

Foster (W<sup>m</sup> S.)

Compliments of the Author.

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**THE MUTUAL RELATIONS OF THE  
PROFESSION AND THE STATE.**

BEING THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA  
AT ITS MEETING AT HARRISBURG, MAY 10, 1896.

BY

**WM. S. FOSTER, M. D.,**

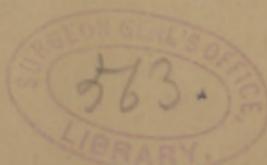
OF PITTSBURG, PA.

EX-PRESIDENT OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY, MEMBER AND SECRETARY  
OF THE STATE BOARD OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS.

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## ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT.

THE MUTUAL RELATIONS OF THE PROFESSION AND THE STATE.

By WM. S. FOSTER, M. D.

OF PITTSBURG.

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Medical men as individuals and the profession as a body have interests which more or less constantly bring them into contact with the State as an administrative body. We meet problems whose solving cannot be accomplished without State action, and that action is likely to be delayed, mistaken or thwarted without our professional knowledge, advice and assistance.

There are, then, certain matters in regard to which our profession as a whole, and we as individuals, are in honor bound to give the community, through the organization of the State, our co-operation and our best aid, if we are to fulfill all the demands of good citizenship. And there are other matters, in regard to which the State owes our profession a debt of both duty and gratitude, which should be a debt of honor. To a brief consideration of both sides of the mutual relationship thus existing, it has seemed to me not unprofitable to devote our attention at this time.

It is a most proper thing that a body which represents the organized strength of the medical profession in this great commonwealth should set itself seriously and gravely to the task which is involved in the proper consideration of this subject. This Society is the fighting unit which represents the character, the dignity, the rights and privileges of nearly 8000 practicing physicians and surgeons within the limits of Pennsylvania; but, in addition, we hold in our hands, and we safeguard by our efforts, those interests that are superior to all personal consideration, namely, the life and happiness, the



physical welfare, and much of the moral prosperity of a population which to-day approximates 6,000,000 souls. With such interests confided to our care, it is eminently fitting that we ask ourselves gravely how we may meet the problems of state medicine, pressing for solution now as they have never done before; and it is fitting that we answer seriously, faithfully and bravely after mature consideration.

Our duty to the State concerns us :

As citizens,

As doctors individually,

As an organized profession.

A man's value to the State as a political organization is enhanced by the intelligence of the man and by the integrity and activity with which that intelligence is employed in matters affecting the welfare of the State.

If you accept this statement as I do, it then follows that the physician who willingly, earnestly and actively fulfills the ordinary demands of citizenship becomes the State's most valuable citizen. There then opens up to him a larger field of usefulness, as a citizen merely, than to other men. His education primarily, and his manner of life secondarily, make him a factor in the community of more actual and more relative value than the ordinary man.

With this added weight in the community comes the plain duty to exercise one's political privileges to the utmost, from reasons that are at once personal, professional and political. To put it plainly: a doctor ought to take an interest in politics, local, state and national. As a citizen, he should not only vote regularly, but he should go to the primaries and to caucuses. The time and place to make his influence felt for good in the political community is at the time and place that candidates are chosen; when their personal character is weighed in the balance, and when their friendship or antagonism for measures of proposed legislation will influence the choice of candidates. In other words, if a doctor wants to make his knowledge of use to the community as a whole, if he wants his ideals to be framed into laws and made a part of the record of his State's progress, he must bear his part as a citizen in the

simplest and most fundamental processes that contribute to the making of laws, or the choosing of those who answer yea and nay in the law-making body. It is not degrading to take an honest part in politics, but it is degrading to let dishonesty trample upon your rights. It is not degrading to strive to place good laws upon the statute books, but it is degrading to permit the enactment of bad laws, because you are either too bashful, too busy or too indifferent to demand the enactment of good laws.

