

Peck (W. F.)

ADDRESS

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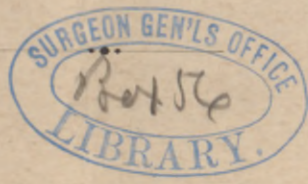
DR. W. F. PECK, PRESIDENT,

OF THE

Iowa State Medical Society,

AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING,

Held at Des Moines, January 26, 1876.



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ADDRESS.

Custom renders it incumbent upon me as the presiding officer of your Society, to present annually an address, in which it is expected allusions will be made to the condition and advancement which the profession of medicine exhibits in a comparative relation to the other recognized professions. The present occasion is evidently one which possesses a peculiar and extraordinary interest when we consider that one hundred years ago the present year, fifty-five persons, representing nearly four millions of people, declared an independence which from that time has been perpetuated under the meaning name of an American Republic.

It appears from the preserved archives, that the medical men of 1776 contributed not a little to the determined spirit which secured for us disenthralment from English oppression. While the colonies were struggling to assist in maintaining a government which was regardlessly exacting in its administrative operation, we find that the medical men were actively at work with others in forming and executing plans for guaranteeing to posterity a toleration of thought and speech, the untrammelled exercise of which are necessary for a free government and a liberal profession like that of medicine. The medical profession furnished five of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Their names are Josiah Bartlett of New Hampshire, Matthew Thornton of New Hampshire, Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut, and Lyman Hall of Georgia. The opinions and views of liberty to which they subscribed, received the full endorsement of their medical constituents, as is fully shown by the efficient and active part which they performed in the revolutionary struggle which immediately followed. While there were isolated instances of suffering on the part of the Continental soldiers for want of medical supplies, not a single experience, so far as I have been able to ascertain, occurred where a medical man did not relinquish all that was precious to him, when necessary, in order to render relief to those who became incapacitated by reason of wounds or disease contracted in attempting to establish the principles which have been from that date emblematically represented by our National ensign. The number of physicians practising in the Colonies, at the outbreak of the revolution, was three thousand five hundred, and out of that number about four hundred are presumed to have been graduates. Four hundred surgeons were employed in the Revolutionary service, and out of that number four were killed and about six died from disease. It would seem that the privations to which the soldiers

were subjected should have caused a rate of mortality much greater than that which occurred during the War of the Rebellion; but a careful comparative analysis shows that the forced hardships rather prompted a condition of health not equaled by our modern civilized advantages.

Our national age as a profession furnishes an opportunity for us to compare somewhat the educational status of to-day with that which existed in the early history of the present century. And in making an examination of the facilities which were offered for the acquirement of an education, I find that only two medical colleges existed in 1776. One was located in New York and one in Philadelphia. The one in New York was organized in 1768, although lectures on anatomy had been given in it as early as 1764. The two colleges named had issued, when the Revolution commenced, about two hundred and fifty degrees, and it is supposed that not less than twelve hundred students had matriculated for one course of lectures. It was undoubtedly true that a large number of non-graduates, including all who pretended more or less knowledge of the healing art, practised medicine then than now. It was much more difficult to obtain the wherewith to procure an education; and furthermore, the student's position then was unlike the comparatively encouraging one which he is permitted to enjoy to-day. Then his time of servitude was from three to seven years, during which he was, by the condition of his articles of indenture, compelled to perform such labor as his preceptor or master directed. It was the fortune of a few to have the support of sufficient means to visit England and Scotland, and there receive the benefits resulting from attendance upon hospital instruction, which was furnished by teachers justly celebrated for their education and thoroughness. Many of those whose names are connected with the progress of medicine in the early part of the present century, enjoyed the advantages derived from anatomical study in foreign seats of learning. The mind of the American student and physician soon showed by its activity that the material of the United States could be utilized for the benefit of the profession. Other colleges were organized, and very soon the graduates in medicine increased in their relative proportion to those who were not properly qualified to practise.

