

SIMMONS (G. L.)

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AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the Opening of the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of
the Medical Society of the State of California,
held in San Francisco, April, 1895.



BY

G. L. SIMMONS, M. D., PRESIDENT,
Sacramento, Cal.

presented by the author.

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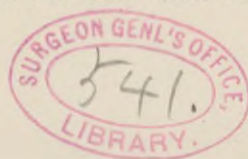
*Delivered at the Opening of the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the
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By G. L. SIMMONS, M.D., President, Sacramento, Cal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Medical Society of the State of California: One year ago, when I received notice of my election as your President, I was in the midst of preparations for a prolonged vacation from the State. A radical change was deemed necessary for my health, and, had I earlier known of a mention of my name in this connection, I should at once have declined the honor, believing that I would not be able to serve you in an acceptable manner. As the selection was had, however, without this knowledge, I felt it to be my duty to accept the position, to somewhat abridge my vacation and to return home with an earnest desire to do all in my power to maintain this State organization of medical men; now the chief representative body of the two thousand practitioners of California. In acknowledging my indebtedness to you for the great honor you have done me by elevating me to this highest office in the gift of my profession, I ask your kind indulgence for any errors I may unwittingly commit as your presiding officer.

The San Francisco Meeting of the American Medical Association.

It would seem proper that I should first refer to the important medical event which has taken place in our State since your last meeting, and towards the success of which a liberal sum was voted from your treasury. The gathering of the American Medical Association in San Francisco last June under your auspices, should be a subject for general congratulation. Not only were members present from all over the Union, in excess of the most sanguine anticipations, but the character of the papers received and read gave to the proceedings an unusual interest, and must secure to such a representative national body an enlarged influence. In accordance with the instructions given to your delegates, it was voted to make no change in the code, a majority believing that "the Ethics of the Fathers" are clear, concise and applicable to the varying conditions of professional life and knowledge. The magnificent entertainments given



to members of the Association in this city and the good fellowships engendered therefrom, are also subjects of pride and universal satisfaction. I feel that we should specially recognize the value of the services of a few of our members in first presenting our claims for this national meeting, and in afterwards carrying out the preliminary work essential for its success.

Reasons for Deficiencies in Medical Organization in California.

It is made my duty in the Constitution to address you "upon some subject in harmony with the objects and aims of the Society." I propose, therefore, to offer some practical remarks upon a few topics which have already been discussed by the distinguished gentlemen who have preceded me, but which, in my judgment, so intimately concern our welfare that their reintroduction may not be unprofitable. There are two prominent characteristics of age in physicians who have passed the mid-period of active professional life, which prevents them from being wholly impersonal. The first is to deal largely in retrospection, and the second (from having seen the rise and fall of innumerable supposed systems and specifics for the cure of disease) to lack the essential credulity for unlimited faith in new discoveries in medicine, until time and patiently recorded results and comparisons aid a solution of the important problems. Acknowledging these tendencies in my own case, I need not apologize for a reference to the history of our profession in California. I do this with more confidence because my personal interest in medical science as youth and man about covers the period since the tide of gold seekers literally rushed to the then territory of California, and it is to the peculiar nature of this immigration that I have attributed not only many of the striking characteristics of our present population, but also the presence of these earlier pioneer traits in the medical profession itself, which has no doubt been one of the chief causes for the lack of interest in the fraternal association of its members.

Ever since our first annual meeting in San Francisco, just a quarter of a century ago, we have had the presidential services of men whose unselfish lives and devotion to principle have led them to deplore the want of a fully organized profession; but I believe no one has pointed out the fact that it is probable our feeble cohesive elements resulted from exceptional conditions which were not present in any other section of the American Union. Without question, our immigration was originally composed of representatives from the most active and ambitious elements of the present century. For the first time in history, there was offered to men of every nation a free and

untrammelled field for the mining of precious metals. The cost of journey by sea or land to this State, then far removed from the center of population, the courage to face the greatest dangers, the health and youth essential to lead exposed pioneer lives, all combined to bring here an independent and self-reliant people, overwhelmed by the desire for the sudden accumulation of wealth. The ambitions and mental peculiarities of such a population formed a most original field for observation, and the leading traits were certainly those of independence, self-reliance, love of excitement, change, speculation and criticism.

Very naturally the same features were also evident in the ranks of the medical profession. Here were representatives from all the leading medical schools of the world, each having the most unbounded faith in his own methods and education, speaking different languages, with habits and prejudices that had not been worn smooth by the rapidity of international travel and without the refining influence of home life, is it strange that they were restless, impatient of restraint and ready to ignore the qualifications of rival practitioners. To the credit of many of these educated men we should place the fact that they were often the best organizers to develop out of chaotic conditions, the institutions of this State, even if their medical work was marred by personalities and their dignity lowered by aggressive disputations.

