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AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.*

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During the first week of May, 1847, a National Medical Convention met in Philadelphia and completed the organization of the American Medical Association. A correct knowledge of its origin and a just appreciation of the motives of its founders require some explanation of the status of medicine at that period of time.

The Federal Constitution of the United States leaves the regulation of education and of educational institutions to the individual states. Consequently the people of each state, through their legislative bodies, establish systems of primary education and grant charters for academic and collegiate institutions for literary, scientific and professional education. There is, in consequence, a lack of uniformity in the educational standards of the individual states. In the early period of the history of the nation the contrast between the several states was more marked than it now is.

The degree-conferring power of educational institutions has been unlimited in most, if not in all the states of the Union. The medical schools have not only possessed the power to confer medical degrees, but until recent years, a degree so obtained conferred the liberty to practice medicine in a majority of the states.

*In 1855, Dr. N. S. Davis wrote a "History of the American Medical Association" from its organization up to January, 1855, which was edited by Dr. S. W. Butler and published in the *New Jersey Medical Reporter* (Vol. 8, 1855). On June 1, 1897, Dr. N. S. Davis read "A Brief History of the Origin of the American Medical Association" (*J. Am. M. Ass.*, 1897, xxviii, pp. 1115-1117) at the semi-centennial celebration of the Association in Philadelphia. I shall make liberal use of these articles and of the published transactions of the Association without the further acknowledgment of credit.

It is true that the first three medical schools organized in this country which were located in Philadelphia, New York and Boston, were founded substantially upon the same basis as the University of Edinburgh. The curriculum was the same. A preliminary academic education requirement for beginning medical study and from three to five years of medical study with an annual college term of not less than six months was adopted.

The rapid development of the country, the great increase in the population, the foundation of many new towns and cities and the addition of new states, during the first fifty years of our existence as a nation, developed a demand for additional physicians and a corresponding increase in the number of medical colleges.

During the last few years of the eighteenth century, with only four medical schools, there was annually enrolled less than three hundred students, of whom not more than fifteen were graduated each year. Within sixty years there were more than thirty medical schools, with an annual attendance of more than 3,500 students, and each year 1,000 or more received the degree of Doctor of Medicine.

The rapid increase in the number of medical colleges and the number of medical students occurred without any general supervision of the medical profession and with no accordance with any uniform system of laws. The charter from the state, which permitted the organization of the medical college with power to grant diplomas, carried with it no pecuniary endowment. The institution was entirely dependent for support upon the fees received from students. This led to an active rivalry between medical schools for the greatest number of students. A corresponding rivalry existed between the medical schools in neighboring states, in the effort to induce students to attend the medical schools located in the state in which they had residence. As a result of this rivalry between medical schools, all preliminary educational requirements were abandoned, the term of study was reduced to a nominal three years and the medical college instruction to two annual repetitional courses of from twelve to sixteen weeks in the better class of schools, while the poorest schools granted a degree upon the certificate of a preceptor after one or two years of office study and one term of three or four months of medical college attendance.

In the earlier years of our history, it also must be noted that a large number of those who practised medicine received their entire instruction in the office of a preceptor. These practitioners

were licensed by the officers of medical societies, the judges of courts, or by the preceptor alone in some cases.

These inadequate and unsystematic methods of training students for medical practice, elicited severe criticism from some of the teachers connected with medical schools of the better class, from members of medical societies and from contributors to the medical press. It was recognized that no adequate improvement in the standards of medical education could be accomplished without concerted action on the part of the medical schools. To this end, in 1835, the Faculty of the Medical College of Georgia advocated, through the *Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* (Vol. 1, No. 4, Sept., 1836, pp. 220-223), that a convention be held of delegates from all the medical colleges of the country, for the purpose of securing a more nearly uniform and a higher standard of medical college instruction. The proposal failed because of the indifference of some of the older medical colleges.

In 1840, at a meeting of the Medical Society of the State of New York, a resolution offered by Dr. John McCall, of Utica, was adopted, which called for a convention of delegates of medical colleges and the state medical societies to meet in Philadelphia in May, 1840. The state medical societies and the medical schools did not respond to the invitation extended to them by the Committee of the Medical Society of the State of New York and no meeting occurred.

