

1933

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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RICHMOND, VA.

Fellow Members of the American Proctologic Society, and old friends, to one and all I bring greetings.

I call you old friends advisedly, for had I not your friendship and confidence, I would not today be presiding over this distinguished gathering. I think it was Horace Walpole who said: "Old friends are the greatest blessing of one's later years. Half a word conveys one's meaning. They have a memory of the same events, and have the same mode of thinking."

That is particularly true of the friendships that we have formed in this body. It has been thirteen years since I was honored by being made an associate fellow of this Society. I had been permitted to attend some of your meetings previously, as a guest, and hence could appreciate the value of an association with you.

At that time I was just beginning the study of rectal diseases, and, while I did not then comprehend all that was said, yet the sincerity and earnestness of your members made a most favorable and lasting impression upon me. The discussions were always liberal, and at times spirited. Contrary to the custom prevailing in other medical societies, it was noticeable that even the most excellent papers received few bouquets at your hands. On the contrary if a statement was made, which did not ring true in every respect, the author was subjected to severe, and at times, apparently unfriendly criticism. In other words a speaker dared not make a statement which he was not prepared to back up.

In my opinion, the sincerity and frankness, and, at the same time, the true friendliness of the early members of this Society to each other, have had much to do with its success. I am happy to state that this same spirit has continued without abatement throughout all these years. Also, the younger members, with few exceptions, have shown the same earnestness that characterizes the old guard.

To have been chosen to preside over a body of enthusiastic workers and good fellows, as you are, is an honor to which I had not dared aspire.

As to my appreciation of this honor, the confidence and trust you have reposed in me, I can only say with Charles Lamb, "If words came as readily as ideas, and ideas as feelings, I could say ten thousand kindly things." I believe you understand me.

The members of this Society have seemed constantly hungry for new ideas, as only true scientists can be. This, in a word, is the reason why, year after year, we see the same familiar faces at these meetings. No doubt it is at a great personal sacrifice that some of you come long distances each year to attend these sessions. While there has always existed the warmest personal feeling of friendship among you fellows, it is not sentiment alone that brings you so regularly together. Although you have devoted the best years of your lives to proctology, you realize that there are yet problems to be solved, and that the place to clear up these difficulties is here, face to face with each other. If the truth were known, many discoveries of importance have resulted from the meager suggestions of others. It matters not how proficient he may be, no member of this Society can afford to be absent from its meetings.

If you will look over the list of attendants for the past few years you will see that the busiest men have been the most regular. Personally I have always felt repaid for the time spent and the expense incurred on these trips, and have ever returned to my work with the feeling that I was a better proctologist than before I came. Furthermore, I seem to get an inspiration and renewed interest in my work from these meetings, which help to carry me through the coming year. One needs to be tuned or keyed up once in a while in order to do his best. When a physician becomes satisfied with himself he usually ceases to prosper, for it is an invariable law of nature that when progress stops retrogression takes place.

It is a pleasant duty to welcome you to this twenty-fourth annual meeting of the Proctologic Society. Since its organization we have met regularly each year, with the exception of the year of the great World War. This is our second meeting in Los Angeles, the one previous having been held here twelve years ago. We are truly grateful to Dr. Kiger for the invitation to come once more to this beautiful city, and also for the most excellent program of clinics which has been provided.

Los Angeles was for a number of years the adopted home of our first President who has done more for proctology than any one else. He is familiarly known to us as the "Father of Proctology" and he well deserves the title. He it was who blazed the way that we might follow. We can imagine this was no easy task in those days of skepticism, but, through perseverance, energy and unlimited optimism, he overcame the

difficulties one by one, as he met them, and finally rose to a position of preeminence and honor. We are proud to be the disciples of such a truly great man. Throughout the ages and until the end of time we shall honor and revere the name of Joseph M. Mathews. His life and work bring to mind the oft quoted gem of James Russell Lowell:

The longer on this earth we live
And weigh the various qualities of men,
The more we feel the high stern featured beauty
Of plain devotedness to duty.
Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise,
But finding amplest recompense
For life's ungarlanded expense
In work done squarely, and unwasted days.

For many years, because of the indifference of the medical profession, the name "rectal specialist" carried with it the stigma of the charlatan or quack. Beginning with the efforts of Dr. Mathews, and later through the work of other members of this Society, the speciality now holds as honorable a place as any other branch of medicine and surgery, although as yet the advertising quack is not entirely eliminated.

Ours is one of the few divisions of surgery not overcrowded. In all the larger cities, such as New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia, will be found several men devoting their time to the treatment of rectal diseases, but in proportion to the population, there does not seem to be a sufficient number of these men anywhere to care adequately for the work. There are many large communities, and even states, in which a proctologist, worthy of the name, is not to be found. Any well-to-do section of 100,000 population, or even less, will furnish an abundance of work of this nature for a deserving and capable man.

