This has been brought about by those interested in the health of our school children. Another topic suggested for a meeting is "Sewerage." A program that I have in contemplation is "Diphtheria and the Anti-toxine Treatment." As you all know, they had a siege of Diphtheria at Ashtabula, in which anti-toxine was tried. The pathologist of Western Reserve University, Dr. Howard, made bacteriological tests in a number of these cases. The bacteriologist of this Society, Dr. Ohlmacher, is also experimenting along this line, and will, by the time of the aforesaid meeting, have developed the anti-toxine by means of inoculating a horse. With papers on the subject by a couple of Ashtabula doctors who have had actual experience with anti-toxine, and with discussions by the two pathologists and several of our old practitioners, who have had much experience in treating this disease by the ordinarily accepted methods, I believe that we can have a meeting that will fill this room to overflowing.

For our next quarterly meeting we have in mind a medical man of world-wide reputation, and it is my earnest hope that we may be able to prevail on him to address this society.

The council of the society, and especially the program committee, would ask indulgence from those members who are inclined to find fault from the fact that they are not asked to be put on the program. I would call your attention to the fact that we have but sixteen meetings per year, exclusive of the quarterlies. With two

papers per evening, on an average, this gives a possibility of thirty-two people a year being asked for papers, and also shows the impossibility of getting everybody, in a society of two hundred and nine-one, on the program even in two or three years. On the other hand, there is something else that is just as advantageous to the society and to the individual member, and that is, the presentation of clinical cases. I would most earnestly urge that at any time you have an interesting clinical case, bring it before the society. These patients always make interesting subjects for discussion.

For the general benefit of the society, I would recommend that a committee make suggestions as to what slight changes may seem best in our constitution, and after approval the constitution and by-laws and a list of membership be published and sent to each member of the society. This has been approved by the council.

I have recommended to the council, who have acted accordingly, that the chairman of the committee on growth and prosperity make a list of the physicians of Cleveland who are eligible to membership in this society, said list to be sent to each member of said committee. I earnestly hope that the members of the committee on growth and prosperity will make use of this list in their endeavors to increase the size of our society.

I would urge upon you the importance of increasing our non-resident membership. By so doing we keep in touch with the profession of northern Ohio, and make possible greater unity of action in the common cause of the advancement of scientific medicine and the interests of the medical profession. This can be done by keeping up the high standard of our quarterly meetings, and by putting our non-resident members on the program from time to time.

Gentlemen, we have before us the prospects of a most successful year.