Perhaps no better description of the profession as it existed at an early period can be given than that presented by our second President in his annual address. He said: "We are a heterogeneous mass, an army of incompatibles. No country in the world is supplied with physicians so diverse in character. We have all the peculiarities of all the schools in the world coupled with all the peculiarities of all the nations of the world. The physicians of California know less of each other than the physicians of any other land, and they care less for each other. There is no fraternity. Every man is for himself, and thinks the best way to raise himself is by treading down others." With such an arraignment how necessary the first clause of our constitution that our objects are "To encourage the unity and harmony of the profession throughout the State."

From 1850 to 1860, several attempts were made to organize the profession into local and State Societies, but, with few exceptions, efforts in this direction were not a success. A review of the medical literature of that period, however, shows that even under the most unfavorable conditions for study, and amid all the excitements and changes incident to our pioneer life, a fair proportion of the prac-

tioners here applied themselves to original work and investigations. It should also be noted that many of our members were prominently interested in microscopy and botanical work, and that some of the most serious and important operations ever attempted were successfully performed and reported by the earlier surgeons of California. It is also certain they first demonstrated that the serous cavities of the human body and the larger joints could be successfully invaded by the knife when necessary to preserve life or limb. At this period there were laid the foundations for our medical schools and hospitals which now stand among the best of our educational land-marks. The self-sacrifice of the founders of these institutions, their discouragements and disappointments, their large donations of money, all show the grandest results of individual devotion to medical science.

Since the first decade, in some sections of the State, the value of an organized profession has been recognized and maintained, but in others many practitioners stand aloof from association, and do not see (as stated by your last President, Kenyon) the power of combined effort to elevate the profession and to maintain its influence. How to reach this class who add so little to the sum of medical knowledge, is an important question. In my judgment, much could be accomplished by this Society lending its influence to the formation of small district societies. This could be attained in the same way as has been done by organizers for fraternal and benefit societies. As a practical method in an endeavor to add to our numbers and increase our associated influence, I respectfully recommend the appointment of an officer whose duty should be to visit certain sections of the State and perform the initial work in this field of pioneer isolation and degrading jealousies. Let us so act that the close of this century, so fraught with the grandest discoveries in medicine and surgery, may see us a united profession and in close fellowship with our fellows throughout the world in the saving of human life and the relief of human suffering.

Serum-Therapy.

Since your last meeting, the medical profession every where has been confronted with a question of great importance, involving, as it seems to do, a change in our system of therapeutics more radical than any advocated for many years. In the midst of the poly-pharmacy of the present day, with an accumulation of supposed remedies, even the names of which tax the best of memories, we witness a revival along bacteriological lines, and see that the evil effects of diphtheria are often controlled by the injection into the

circulation of a specially prepared serum. The literature upon this subject is so well known to you, as also the observation of certain cases, that it is unnecessary to refer to this branch of the subject. It may be said, however, that at no time in the history of medical science, have societies like this assembled under a greater pressure of public interest in the determination of a question of a scientific nature. On both continents, the public press is constantly publishing successes to such an extent as to interfere with accurate investigation, and governing boards, that have persistently opposed and neglected the investment of funds for healthy water supplies and proper sewage disposal, are urging appropriations for experiments upon pathogenic germs, often generated by their own neglect of the simplest rules of preventive medicine.

Let us trust that here and elsewhere, the pangs of disappointed hopes raised in many a poor sufferer from tuberculosis may not be repeated in the parents of diphtheritic children. Ready as our profession always has been to examine the claims of any new agent in the treatment of disease, adopting from any source all means which may possibly inure to the benefit of the lives of those entrusted to our charge, may we not also in the case of the new theory, with the State aid for the distribution of antitoxine so recently bestowed, "Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good."

Professional Remuneration.

Of a few subjects of special interest to California practitioners, one of the most important is that relating to compensation for professional work from those who are able to pay for the same. When it is considered that the length of time and expense attending a good medical education have been nearly doubled during the last twenty years, is it not deplorable that the incomes of a majority of physicians have been reduced to such an extent that many are in an impecunious position, and find it difficult under modern demands to balance their receipts and expenditures. While a few practitioners in larger centers have been paid extra fees and have obtained a certain degree of independence, the great mass are held down by poverty. On all sides the services of medical men are underrated, and courts, corporations and beneficiary societies appear to combine to reduce our compensation. The upright judge, who, without a smile, allows probate fees of thousands to young attorneys, haggles over an account of hundreds for medical services which generally involve a night and day attention in the presence of sights and scenes of the saddest and most terrible character. Corporation directors arrange a plan by which thousands of their well paid employes receive in hospitals or

private homes the services of the most competent physicians and surgeons at a cost *per capita* so low that its insignificance should never be mentioned as an honest recompense, and a beneficiary society (one of the largest in our State) has recruited its membership upon the representation that doctor's bills will cost the members comparatively nothing.

