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Presidential Address

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AMERICAN PROCTOLOGIC SOCIETY

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IT is a privilege to celebrate with you the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the American Proctologic Society and to pay tribute to our past presidents whose vision, ideals and accomplishments have formulated our present structure of achievement.

The half century spanned by this Society is not long if measured by the process of the suns but it is an infinite distance into the past if gauged by the revolutionary changes and events which have marked the passing of those five decades. Those fifty years have seen beliefs once thought immutable, principles once held to be eternal, relegated to the dustbins of outworn ideas. During its threshing the dispassionate flail of time has beaten the good grain from the stalks that bore it and the winds have carried the chaff into oblivion. Many in other fields of activity who for a passing moment might have enjoyed the world's esteem are now forgotten but the work of great thinkers and the achievements of noble characters in the realm of medicine are among the permanent acquisitions of this world which abide and continue to bless mankind.

It is good to lose oneself in contemplation of the past and in reflection upon the achievements of those who have gone before us. That which we see in retrospect and which we regard with humility of spirit brings home to us the

striking succession of cause and effect. We can appreciate the far reaching influence of actions and incidents which might have appeared trivial at the time of their occurrence. We can recognize that man is the child of yesterday and the parent of tomorrow. We can realize that what we are now is indissolubly linked with yesterday and that our present activities will inevitably set in motion a series of effects which will extend into the future. This reflection is weighted with the responsibility of planning the course of that future. In a world in which the only certainty is change, it rests with us to determine what form that change shall assume. Henri Bergson expressed a sentiment which bears out this thought succinctly: "The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is the effect was already in the cause." To the founders of this Society and to those who labored for its growth and development we represent the future. The degree of continued creative evolution of the Society will be in direct proportion to the insight and the wisdom that we accept as our responsibility and our willingness to work for the results which we desire to see accomplished in the years to come.

While it is entirely proper to venerate the past, let us not linger there overlong but continue to be active in thought, word and deed; a

precept which was expressed so clearly by Philip James Bailey when he said,

“We live in deeds, not years,
In thoughts, not breaths,
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.”

Because time has wrought new concepts in the social structure of the world, our responsibility to this Society in the future now possesses a dual nature: we acknowledge an obligation to the younger men and affirm our obligation to the medical profession and society throughout the world.

Our national responsibility is divided between an obligation to those who will be the future custodians of our specialty and one which has for its objective the advancement of knowledge in all subjects relative to our specialty. In its relation to future surgeons of the colon and the rectum the status of the American Board of Proctology is of utmost importance. Such a board will assure us of a growing number of trained young men of talent and ability who will freshen the fabric of our knowledge and extend the benefits of the proper quality of medical service.

Assurance of the availability of the means of training physicians should be one primary function of our organizational structure. If we hope to accomplish this, there must be formulated a sound long-range program of planning and execution. There is need for increased teaching facilities in subjects which relate to surgery of the colon and rectum. The curricula of most approved medical schools require revision. Clinical resources in hospitals and clinics associated with teaching institutions should be made available to medical students and interns. These facilities should be developed in order to support laboratory and academic study. The establishment of more residencies in proctology is an important goal.

It is important to extend the practice of preceptorship. In this method of education I fear we have procrastinated woefully.

Man may consider himself superior in his ability to plan constructively for the future. He sows seed not only to satisfy immediate needs but also to grow additional seed for future harvests. It is not enough to hoard during one season like a squirrel which depends upon nature to supply the next crop of acorns and exercises no initiative on his part. Man alone is conscious of the practical and the mystic significance of keeping unbroken the