Medical education continued to be a prominent topic of discussion in many of the medical societies of the country, and at the annual meeting of the Medical Society of the State of New York, in 1844, two series of resolutions were offered by Dr. Alexander Thompson, of Cayuga County, and by Dr. N. S. Davis, of Broome County. These resolutions declared "that a four months' college term was too short; that the standard of education, both preliminary and medical, as requisite for the degree was altogether too low and that the union of the teaching and licensing power in the college Faculties was impolitic and constantly liable to abuse." After some discussion, the resolutions were referred to the standing Corresponding Committee, of which Dr. N. S. Davis was Chairman.

At the meeting of the State Society in February, 1845, two reports were presented by the Corresponding Committee; one by the Chairman, recommending the principles involved in the original resolutions; the other by Dr. M. H. Nash, of Orange County, who opposed the principles of the resolutions. The

opponents of the resolutions admitted the truth of some of the allegations in reference to inadequate requirements for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Still they maintained that the standard of qualifications exacted by the colleges of the State of New York was as high as that required by the colleges of any of the neighboring states. Consequently the adoption of measures which would compel the schools of one state to institute a higher standard would drive the students to the schools of other states where less severe attainments were required.

After a long debate, the subject was about to be postponed for another year when Dr. Alden Marsh, of Albany, privately suggested to the chief advocate of the resolutions that the objection might be obviated by calling a convention of delegates of all the colleges, with the object of inducing the medical schools of the individual states to act in unison. Dr. Davis then submitted the following:

"Whereas, it is believed that a National Convention would be conducive to the elevation of the standard of medical education in the United States; and

"Whereas, there is no mode of accomplishing so desirable an object without concert of action on the part of the medical colleges, societies and institutions of all the states, therefore:

"Resolved: that the New York Medical Society earnestly recommend a National Convention of delegates from medical societies and colleges in the whole Union, to convene in the City of New York on the first Tuesday in May, in the year 1846, for the purpose of adopting some concerted action on the subject set forth in the foregoing preamble.

"Resolved: that a committee of three be appointed to carry the foregoing resolution into effect."

The general expression of the members of the Society in the debate which followed was that the project was impracticable. However, favorable action was strongly urged by the mover and the resolutions were adopted. Drs. N. S. Davis, of Binghamton, James McNaughton, of Albany, and Peter Van Buren, the Secretary of the Society, were named as the Committee to carry the resolutions into effect. During the following year, the Committee, through its Chairman, corresponded with the officers of each of the medical societies and colleges of the country and with many influential physicians in sections of the country where no medical organization existed. At the meeting of the Medical Society of the State of New York in February, 1846, the Chair-

man of the Committee was able to report "that in far the larger portion of the Union, the invitation of this Society has met with a prompt and hearty response from the profession; and it is with much regret that we find even a few institutions declining to take part in so important a movement." The Society appointed sixteen delegates to attend the proposed Convention.

On Tuesday, May 5, 1846, the delegates from different parts of the United States assembled in the Hall of the Medical Department of the New York University. The delegates were called to order by Dr. Edward Delafield, of New York. Temporary officers and a Committee on Credentials were elected. The credentials of one hundred and nineteen delegates were accepted. A committee of one from each state represented nominated the following gentlemen for permanent officers and they were unanimously elected: *President*, Dr. Jonathan Knight, of New Haven, Conn.; *Vice-Presidents*, Dr. John Bell, of Philadelphia, Penn., and Dr. Edward Delafield, of New York City; *Secretaries*, Dr. Richard D. Arnold, of Savannah, Ga., and Dr. Alfred Stillé, of Philadelphia, Penn.

In the midst of the most perfect harmony and good feeling the organization was completed of the *first* National Convention of the medical profession in the United States.

A Committee of Nine was appointed "to bring the subject of Medical Education before the Convention in the form of distinct propositions suitable for discussion and action." The Committee presented the following propositions:

"*Resolved*, That it is expedient for the Medical Profession of the United States, to institute a *National Medical Association*."

"*Resolved*, That it is desirable that a uniform and elevated standard of requirements for the degree of M.D., should be adopted by all the medical schools in the United States."

"*Resolved*, That it is desirable that young men before being received as students of Medicine, should have acquired a suitable preliminary education."