With facts like these before us, how long will it be before the situation of our practitioners will be analogous to that which now obtains in some European cities, where medical clubs absorb 90 per cent. of the male population, or, as in Birmingham, where it is said competent medical men give their services and medicines at a rate of a penny per head per week. Without any desire to advocate interference with the freedom of individual action in so important a matter, I would respectfully ask, is not this growing custom a blow to equity and justice? In these days of the general recognition of the principle that "the laborer is worthy of his hire," how comes it that the members of that calling who give more to the poor and to communities than all other professions put together, should have the value of their services cheapened, where present returns offer the smallest hope for independence? My own feelings prompt me to say that if medical organizations do not adopt some means to remedy this evil, the profession as a whole deserves to be kept in poverty and to feel the pangs of leaving unprovided loved ones.

Publicity in Professional Matters.

For many years the unwritten law of our profession has prevented its members from contributing articles upon medical subjects to the public press, even when they were smarting under the greatest misrepresentations. Publicity has been considered as belonging to the irregular and charlatan, and as the life career of the honest physician is one of confidence, it has not been deemed possible to attempt even a mild innovation which might lead to a betrayal of such an important feature. As a result of this close policy we find a general misapprehension existing in the United States in regard to the education and methods of what we call the regular medical profession, and this misapprehension, or want of knowledge of truth, has, in my judgment, had much to do with the spread of quackery and irregular practices throughout the Union. Let any one of you lose your identity as a physician (as I have done during the past year) and mingle in general society and I am sure you will be amazed at the statements you will hear as to the practices of your chosen calling.

In all parts of cultivated Europe, government so controls this subject that the same evils do not exist, and the irregular is relegated

to his proper position. But here in free America, our people for years have been led into the most erroneous conceptions, and no attempt has been made to publicly explain the true position occupied by the medical profession. The average citizen divides all practitioners into three "pathies," the oldest fashioned of which is allopathy. In vain we say individually that there is no school of medicine in the world that teaches such a "pathy" and no physicians who practice it or allow such a classification, that the name and definition were an invention of Hahnemann for his own purposes, the use of which conveys to the popular mind the idea of exclusive methods and dogmas or an exactly opposite conception to what is true.

Quite early in the history of the American Medical Association, the eminent Dr. Geo. A. Wood, in an annual address as President, made use of the following language on this subject, which certainly embodies the sentiment of the regular profession: "As intelligent men we were taught and have always practised the cure of disease by any and all methods which can be proven to be for the best interests of our patients, and we are bound by no limits other than those of truth and honor. Let us show when the epithet of 'allopathist' is applied to us by others that it is false, inappropriate and offensive, and that the use of it is contrary to gentlemanly courtesy and the proprieties of cultivated society."

Our own State Society years ago passed resolutions in regard to this subject, which was published in our proceedings. As these books are seldom read by the public, no apparent benefit was ever made manifest, and many editors, lawyers, the clergy and citizens generally, still continue the use of the erroneous appellation. Having the fullest faith in the intelligence and fairness of my countrymen, and believing that when the truth is presented in a proper manner, a majority will accept it, I recommend that effort be made to enlighten the public upon the question of the true position of the medical profession, and the relation it sustains to all 'pathies, healers and faith cures.

The Public and Preventive Medicine.

One of the most difficult questions to present to the governing boards of cities and town is that concerning the public health, and few outside of the profession understand, as stated by the best authority, "that so common a disease as typhoid increases in proportion to the saturation of the soil with decomposing organic matter, and decreases in proportion as a city is well sewered and uses only pure drinking water." My object in referring to this particular sub-

ject is to emphasize the effort to discuss questions relating to preventive medicine before the public by means of free popular lectures. I believe it to be the duty of each one of us to aid college extension in this direction, and to give to every town the knowledge so necessary to maintain the public health.