At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence there were but two medical societies—one was located in New Jersey, as the State Medical Society, and the other was the Delaware State Medical Society, which was organized in 1776. It is not possible to determine what constituted eligibility to membership. It is certain, however, that the punishments inflicted upon those who claimed to perform mysterious cures could not have served otherwise than to stimulate the student as well as the practitioner in the direction of examining into natural causes, conditions and results; and with this disposition to have definite results follow known causes, it certainly could have had no other tendency than to be pathological and rational in ferreting out disease and supplying means for its removal. The spirit of med-

ical progress is well shown, when an exhibit is made of the number of medical colleges which exist in 1876 as compared with the number which were in operation in 1776.* There are now ninety-nine colleges—sixty-three are Rational, four are Eclectic, seven are Homœopathic, eleven Dental, and fourteen Pharmaceutical, thus aggregating the number mentioned. The course of study is very much improved; and in place of having one professor teach seven branches, as was done by Dr. Nathan Smith, (the founder of Dartmouth College,) for twelve years, only one branch is assigned to one professor, and in some instances one branch is sub-divided so that from three to five teachers are employed in giving instruction in it. Anatomy is now practically studied under the protection of the State. Formerly great injustice was done the physician by requiring him to possess perfect knowledge of the human structures, and while the decisions of the courts were exacting in this particular, the statute books made it a criminal offense in case the searcher after truth was detected performing practical dissections. No better evidence is needed, to prove that the medical profession is steadily at work removing bigotry and prejudice, than the wise changes which the people, through the Legislature, endorse in doing away with the unparalleled inconsistencies which have heretofore been considered law or justice! It is but a short time since our State showed this undoubted indication of liberal thought which found expression in the transactions of this Society. Slight changes are still necessary in order to make the present law perfectly satisfactory. No doubt the intelligence of the State, represented in the present Assembly, will do that which is needed to give the benefits which were originally contemplated.

In 1776 there were but two medical societies. To-day there are not less than thirteen hundred in full operation in the United States. When the Revolutionary War commenced there were thirty-five hundred medical men in partial or full practice. There are at this writing seventy thousand physicians who practice the rational system of medicine. In addition there are about ten thousand who pretend to represent systems of medicine of equivocal utility.

It may be interesting to compare the rates of charges in 1781 with those allowed by fee bills at the present time. The following is furnished by Dr. James Thacher:

The fee for a visit was one shilling and six pence, afterwards increased to two shillings.

Midwifery and capital operations were at a guinea, with charges for after visits.

The first fees established by the medical club of Boston were fifty cents for a visit; if in consultation, one dollar. Rising and visiting in the night after eleven o'clock and before sunrise, double fee. Obstetrical case, eight dollars; capital operation in surgery, five pounds. Reducing a dislocation, or setting a fractured bone, one guinea.

*Dr. Jno. M. Toner's letter.

Bleeding, opening abscess, extracting tooth, fifty cents, and the usual fee for visit was added.

The proportion of medical men to the population in 1776 was about one to every one thousand inhabitants. (If we could estimate all who gave medicine the ratio would undoubtedly be decreased.) Now with a population of full forty millions, the proportion is one physician (including all who claim the distinction) to every five hundred inhabitants. From year to year, as the facilities for acquiring a medical education have been improved, do we find that the disposition for investigation and research is correspondingly increased.

It is interesting to compare the exalted position of the profession to-day with that which it occupied at the beginning of the present century. At this historic time, other professions, societies and organizations will be examining their centennial record, having in view the laudable object of showing how much they have contributed to the progress of the citizen and State. In the early part of the present century pathology was less emphatic in directing medication. And inasmuch as the patient was surrounded by influences which tended to limit the use of his reasoning faculties, he was thereby impelled to confide almost implicitly in the dogmatic assertions of the age. Medicine was given in bulk, and as a consequence the extractive principles were not brought in immediate contact with the unhealthful agencies. One of the chief improvements which we assign to the nineteenth century is the utilizing of chemistry in abstracting from the crude drug the efficient agent which, when administered, acts more speedily in combating the deteriorating influence. There is also recognized the same improvement in the comparative tastelessness and concealment of the other objectionable qualities of the drug. The discovery which has contributed most to the alleviation of the suffering condition, is that of anæsthetics. And so long as the earth shall contain a civilized people, so long will the profession of this century be remembered. In 1848 Morton handed to the surgeon sulphuric ether, the use of which has done much toward removing one of the most objectionable conditions of human life. No product of any invention or discovery can be successfully compared with it. The sole benefit is not that it only relieves pain, but that it also renders possible operations for disease and deformity which without it would continue the existence of causes for the injury and disfigurement of the race. Those who are best qualified to attest its value are those who have been relieved of suffering by its administration.

Electricity, in its application to tissues suffering from a want of nervous force, also its utilization to discuss and remove morbid growths, is one of the improvements in the use of which both the physician and surgeon have reason for indulging in feelings of mutual pride. Mainly to Dr. Morse is the world indebted for the employment of the electrical current in transmitting thought, the product of the association of organic matter through or along unorganized particles.