"*Resolved*, That it is expedient that the Medical Profession in the United States should be governed by the same code of Medical Ethics."

It was also recommended that a Committee of Seven be appointed on each of the propositions, whose duty it should be to report at a meeting to be held in the City of Philadelphia on the first Wednesday in May, 1847.

The report of the Committee was adopted, together with a

further recommendation that a fifth Committee of Seven prepare and issue an address to the regularly organized medical societies and chartered medical schools in the country, setting forth the objects of the National Medical Association and inviting them to send delegates to the convention to be held in Philadelphia in May, 1847.

Two other Committees of Seven were appointed. One, on the proposition that all licenses to practice medicine should be conferred by a board of medical examiners in each state. The other, on the necessity of efficient laws for securing the registration of births, marriages and deaths in all the states and for a uniform nomenclature of diseases adapted to the United States.

In reading the transactions of this convention, one is struck with the fact that in the two days' session, all of the business was transacted with apparently the utmost harmony and good feeling. It is also notable that the propositions acted upon were considered by the delegates as *the* important questions of the day affecting the medical profession. Many of the same propositions continue to be of great importance to us to-day.

On May 5, 1847, the second National Medical Convention assembled in the Hall of the Academy of Natural Sciences, in Philadelphia. The two hundred and fifty delegates represented about forty medical societies and twenty-eight medical schools. Twenty-two of the twenty-six states of the Union were so represented.

The Convention was organized with the following officers: *President*, Dr. Jonathan Knight, of New Haven, Conn.; *Vice-Presidents*, Drs. Alexander H. Stevens, of New York City, George B. Wood, of Philadelphia, A. H. Buchanan, of Nashville Tenn., and John Harrison, of New Orleans, La.; *Secretaries*, Drs. Richard D. Arnold of Savannah, Ga., Alfred Stillé, of Philadelphia and F. Campbell Stewart, of New York City.

The reports of the seven committees appointed at the New York meeting were made. Many of these reports are very full and may be found in the first volume of the *Transactions of the American Medical Association*. Brief comment on the report of some of the committees is all that can be given here.

The Committee on Preliminary Education recommended that the prospective medical student should have a good English education, a knowledge of natural philosophy, of the elementary mathematical sciences (including algebra and geometry), and such an acquaintance with the Greek and Latin languages as

would enable one to appreciate the technical language of medicine, etc., etc. All medical colleges were requested to require a certificate of each matriculate, signed by his preceptor, clearly certifying to the student's qualifications.

The Committee on Uniform Requirements for the Degree of M.D. recommended a course of study of three full years, of which two should be in attendance upon two annual courses of lectures. That the curriculum should embrace the seven main divisions of medicine, represented by seven professors. That each candidate for the degree shall have steadily devoted three months to dissections.

The Committee of Medical Ethics reported through its Chairman, Dr. John Bell, of Philadelphia, a very full code of medical ethics. This was adopted and remained a part of the Constitution and By-laws of the American Medical Association until the reorganization of the Association in 1901.

The Committee on the Subject of the Union of Teaching and Licensing in the Same Hands made a majority and a minority report. After a lengthy discussion, both reports of the Committee were referred to the Committee on Medical Education, with instructions to report at the next meeting.

The most important subject which engaged the attention of the Convention was the report of the Committee on a Plan for Organizing a Permanent National Association. This Committee consisted of Drs. John Watson, John Stearns, F. Campbell Stewart and N. S. Davis, of New York; Alfred Stillé, of Philadelphia; W. H. Cogswell, of New London, Conn., and E. D. Fenner, of New Orleans. The Committee adopted as a basis of organization the principle of representation, by making the active members of the Association consist of delegates from medical societies and the faculties of medical schools, in accordance with a fixed numerical ratio. In the preamble attached to the Constitution, the purposes for which the Association was organized were declared to be, "*for cultivating and advancing medical knowledge, for elevating the standard of medical education, for promoting the usefulness, honour and interests of the Medical Profession; for enlightening and directing public opinion in regard to the duties, responsibilities and requirements of medical men, for exciting and encouraging emulation and concert of action in the profession, and for facilitating and fostering friendly intercourse between those engaged in it.*"

The Committee further emphasized the importance of encour-

aging the formation of State and County societies throughout the Union, which should be auxiliary bodies with representation, by means of delegates, in the National organization.