Another direction in which our efforts would result in benefit to sufferers from disease, and to our State at large, is in keeping before the people of the whole country the superiority of our climate in many of the gravest affections. While it might appear that this subject has already been presented to the fullest extent by our members and Boards of Health, my opinion is that thousands of eastern invalids are not aware that we have in many portions of our State peculiarly favorable conditions for the open air treatment of consumptives, which do not obtain in other sections. It should be remembered that one of the first causes for the rise and importance of the southern sections of California resulted from the reports on the climate of the coast section made by our first President. During the past winter I have made some personal and comparative observations of the climate of the "Riviera," and it can easily be shown by the meteorological tables of Nice, Mentone or Cannes, that we have a greatly superior climate in winter, while the number of our sunny days are beyond their utmost claims. For climatic reasons alone thousands of Americans still seek this section of the old world, ignorant of the fact that in their own country, hardly five days journey from the Atlantic seaboard, without the risks and annoyances of a longer trip by water, there exists a land of winter flowers, more beautiful and healthy than any in Southern Europe. Dr. R. F. Rooney, of Auburn, has recently published a valuable article in the *Occidental Medical Times*, upon "The Climate of the Sierra Nevada Foothills, and its Influence on Diseases of the Respiratory Organs." The general circulation of such observations as he has been able to make should certainly insure the attention of physicians of the whole country to an extensive section of our State for the relief of patients suffering from genuine asthma, bronchitis or incipient phthisis.

Oliver Wendell Holmes.

In closing this address, I need not apologize for a brief reference to the loss our profession has recently sustained by the death of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Although to the public he was known, loved and honored for his literary work, among medical men, his real labor was recognized as belonging to medical science. For thirty-five years he acted as full Professor in the Medical Department of

Harvard, and in his earlier career, gave to the world a series of prize medical dissertations full of original thought and investigation. If he had done nothing else for medical science than to bring the weight of his mind to the discussion in 1843 of the question of the communicability of puerperal fever from one patient to another by the "accoucheur," that one effort to establish a theory, now everywhere acknowledged to be correct, and which has saved the lives of many mothers, entitles him to the gratitude of the entire profession.

As a professor of anatomy, he was recognized as prominent long before his abilities in general literature had shown upon the world. In the earlier efforts to develop the study of microscopy, Holmes was most active and original. Although at that time exercises in this department were not required by the faculty, his interest was so great that he formed classes for private instruction at his home on Montgomery Place, and I well remember the enthusiasm with which he related the fact that his object-glass was of American manufacture and had been taken to Europe by Dr. Burnett who, after challenging comparisons, had found it to be superior to any then known in the world. In connection with his earlier work in microscopy, attention has been called in the *American Microscopical Journal*, by Dr. Ephraim Cutter, now of New York, to the fact that Holmes then taught the use of the instrument with direct illumination. The professor having an arrangement of his own—a six inch black disk fastened to the tube and graduated so that turning the disk would act as a fine adjustment.

With such a professional record, and while his name is being honored by laymen in Europe as well as in America, is it not most fitting that medical organizations, even on the shores of the Pacific, should not allow the brightness of his fame as poet and novelist to obscure the labors of years for medical science of a man, spoken of in a late number of the *British Medical Journal* as "one of the most lovable and notable figures of modern medicine."

Apart, however, from his position of medical author and professor, we owe to Holmes a debt of gratitude for his constant desire, evident in his general literary work, to place the profession of medicine in its true position before the public. His keenest satires and vigorous treatment against charlatanism and irregular medicine may be found in connection with his most highly prized papers in literary magazines of the day. In him the good doctor always spoke, although often under the name of "Autocrat" or "Professor." Without exception, the medical students who listened to his teachings carried through their lives a continual interest in what has been

called his delightful personality, and his genial medical wisdom, interspersed throughout his writings, has done much to enliven the paths of these "toilers who have no rest"—the overworked practitioners.

In 1860 Dr. Holmes delivered an address before the Massachusetts Medical Society, entitled "Currents and Counter Currents in Medical Science," afterwards published with an essay upon "Homeopathy and Kindred Delusions, and the Four Topics of 'The Weapon Ointment,' the Tar Water Mania of Bishop Berkeley—the Royal Cure of the Scrofula, and the History of Perkins' Metallic Tractors." All, as the author says, "published to illustrate the ease with which numerous facts are accumulated to prove the most fanciful and senseless extravagances." If this work could be placed in the hands of the people to-day there would be less quackery and fewer delusions. On the tenth of last October, it was my privilege to stand by his open grave in the beautiful cemetery of Mount Auburn, and to pay silent worship to all that remained of the great man always in fellowship with youth, who, forty years before, had received me as a struggling medical student from the Pacific coast. In common with others, I am sure that his kindly encouragement made easy a most difficult path. Truly he deserved a cheerful and serene old age, and a place among "modern immortals."

"In love he practised, and in patience taught,
The sacred art that battles with disease;
Nor stained by one disloyal act or thought,
The holy symbol of Hippocrates."