But we owe the State other duties than those which she may with equal propriety demand from all other men of education. Our professional qualifications entail upon us certain special duties to the State just as certainly as they entitle us to certain special exemptions. It has been recognized by the law that the peculiar requirements of our calling are such as to justify our exemption from service as jurors. We are indebted to the community for this courtesy, small though it is. As medical men we should endeavor to give an impress to the laws that are made. There is much of recent medical discovery that affects the welfare of the people and that may be properly embodied in our laws, and we as physicians are derelict in duty if we fail to impress such matters upon our legislators. The individual action of each physician means much in this regard. If upon subjects affecting the public health, each doctor in this State would seriously and earnestly urge his knowledge of real facts upon some legislator of his acquaintance, it would not be long until really modern medicine would succeed in having placed upon our statute books legislation of real value to the people.

The care of the insane and the administration of hospitals of all kinds have too long been under the supervision of non-professional men. It is humiliating to note the appointment of pushing politicians, third rate lawyers, and professional charity mongers, to those positions of honor and responsibility in connection with the administration of hospitals and other charitable institutions.

The actual work of these institutions is in too many cases performed without remuneration by members of the medical

profession, and their familiarity with the needs of the institutions would properly enable them to demand recognition in the administrative, honorary remunerative appointments. But with scant courtesy medical men are usually dismissed from consideration when these matters are considered, with the too frequent false assertion that they are "not business-like" in their methods. If the appointments as made showed any real consideration for this argument, we might at least admit its sincerity, but the character of many of the appointees to those responsible offices is such as to absolutely negate such a supposition.

In other lines we owe service to the State, and we should at least proffer such service. How often have we felt that proper medical legislation might have been secured and vicious medical legislation prevented had the medical profession as capable and as large a representation in our legislative halls as that of the legal profession.

There are certainly enough physicians in this State who have, at the same time, a good professional standing and sufficient political eminence to enable this Society at all times to have from ten to twenty of its members in the State Legislature. They could not fail to influence legislation in a desirable manner and their service would be creditable alike to them as citizens, to us as a profession, and to our loved Commonwealth.

As an organization, there is much for this Society to do for the State, and in doing for the State to advance at once its own honor and the welfare of every citizen, however humble.

The re-codification of our laws relating to public health, especially as bearing upon such subjects as correct collection of vital statistics, the maintenance of the purity of our streams, the proper reporting and quarantining of contagious diseases, and the establishment and enforcement of regulations for the limitation of disease; these are propositions which it should be our privilege and our high duty to formulate and press to enactment at as early a date as possible.

There is ample reason why this is the paramount duty facing us to-day. Pennsylvania's three largest cities have for

years maintained an unenviable reputation for typhoid fever prevalence. That prevalence is not simply unnecessary. In the light of modern sanitary science, it is a crime—a crime as great, as cruel and as shameful as the slaughter of the innocents in sacred history. A crime which the united voices of our profession must denounce and the awakened conscience of the Commonwealth bid to cease.

When the water supplies of the State have been purified, it is probable that the typhoid fever mortality of this State will not range much higher than that of smallpox, and there may yet arise a generation of physicians to whom the one disease will be as great a curiosity as the other.

And here our duty to the State and to our fellow-citizens and the State's duty to us, both as a profession and as citizens, seem to intermingle, so that they can with difficulty be distinguished. We owe it as a duty to the State to elaborate a plan of action. The State owes it as a duty to us to accept that plan. We both must enforce it on behalf of that ignorant, helpless humanity whose cry arises to heaven and whose unnecessary sacrifice to an unnecessary disease must cease.

If our united voices at this time express our unanimous demand for energetic action upon these matters, and if we each and all follow up that demand by personal persistent interest and argument during the coming year, the next legislature will be forced to give to our State Board of Health ample authority and a liberal appropriation for this work, and within a decade we shall behold its practical consummation proven by an annual typhoid death rate not greater than ten per cent of the present one.