The Constitution also provided for standing committees on Medical Sciences, on Practical Medicine, on Surgery, on Obstetrics, on Medical Education, on Medical Literature, and on Publication.

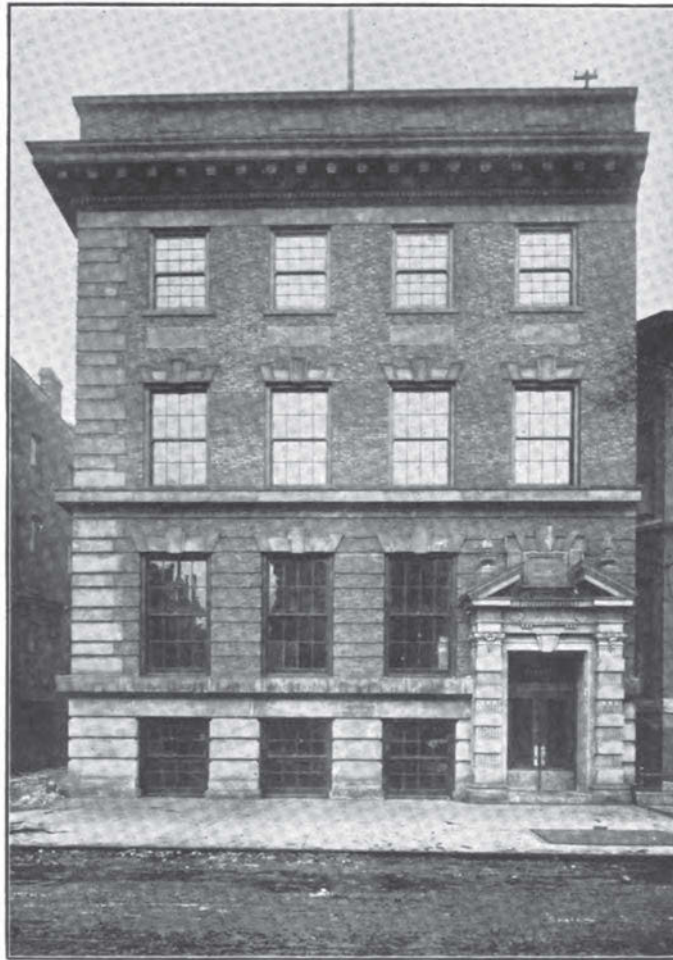
The various articles of the Constitution were considered separately and were adopted without change, as recommended by the Committee.

The Convention then resolved itself into the "American Medical Association" and a nominating committee, composed of one delegate from each State represented, selected the following officers for the first year: *President*, Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, of Philadelphia; *Vice-Presidents*, Dr. Jonathan Knight, of New Haven, Conn.; Dr. Alexander H. Stevens, of New York City; Dr. James Moultrie, of Charleston, S. C., and Dr. A. H. Buchanan, of Nashville, Tenn.; *Secretaries*, Dr. Alfred Stillé, of Philadelphia, and Dr. J. R. W. Dunbar, of Baltimore; *Treasurer*, Dr. Isaac Hays, of Philadelphia. The nominees named by the Committee were unanimously elected. Baltimore was selected as the place of meeting in 1848.

This brief account of the medical history of our country and of the several preliminary steps which led to the organization of the American Medical Association shows that its founders were actuated by the loftiest motives. Among its founders and in the list of those who attended the annual meetings may be found the names of those who have made international reputations and helped to make the world respect and admire American medicine.

The transactions of the first few years show the active participation of many well-known men, whose names will be forever linked with the history of American medicine. Among them may be mentioned Alfred Stillé, Nathaniel Chapman, Isaac Hays, Austin Flint, H. I. Bowditch, Bigelow, John C. Dalton, Jr., George B. Wood, S. D. Gross, Daniel Drake, J. K. Mitchell, Daniel Brainard, Condie, Mussey, Atlee, Oliver Wendell Holmes, J. R. Wood, John C. Warren, L. P. Yandell, N. S. Davis and many other equally well-known, whose names space does not permit to be mentioned here.

To all of these noble men do we owe a debt of gratitude for the grand work they have done for medical education, for medical progress and for all the humanities for which the American Med-



The Building of the American Medical Association.