Among the many operations in surgery performed during the

century now being celebrated by the Centennial year, the following are deserving of and should occupy a conspicuous place in the annals of American progress :

In 1807* Dr. Samuel White removed, by cutting through the abdominal wall into the intestine, a teaspoon which had been accidentally carried there. The patient recovered. In 1809 Dr. E. McDowell originated the operation of ovariectomy, which is now almost daily performed in different parts of the civilized world. It is well known that before his time all patients who suffered from ovarian tumors died. A little reflection will easily estimate that many thousands must have surrendered their lives prematurely for want of surgical interference. The very difficult operation of extirpating the parotid gland, was first performed by Dr. John Warren, of Boston, in 1798. In 1818 Dr. Valentine Mott tied the innominate, his patient surviving the operation twenty-six weeks. Dr. Rhea Barton in 1826 resected the head of the femur. The patient recovered and walked with a useful joint. Dr. Paul Eve successfully extirpated the uterus. It was Dr. J. Marion Sims who first employed metallic sutures in utero-vaginal and vesico-vaginal surgery, thereby not only rendering the operation for vesico-vaginal fistula possible but commendable. He also introduced the operation for dividing the cervix, in cases of undue flexion, for sterility. Dr. Nathan Smith preceded Dr. Read in reducing dislocations by manipulatory means alone. Dr. Buck, by means of adhesive plaster, weight and pulley, demonstrated conclusively that less shortening, in fractures of the femur, will occur than when any other method of treatment is employed. Drs. Sayre, Davis and others, have done incalculable service to patients who suffer from hip-joint disease, in applying the principles of extension and counter-extension by means of the hip-joint instrument, thereby permitting free exercise, where before restraint more or less complete, was the received treatment. Dr. George McClellan removed the arm, clavicle and scapula of the same side. Dr. Austin Flint, jr., by experimental research demonstrated that the liver, in addition to its other functions, eliminated cholesterine, which makes its appearance in the bowels in the form of stercorine. The American ambulance has never been surpassed in its adaptability to the needs of contending army forces.

It is with mingled regret and pride that we refer to the wonderful results which were contemplated by the medical administrative department of the Federal army in the late war of the rebellion, in organizing and perfecting such a complete system of hospital and supply management, which furnished without limit the varied wants created on account of wounds or disease. During that time no effort was spared to assuage pain and relieve suffering. The necessary pathology resulting from battle and other causes was concentrated in the Army Medical Museum, originally planned by Dr. Wm. A. Ham-

*Dr. Smith's Surgery.

mond, which should be considered the professional shrine at which every American medical man ought to pay the tribute of his respect and admiration, by making an occasional visit thereto. Few stop to reflect upon the source and character of that representation. No Nation can exhibit such a fine collection of pathological specimens produced by circumstances and conditions so peculiar.

There were employed in the *War of the Rebellion, in all, nearly three thousand surgeons, of whom nineteen were killed in battle; thirteen were killed by partizan troops or guerillas while in the discharge of duty; eight died of wounds received in action, and nine died through accidents occurring in the line of duty. Seventy-three were wounded in action. The number of surgical cases treated was 408,072, with a mortality of 37,531; died of disease, 186,216. There were 302 suicides, 103 homicides, 121 executions; killed in battle, 44,238. Died of unknown causes, 24,184. The total number of deaths from the commencement to the close of the Rebellion were 303,504. The annual death rate of the colored troops was 148 per 1,000 of average aggregate mean strength. In the case of the white troops the annual death rate was 88 per 1,000 average aggregate mean strength. The average strength of the army for four years two and a half months was 764,436. The entire number of enlistments was 2,252,007 men.

The important services which the surgeon of the army gave in rendering over two millions of troops useful in assisting to perpetuate the liberties of our nation, are not sufficiently appreciated by either the Government or people where the details of the cause of the blessings which we now mutually share are discussed. The statesman may comprehend the problems of government and also recommend plans for the adjustment of international difficulties, but the plans thus grasped and advocated could never inure to the country's good, when a resort to arms is had, unless the soldier is preserved in the possession of his health, and when disabled the cause of his disability removed by medical or surgical skill. A reward for the practical exercise of that knowledge which assists in preserving life and health is almost never voluntarily extended. And too striking is the fact in the enactments of the nation's authority which should be first to place honor and compensation where it is justly due. While we are all often reminded that our services have not been adequately appreciated, we should never allow the fact to permit us to cease or lessen the effort which enlightened skill may invite us to exert in behalf of our nation's interest. It is to be hoped that when the historic writer for the second Centennial reviews the results of the united labor of the medical profession, he will, comparatively speaking, have ampler cause for merited congratulation.