It is probably true that where the superior worth of the specialist is not known, and where it has not been customary to refer these cases to him, some educational work will be necessary before he becomes thoroughly established. This of course will take time, as may be expected in any new undertaking. In order that our chosen line of work may receive further recognition in parts where it is unknown, and also for the benefit of the many sufferers from rectal diseases (and they are everywhere) we should encourage young men of ambition and integrity, after preparation in rectal surgery, to locate in sections where they are most needed. No one need fear a little additional competition. There is an axiom in business which says: "Competition of the right sort helps business." This applies to the professional as well as the business man.

It seems to me that we have been derelict in one phase of our work, and that is in not calling sufficient attention to the relation of rectal

diseases to systemic affections. Medical literature for the past few years has been crowded with articles dealing with the effects of infection in the mouth, the tonsils, the genitourinary tract, in fact few parts of the body have been overlooked. Rarely, however, have the authors considered at all the influence of anal or rectal diseases on the system as a whole. Even such an authority on focal infections as Frank Billings devotes less than five lines in his book to this phase, and dismisses the subject by simply stating: "The rectum, with its rich supply of hemorrhoidal veins, becomes a focus of infection, through ulcers, infected thrombi in veins and local abscesses." Such a statement has little significance, and, of course, by no means covers the ground. The most comprehensive paper on the subject which I have seen, has been from the pen of Dr. Horace W. Soper, of St. Louis. Dr. Soper seems to have an unusually clear idea of the relationship of infections in the lower intestinal tract to systemic diseases. I do not believe that every disease of the rectum is a focus of infection, in the sense that there is sufficient absorption from it to cause grave constitutional symptoms, although I am convinced that this does frequently occur. Indirectly, however, the effects are often as fully pronounced. Take, for instance, a fissure in ano, one of the commonest diseases of the intestinal tract. I think there must be but little absorption from such a condition and yet the patient with a fissure soon becomes constitutionally sick in one way or another. As in chronic appendicitis or cholecystitis there is an interference with metabolism and peristalsis is retarded, with an incomplete elimination of the intestinal contents. Call it autointoxication or not, as you choose, constitutional treatment of such a condition has but little effect. The physician doing general practice has had little opportunity to observe the frequency and significant importance of these apparently minor lesions. Whose business is it but ours to inform him of these facts, as we see and understand them? We have been remiss in our duty to the profession and to mankind. Allow me to suggest that we write more along these lines.

It is my opinion that we should seriously consider the advisability of reestablishing the *Proctologist* or some other journal for the publication of our papers and other matters pertaining to our specialty. You will recall that a very worthy periodical was edited for many years by Dr. Rollin H. Barnes of St. Louis, but was discontinued after his death because no one could be found willing to assume the responsibility of leadership. There are at this time several men among us capable of doing this work in a creditable manner, and I have no doubt that one or more of them could be induced to assume these duties, if assured the proper support from the Society. I simply offer this as a suggestion, but believe

that it should receive careful consideration by a committee appointed for that purpose.

Another suggestion is that some one should be designated to make a digest of the current literature appearing during the year, and that the same be read at the annual meetings. This, you will remember, was done for many years by Dr. Samuel T. Earle, and was a most interesting and instructive part of our program. Short synopses of articles containing new and original ideas pertaining to diseases of the intestinal tract should be made. A publication of these in the proceedings of our meetings or in a Journal, if one be established, would be of material value to us.

I thank you each and every one for the kindly attention you have given me, but still more for the loyal support you have given me as President of your Society.

I have appreciated the honor and enjoyed the service, for after all is said and done there is no surer road to happiness or to success, than sincere service to one's fellowman. With this thought in mind, I close with these beautiful lines from Robert Louis Stevenson:

"When we look into the long avenue of the future and see the good there is for each of us to do, we realize, after all, what a beautiful thing it is to work, and to live, and be happy."

SOME ADMONITIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND CRITICISMS

JOSEPH M. MATHEWS, M.D., LL.D.

SEATTLE, WASH.

Being the oldest man here and the first president of this Society and the originator and founder of the specialty of proctology, I believe that you will permit me to offer a few friendly "Admonitions, Suggestions and Criticisms." If they do not meet with your approval, you have only to cast them in the waste basket, and consider them unsaid.

Let me refer to the name that you have approved, and affixed to be used by each member to designate his specialty and used in rendering this your national body distinct from other special societies, namely: Proctology and Proctologist. I was not present when this name or title was determined upon. Had I been, I state frankly that I would have opposed it. It therefore becomes my duty to tell you my reasons. I would have contended that, being a new specialty, unknown to either the medical profession or the laity, it would have been best to simplify its name as much as possible. For instance, a member wishing to an-