And now, from these necessarily brief thoughts upon our duties to the State, let us turn to the consideration of the duties of the State to the medical profession. The State owes us, first, a debt of gratitude. We have been over-modest in asserting this claim, yet there is no profession that has given so much to and received so little from the State. From his earliest most energetic student days, through the long and arduous struggle for professional recognition, in the culmination of a finally successful career, and on into a tottering old age,

the physician's life is one of constant self-sacrifice. There is made upon him a never ceasing call for gratuitous service which is unlike that made upon a member of any other profession, trade or business. His time, his advice, his strength, his medicine case and his surgical satchel are ever held by the populace as a free gift. No other man gives so much and receives so little. And I say this, not to disparage the nobility of true charity, nor to underrate the necessity for it, but to condemn that selfishness which demands as charity what it neither needs nor deserves as such. It is not simply the abuse of our freely rendered services in dispensary work, but the added imposition of free service in hospitals, to many who can well afford to pay the demand by City, County and State for gratuitous service in positions of professional responsibility, and reluctant recognition by great corporations of the equality of our service with that of lawyers, engineers and business men. We are ourselves largely responsible for the low esteem in which these organized bodies hold our services, and for the grudging pecuniary recognition they accord us. We have competed too earnestly for their appointments and have practically underbid each other in our anxiety for personal recognition. And the natural result is seen in the humiliating comparison of the positions our leading physicians and surgeons hold with lawyers and other professional men in official positions of responsibility.

It needs no long or searching inquiry to arrive at the underlying cause of this humiliating comparison. If the medical profession of Pennsylvania, in common with that of all other states of this Union, were not over-crowded, the unnecessary and unprofessional competition for official appointments would be so lessened that we could afford to demand proper recognition and proper remuneration for our professional services.

Comparisons are well known to be odious, yet they are often instructive. Notwithstanding the undoubted honor of the position, no attorney would accept an appointment to the Supreme Court Bench if no salary was given. Necessary to the public as are the services of a prosecuting attorney, what en-

terprising young man would give his legal services in such a position gratuitously? Nor does any attorney surrender the legal claim to his fee for conducting the defense of poor clients assigned him by the courts.

We have Boards of Charities whose business it is to investigate charitable institutions, and in some instances to disburse the moneys of the State and of the separate counties. Has anyone ever known of them refusing to accept their mileage? Or has the State ever failed to provide for its payment?

When a sanitary investigation is to be made, the attorney gets his fee for drawing up the papers; the engineer is paid for his expert services; the witnesses are paid for their time in court; the doctor alone must give his time, his services, and his advice free.

In a word, the State is always willing to pay everyone except the doctor; *he* must always give the State something for nothing and be thankful that his ears are not cuffed in return for his voluntary service.

Are we not ourselves to blame for this condition of affairs? Have we not fallen over each other in offering the State our services gratis? Have we not cut each other's throats in our anxiety to secure "honorable" appointments, while we have forgotten to insist that honest service should be honestly paid for?

Have we not made entrance into our professional ranks so easy that it has tempted the incapable and the small-spirited, and at the same time deterred many who put the highest estimate upon themselves and their services? I do not answer these questions, but I ask them in seriousness, so that you and I and all of us may ponder them in our hearts, and if we do not answer them at this time in plain words, the deeds of the future may speak with more definiteness and more effect than mere words.

Will the State ever treat our profession better than it has done in the past? To this we may safely answer yes. Our profession is year by year asserting itself, its rights, its privileges, and its dignity as it never did before. The State cannot fail to recognize such rights and privileges, when asserted with becoming manner and dignified statement.

When our united profession, by its unanimous demand, compels the State to raise the standards of medical education, to increase the requirements for medical practice, both of which the State has recently taken cognizance of, to provide for its public health interests with the farseeing liberality that befits a splendid, civilized commonwealth, rather than the myopic impecuniousness of a frontier village; when our tenacity of purpose and sincerity of belief have wrung from ignorant or unwilling legislatures practical recognition of the equality of the medical with other learned professions, this Society will be in a position to better advance the interests of humanity than ever before. We are standing on the threshold of a future whose possibilities are limitless, whose opportunities for doing good are "boundless." It is our heritage. Let us enter in and possess it.