eternally revolving cycle of sowing and reaping. The primordial certainty of a tomorrow, of another year, yes, even of an endless series of future years, acts as a stimulant which urges us on to work beyond the point required for satisfaction of immediate needs. This belief in an inevitable future is one factor which is responsible for the prevalence of procrastination. Some of us count on the certainty of time; we promise ourselves that we will modify our living by utilizing more discrimination and wisdom but at some later date. We may determine that we will study, dissect a cadaver, write a thesis or prepare for a Board examination sometime when it is more convenient and thereby less effort may be required. Some of us have postponed the development of a clinic or a department. How many of us have interested ourselves in our younger men or have assisted and encouraged them in the practice of colonic and rectal surgery? How many of us in the exercise of our responsibility have made preceptorships available for the many eager and talented young surgeons who are turning with keen and inquiring minds to our special field? The harvest of tomorrow is here today and procrastination never plowed a furrow or winnowed grain from chaff. The needs of our successors for guidance and assistance are of the immediate moment and we must accept the obligation. The close personal relationship which existed between student and teacher and which was so fruitful during the period when such eminent teachers as Osler, Welch, Thayer and Halsted taught in Baltimore passed into oblivion when the demand for medical education assumed its present vast proportions. Nevertheless, the preceptor-student relationship still carries a high potential as a factor in medical education. The preceptor serves not only as teacher, as a sort of clearing house of knowledge and experience, but also as a whetstone on which young men may sharpen their intelligence and their capabilities in scientific inquiry. With a profound sense of self-dedication we must accept our responsibility in this connection.

If the members of this Society expect to keep pace with the rapid developments in surgical science, there must be concerted action aimed at fostering research in all phases of colonic and rectal surgery. Research in the basic sciences must be inclusive. Without broad knowledge increased teaching facilities may

soon disseminate the dust of outmoded thought; without more and better teaching facilities the results of research may never become available to professional practice. The two are linked inseparably. The students of today are the scientists, the teachers and the surgeons of tomorrow.

In a world in which geographic boundaries have contracted and the means of communication have been fabulously extended it would be folly to practice professional isolationism. To accept complacently the theory that we may occupy positions of leadership in medical discoveries, research and technics is to lay ourselves open to the danger of stagnation which is inherent in a spirit of self-satisfaction. It is fortunate that we have been able to receive, store and utilize a wealth of material which has been contributed by scientists from all parts of the world while other countries which formerly enjoyed a rich endowment in scientific accomplishment have been crippled or crushed by the disastrous conflict. We can well afford to be generous. Hoarding carries its own penalty through selfishness and resultant isolation while generosity brings well merited material and spiritual rewards. It is a laudable responsibility and a pleasant duty to be generous to our colleagues of the medical profession the world over. It is our gracious privilege to make available to them the facilities of our teaching and research centers.

The importance of this international point of view cannot be emphasized too strongly. The medical profession by virtue of the character of its work has the inestimable privilege of establishing good will and of promoting understanding among all the peoples of the world. Through such efforts suspicion may be allayed and confidence may be established. War-wrecked nations suffer not only bodily

ills and a paucity of the means to correct them but psychic ills as well. Hunger, poverty and disease provide the soil for such conditions. Our effort to establish international amity will constitute an important factor in helping to restore the world patient to health. If in this process the patient can absorb an immunizing infusion against inimical ideologies and if faith and hope can be renewed, all humanity will be benefited.

The American Proctologic Society is anxious to establish and to maintain a flow and an exchange of ideas with professional colleagues from other parts of the world. It would like to function as a central board of communication. It desires to serve as a source of whatever facts and skills it possesses and hopes to disperse them through medical journals and other means utilized for the dissemination of information.

We hope that means can be provided which will permit and encourage visitors from other countries to visit our clinics and laboratories for the purpose of study and discussion. By such experience mutual benefits may be derived.

Finally, I would urge consideration of the possibility of an organizational exchange of students. Intercommunication of thought is the wedge that holds open the door to the extension of knowledge and skill, to tolerance and understanding. We cannot guard too carefully against a spirit of self-satisfaction and apathy as we observe the needs and the achievements of others.

In a world torn with uncertainties, conflicting ideologies and confusion, the medical profession will serve as a stabilizing influence by offering its own works, ethical principles and traditions as examples of tolerance, professional unselfishness and personal dedication to the highest ideals of humanity.