Some local thoughts and suggestions with reference to Iowa's future may not be inappropriate, and wishing to see the physical vigor

*Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion.

of our State relatively increase, and with it the longevity of her citizens accord more with the intentions of nature's laws, I feel like urging the Society to take some action which will induce our legislative authority to duly examine into the propriety of creating a State Board of Health. The observing physician rarely visits a patient without enquiring, guardedly perhaps, concerning the possible existence of some near generating cause, for the disturbed functions which may resist his skill and endanger life. Few people are prepared to comprehend the vastness of this fertile source of disease; and inasmuch as the tendency of the age seems to be in the direction of searching for the cause of believed or claimed results, advantage should be taken of this rational correlation, and the fact utilized for the physical benefit of the people and the State. The proper committee appointed at the last session will bring the subject before you fully discussed, when I hope some settled plan or system for operation will be agreed upon.

There seems manifested on the part of the present law makers of the State a disposition to establish a Board of State Charities. The Society should define in an appropriate manner their views upon this important improvement in the management of our State institutions. Unless the law is full of power, and unless the powers of such a board are very great, no good can be expected from it except, perhaps, the furnishing of lucrative offices to some well meaning but powerless aspirant. A former occupant of this office forcibly urged the propriety of asking the Legislature to provide for the large number of imbecile and demented persons in the State. At present the only refuge which this unfortunate class has is the hospital for the insane or the county alms house. The asylums are already too densely crowded; and certainly no more inappropriate place for their maintenance could be selected than the houses located on the poor farms in the different counties of the State. In this enlightened country, about which so much has been said, greater effort should be exerted in the way of improving and making better by education this unfortunate class of feeble minded of our commonwealth, who, in their present condition, only serve to take from our wealth that amount of food and care which manual labor must produce for their unremunerative existence. This class must, at an early day, receive more than a sympathetic notice at the hands of those who should take pleasure in knowing that their labor has directly done good by relieving a depraved condition which by some education may be made to understand, at least some of nature's teachings.

Wherever medical societies flourish there you may expect to find the spirit of medical progress more or less actively at work. It is with pleasure, therefore, that I allude to the successful working of our Society. Since the qualification for membership made it obligatory on the applicant to come representing a local organization, societies have been and are forming in most parts of the State. Where a single county does not contain a sufficient number of medical men to form a society, the practice is wisely carried out of aggregating

medical men from different counties, forming thereby what is termed district societies; and while this fraternal disposition is rife in the profession, it should be so encouraged that it may render the object profitable, by causing the delegates to have the opportunity to take with them on their return to their respective organizations, evidence that it is both honorable and beneficial to have participated in our proceedings. In passing, permit me to suggest that each local society should require a member, before taking a medical student, to cause the applicant to pass an examination which should be satisfactory to the Society, before he is permitted to register for studentship. I am aware that this requirement is exacted by a few societies. But would it not be well to make the educational standard higher by universally demanding this prerequisite?

It is frequently stated by those who stand in the light of authority to the believing masses that the American race is degenerating; that the physical perfection which characterized the development of the inhabitants a century ago does not exist now, and that the medical profession, in many instances is responsible for this retrogression. In answer to such premature remarks and conclusions, the demurrer will state that it is not true that the race is degenerating physically, from the fact that with each succeeding year statistical proof accumulates showing that the days of man are becoming increased, which could not be the case progressively unless the physical organism showed greater ability to entrench against the besieging forces which are continually at work trying to render defective the human constitution. The immense financial accumulations of insurance corporations clearly prove that the tables of Carlisle do not favorably apply to the longevity of this people and age. Too much money is being paid to insurance companies on the hypothesis that we are short lived. The experience of companies annually demonstrates the incorrectness of their formulated assertions. They should either largely reduce their rates or compute life upon a more correct basis. The American experience tables are somewhat better than the tables of Carlisle, but they do not fully recognize the improved physical condition and the increased longevity of the American citizen.

The great value of the meteorological observations now being made by the general government and the volunteer corps of our State, should find an appreciative expression in the proceedings of this organization.

It has occurred to me that some special effort should be made to encourage original research, and to the end that such disposition may be stimulated I will offer one hundred dollars annually, as a standing prize, which shall be awarded by a committee appointed by the society, to the one who shall produce either an essay, an invention, or the results of original research, which shall be deemed sufficiently meritorious. The acceptance of this proposition can be recognized by special action of the society.

