

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS¹

By WILLIAM J. MAYO, M.D., F.A.C.S., ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

THE American College of Surgeons is beginning its seventh year under most inspiring circumstances. More than three-fourths of the Fellows of the Association have been in their country's service and have returned to their work with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. In spite of the war years, the College has made progress along all lines. The Clinical Congress of Surgeons of North America has been taken over by the American College of Surgeons. In the future the educational, scientific, and moral standards of the American College of Surgeons will be maintained, and only its members and invited guests will be welcomed to the clinical meetings.

Standardization of hospitals has made great progress under the able leadership of the Director of Education, Dr. John G. Bowman. As the result of the efforts of the College, the great majority of hospitals in America of more than 100 beds will institute the restricted staff, and install the laboratory facilities and record systems which the American College of Surgeons believes to be essential.

It is the desire of the Founders of the American College of Surgeons that the association shall be democratic, and that its membership shall be open to all those men of sterling character, ability, and training in general surgery and in the various surgical specialties, who are within the limits of North America. For, when all is said and done, the College stands for service to all the people, and unless a sufficient number of men of high ideals and professional qualifications is eventually secured, the organization will have failed to live up to its great opportunities.

The exact number of men required to perform the duties of caring for the various serious surgical ills of the 115,000,000 people of North America is at this time a matter of speculation and, so far as I know, there are no data on which such a computation can be based. However, an estimated number might be fixed to serve as a target

for criticism, of at least one surgeon to 10,000 persons. This percentage is about the same as that furnished to England by the Royal College of Surgeons of London. That there will be, in the next decade, such a number of eligible men, I am confident. Objection has been raised to an association of so large a membership; it is maintained that this would mean a lowering of educational standards. If the principle is established that the association first of all is for the benefit of the people, I believe a working arrangement can be made which will, in a tentative way, meet the requirements. The next generation will not be so greatly troubled as the present one by questions of educational standards. The medical standards of the whole country have been raised to a point not exceeded by those of any other country in the world. In the present generation, by reason of divergent standards, there will have to be a certain amount of latitude to meet the existing conditions.

Knowledge obtained by observation, experience, and from the printed page, is possessed by many men. When knowledge is translated into proper action we speak of it as wisdom. Many men have great wisdom, in their knowledge of useful things, yet may have but a limited book learning. Personally, I believe that the wise honest man who can bring a high order of skill to bear on surgical infirmities should not, at least in this generation, be refused admission to the College because of a lack of fundamental training.

In the adoption of standards or requirements for admission into the American College of Surgeons, character should be first considered. The dishonest, conscienceless man who has surgical skill is most dangerous in any community. Unnecessary operations, even when performed with a high order of technical ability, are the bane of present-day surgery, but, owing largely to the American College of Surgeons, such practices are markedly on the wane. However lenient we may be in estimating the value of the older and disap-

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pearing generation of surgeons, our standards for the younger and coming generation of surgeons, who have had and who will have had opportunities to acquire learning, should be high and increasingly high as future standards and educational requirements are raised.

In the future, the American College of Surgeons will not only demand that the candidate shall be a graduate of a reputable medical school and have had hospital experience and be licensed to practice, but also that he shall have had special training in the particular surgical specialty which he intends to practice. In making these requirements it is the duty of the College to see that facilities for obtaining the special training are developed. Three years at least will be required for such special training. At the present time the man who possesses the B. S. and M. D. degrees and has had one year of hospital training averages 27 to 28 years of age. Add three years to this training and he is 30 to 31. Will this secure the best results or will the man reach his life work at too late an age? We must also consider that during the entire period of his education he is not self-supporting. Will not this have a tendency to make the surgeon a member of an aristocracy to the ranks of which the sons of rich men will be the only ones who will have easy entrance? Investigation was made of the professional standing of the graduates of the medical department of the University of Michigan fifteen years after graduation. It was shown that those who graduated before their twenty-fifth year had made, on the average, greater scientific progress and were a greater asset to their community than those who graduated after the twenty-fifth year.

I think we are all agreed that the actual time spent in the professional part of this education should not be shortened. I think we are also agreed that one of the faults of the educational system of our country is a loss of time and effectiveness in the preliminary educational methods. The university has been made the base of our educational system and it should be the apex. Only a small percentage of those who enter our public schools ever reach the university, yet the university greatly influences the educational policy even in the grade schools. I am convinced that at present two years of time are lost in the grade schools, and that the education given is not altogether the most desirable for the making of American citizens. A six-year course of grammar school education, divested of any university significance, should be a strict government requirement in all schools, private as well as public, and given in the American language. It should be

the purpose to give a common education in the common things that are to make us a united people, and such an education might well be made a requisite for the exercise of suffrage.