(Cut loaned by courtesy of the A.M.A.)

ical Association is an exponent. To no other man is the profession as deeply indebted as to him who by persistent, never-tiring, well-directed effort, enlisted the aid of other noble men in the successful organization of a national medical association. Rightfully is he called "The Father of the American Medical Association." For sixty or more years he has stood for all that is best for the world, and by voice, pen and deed he has fought for a higher standard of medical education. He is to-day probably the only living representative of those who were present when the organization of the Association was perfected.

At each annual meeting of the Association since the organization, the principles upon which it was founded have found expression in the addresses of its officers and committees upon the topics of Medical Education, Preventive Medicine, Surgery, Medicine, and upon all the subjects allied to medical science. Through its standing committees the Association has attempted to improve the standard of medical education. It brought into existence the Association of American Medical Colleges, and through that body a constant attempt has been made to have concerted action of the medical colleges in the effort gradually and steadily to elevate the status of medical education. As a voluntary medical organization it has had at no time a mandatory power over the medical affairs of the various states. There is no doubt, however, of the effect of the moral influence which it has constantly exerted. The influence for good of the Association has steadily grown. In 1885, it wisely decided to publish its transactions in the form of a weekly journal. This publication has grown steadily in the number of its subscribers, and its influence has become correspondingly great. Since 1898 under the management of the Board of Trustees and the able Editor, Dr. George H. Simmons, it has not only attained a circulation larger than any other medical publication in the world, but it is also recognized as representing the best scientific medical thought of the day. The *Journal* is edited and published in the building erected by the Trustees in 1903, in Chicago. (*See Plate 6.*)

In 1900, at the annual meeting held at Atlantic City, N. J., the subject of the re-organization of the Association was considered. The recognition of medical colleges and other institutions as representative delegate bodies had led to confusion. Doubt often had been expressed of the wisdom of recognizing medical institutions as affiliated with the Association. For this and other reasons a Committee on Re-organization, consisting of Dr. J. N.

McCormack, of Kentucky; Dr. P. Maxwell Foshay, of Ohio, and Dr. George H. Simmons, of Illinois, was appointed to formulate a plan of re-organization with a revised Constitution and By-Laws, and to report at the next meeting.

During the second week of June, 1901, the annual meeting was held in St. Paul, Minn. The Committee on Re-organization reported, and the scheme outlined by the Committee was finally adopted without material change. In brief, this consisted of the incorporation of the Association under the laws of the State of Illinois. The national association was to be considered as composed of the affiliated state associations of the Union, and each state association was formed by its affiliated county societies. Membership in the national association implied membership in the state and in the county society in which the member resided. The county society became the portal of entry into the state society and from that body into the American Medical Association. The business of the county society was to be accomplished by a few members, chosen by ballot, to be known as Councillors, Delegates, etc., etc. The business of the state society was to be carried on by a limited body of members, representatives of the affiliated county societies, known as Delegates, and the ordinary business of the national association was to be conducted by a House of Delegates composed of representatives elected by the several state societies. The number of delegates composing the business or legislative body of the county, state and the national association, respectively, was based upon an equitable numerical ratio.

With the business of the respective associations completed by small bodies of representatives, in each society the majority of the members was enabled to carry on the scientific work without vexatious delays and interruptions. Thus, both the business and the scientific work of the Association and its affiliated bodies would be completed with greater facility and notable harmony.

The scientific work of the Association was to be carried on, as in former years, by the Sections on General Medicine, Surgery, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Neurology, and others, making a total of twelve.

As an incorporated body, the financial affairs, including the management of the *Journal* of the Association and the selection of an Editor, was placed in the hands of a Board of Trustees.

Under the re-organization the Association has worked for three years. At the annual meetings of 1902 and 1903 the working scheme of the Association was found to be practical. The

work of organizing the profession by the formation of county societies in the several states, on the plan devised, has gone on with great rapidity. Complete organization has been accomplished in the majority of the states of the Union in the short period of about two years.

The outlook is excellent for the organization and union of practically the whole profession of medicine in the United States in the membership of the American Medical Association. So organized, the influence of the Association will be a mighty force for good in all matters pertaining to the science of medicine, to the medical profession and to the health and happiness of the people of our great country.



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"The Father of the American Medical Association."