The high school could be reduced to three years instead of four, and in it for the first time should the university be considered. Languages should be optional in the high school, but I believe that Latin and modern languages are of great value to the professional man. The high school now recognizes the material facts of life, and gives an education in mechanics and agriculture, business, and the industries, as well as the traditional cultural education, and these courses should be further extended.

It is sometimes difficult to follow the academic mind. The more or less cloistered life that is led by many college professors has given traditional cultural education too great an influence. Modern educators today do not believe that teaching in one subject as, for instance, mathematics, has greater power of mental training than other subjects. The old time educator would consider this rank heresy. His mind still clings to the view that any education which might be used commercially is not cultural, a view which is wholly undemocratic and based on an out-worn caste system.

In no place has this traditional view of education been more pronounced than in the universities. It has been only within recent years that the university faculties would accept the view that the anatomy and physiology of man had cultural training value, although they were convinced that the anatomy and physiology of plants had such value. There has been a slowness of universities to give credits for any kind of work which might be used for gaining a livelihood, even so holy a cause as caring for the sick. And today, less credit is given in these subjects than for others which have no more training value. Do not understand me as desiring to lower the standards of universities in relation to cultural education. Far from it; but I do object to the present attitude which desires to force every type of education into the one mold. The great problem now is to obtain the money to give an education to all those who desire it. The purpose of the university is to give an education not to the few, but to the many; and it should be emphasized that the giving of degrees is only incidental to this purpose. Every unnecessary step, every unnecessary regulation which delays or obstructs the progress of a student prevents some one else from obtaining an education. The academic answer is: Raise standards until the number of those

who can—not desire, but can—obtain an education is reduced to the number who can be given the present form of education. Our country depends not on a cultured class alone, but on the average intelligence, and in the last analysis on the number who will be able to obtain an opportunity to get an education. It should be the duty of the Fellows of the American College of Surgeons to see that certain existing conditions be remedied so that the medical schools may graduate their students at an earlier age.

In this connection, I quote from the 1918 report¹ of C. G. Schultz, superintendent of education of the state of Minnesota, now of the Government Department of Education, Washington:

“It requires a total school enrollment of approximately four hundred fifty to produce one college graduate. No one questions that it is desirable that this one graduate should be produced. But that a large part of the energies of a school community should be devoted to this end seems lacking in sound business sense. Surely such a procedure in no way contributes to the fulfillment of our democratic ideal of the open door to equal opportunity. In order that we may prepare one pupil for college we cannot justify the neglect of those forms of training distinctly desirable for the four hundred forty-nine who must follow pursuits other than those open to the college graduate. The same reasoning leads to the conclusion that we cannot justify our insistence upon the maintenance of high schools for the sole purpose of training all pupils to go to college when only one out of ten goes and only one out of thirty graduates.”

The expense of our educational system is a serious burden on our taxation resources. By efficient methods a much greater percentage of our young people might secure higher education without an increase of the present burden. The average child should not be entered in the common school under the age of seven, but should be taught in the kindergarten, given six years in the grade school, and three in the high school. At sixteen the student who desires it is ready for university training. The freshman and sophomore years, under university supervision, may be given in the home high school under home influences. At the more mature age of 17 to 18 the students leave for the junior and senior years in the university. Such a program contemplates

cutting only three years from the grade and high schools, does not increase the cost, and doubles the capacity of the university for the giving of advanced education. This is not purely theoretic; such university high school courses are now given with university credits in some of the cities of Minnesota, among others Rochester, where C. H. Mayo, as one of the city school commissioners, has made the plan a success.

Another problem for which some wise solution must be found is the future management of the annual clinical meetings of the association. Even at the present time, with a limited membership, there are few cities in this country that can adequately care for the visitors at the meetings. It may be that a partial solution will be found in the development of clinical meetings to be held in various states or parts of the country in addition to the annual meeting for the convocation. It has also been suggested that the attendance at the annual meetings shall be limited to the members of the association, but, inasmuch as it is our intention to make the fellowship the first goal of the ambitious young surgeon after the completion of his training, it would seem that, so far as possible, promising young men should be admitted as invited guests.

In developing the sectional clinical meetings it should be borne in mind that the essential idea is educational—to develop better surgery. We must, however, remember that we, as a College, have a duty to perform to the public and to the profession, and this can best be brought about by close affiliation with the organizations representing medicine as a whole. We urge upon every Fellow that he become a member and a conscientious worker in his County and State Societies, and in the American Medical Association.

Men who cannot become fellows because of lack of moral character should not be allowed to give demonstrations or hold clinics under the auspices of the College.

Finally, I would call attention to the desirability of making the College of Surgeons truly American, by affiliation with the universities of the sister republics in South America. The University of Lima, Peru, is the oldest university in America, and many of the South American universities have attained pre-eminence as educational institutions, with whom it would be of great benefit to be associated. I am sure a way will be found to consummate so desirable an alliance.

¹ Twentieth Biennial Report, Department of Education, Minnesota, 1917-1918.