AN ADDRESS ON THE PRIVILEGES AND DUTIES OF BRANCHES OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.*

BY WILLIAM STRANGE, M.D.,

President of the Worcestershire and Herefordshire Branch; and President of the British Medical Association.

GENTLEMEN,—The press of business in preparing for the great meeting of our Association in this city, in August last, prevented me from giving the usual presidential address on the occasion of the last annual meeting of the Worcestershire and Herefordshire Branch. I regret that omission the less, because it gives me what I hope will be considered a legitimate opportunity of removing it, whilst welcoming to Worcester the members of a neighbouring Branch for the first time in our existence. Such joint meetings are not unknown between other and older Branches, and I have heard that they have generally given great satisfaction, as subserving a twofold object—viz., the bringing together for social intercourse the largest number of medical men which any given district is able to provide, and the securing a larger, and therefore perhaps a more intelligent audience, for whatever of scientific interest those who attend the meetings may be able to offer. I will take the liberty of drawing your attention, for a few minutes, to what is now passing before our eyes in the conduct and management of the parent Association; and then of pointing out to you the bearing which these events must, or should have, upon the privileges, and duties, and welfare of the Branches.

Early in the history of our Association, Branches began to be formed in various centres, in consequence of the difficulty experienced in those days, compared with these, of medical men getting to a distance without loss of much valuable time. I trace the rise and progress of Branches: 1, to the inherent vitality and value of the parent Association; and 2, to the exigencies of medical practice, which make it more difficult for a medical man to leave home for a day or two than for a member of any other of the professions. And now, we find Branches in the more populous centres so large, that their members almost equal in number those composing the whole Association for many years after its foundation. In fact, these larger Branches—such as the Metropolitan Counties, the Lancashire and Cheshire, the South-Eastern, and the Birmingham and Midland Counties—are almost associations in themselves; so well organised are they, so well attended, and divided (where necessary) into sub-Branches or districts. I wish you to bear in mind this fact, as it has an important bearing upon my argument, as to the privileges and duties of the Branches.

The smaller Branches are scattered up and down those parts of the United Kingdom which are less thickly populated than are the districts within the area of larger Branches. These have more the character of units, whilst the others are agglomerations of units. They are more homogeneous, perhaps, as lacking the variety of composition which is to be found in the larger centres of medical activity. They must, almost of necessity, also be unable to produce the same amount of work as the larger Branches can, in consequence of a more restricted field of observation. Hence the instinct which of late has sprung up, urging these smaller centres to unite their forces, either by direct amalgamation, or else by occasional united meetings, such as the one I have the pleasure of addressing to-day.

All this is, of course, very trite, and almost self-evident; and I should not be justified in troubling you with it, were it not for a most important movement which is now going on, affecting the welfare, perhaps the very existence, of some Branches, and bearing equally upon the good government and future welfare of the parent Association itself.

Now, notwithstanding this varying character of the Branches, distant as to place, differing in the character of their leaders—professors at medical schools, teachers at our larger hospitals, leading consulting physicians and surgeons, or busy general practitioners in town or village—there is one bond of unity amongst them all, and

that is, they are all animated by the same spirit, they have all the same object in view, and to one end to be attained is placed before the eyes of each and every one. The motto of our parent Association is such a *multum in parvo*, has such an unity, and yet is so expansive, that it serves at once as a bond of union between parent tree and branch, and between the largest and most important, and the smallest and weakest of the Branches.

This unity of aim and singleness of purpose it is to which we must look to keep the now almost unwieldy mass of our Association from falling to pieces by its own weight. Were it not for this, we might reasonably fear that some great storm of feeling, some hurricane of dissension, might arise and rend branch after branch away from the parent trunk, leaving the now goodly tree a melancholy spectacle to its friends, and an object of derision to its enemies. We know how the rending away of a principal branch exposes the parent tree to injury, and how insecure it makes the attachment of others. Hence the desirability of a bond of union, a chain of support, which one branch can afford to another. And, indeed, in the multiplicity of branches, there is safety for the parent tree. If the whole kingdom were divided into a smaller number of districts, say five or six, for Branch purposes, there would be danger, because the falling away of even one of these would leave a damaging wound in the trunk, such as might endanger its survival. But the feeling of strength in the larger Branches, the result of their powerful organisation, has now naturally given rise to a desire to make that strength felt in the counsels of the parent Association. The large amount of intelligence embraced by an extended area will not any longer be content with the same amount of consideration and power as that hitherto possessed by the very smallest of the Branches. Consequently, there has arisen in some of the larger Branches a feeling of soreness, of injustice done to their rights, by the governing body of the Association. These feelings, after surging for a time below the surface, found voice, as you are aware, at our meeting here in August last. A distinct demand was made for representation in the governing body in direct proportion to numbers, and the Committee of Council was directed to devise a scheme which should embody that principle. The outcome of it all is what you will read in the JOURNAL, viz., that the adoption of that principle will be recommended to the members of the Association assembled at Liverpool next August. The starting point of representation will be that each Branch, however small, will retain its present autonomy by having one representative in the governing body. The larger Branches, if the recommendation of Council should be adopted, will have one additional representative for every 200 members they contain. These very simple elements will compose the foundation of the new executive power. The officers and vice-presidents will, I think rightly, retain the seats they have always had in the Executive Council. You will observe, then, that the Branches are now to assume the chief governing power of the Association. It is right that they should do so, since they are, and I trust will always remain, the strength of the Association. Other members we have, unattached, distant in the colonies or in India, scattered over the world in the army, the navy, or in civil practice. My own private opinion is that these should also share in the government of the Association, and justice seems to require it; but it is difficult to secure direct representation for them. As I have given notice of a motion in relation to this matter, I will not further remark upon it now.

These then, gentlemen, are henceforth to be the privileges of the Branches of the Association. The larger Branches will have their complete organisation and representation; their readiness of mutual access; their populous areas from which to draw material for the advancement of science; their power to sustain individual effort; and their power, also, to compel their members to adhere to the fundamental principles of the Association. The smaller Branches will have the support of an occasional intercourse with the larger; their numbers will probably be more intimately acquainted with each other than can be the case in the larger Branches; and, consequently, if the additions they may be able to make to the sum of medical knowledge should be smaller, the other great object of our Association—viz., mutual friendly, helpful intercourse will be more easily carried out.

I turn now to the duties which, in my judgment, the possession of these privileges entails upon the Branches.

The first and most obvious duty, I take it, which a Branch owes to the parent Association, is loyalty. That Association was, for many years after its establishment, poor, weak, and more than once in danger of disruption. It is now rich, prosperous, and powerful. Disruption could only now be brought about through overweening

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vanity and self-seeking on the part of some of the larger Branches. The danger of disunion, however, will now be removed, or reduced to a minimum, by the proposed new constitution of the governing body. Each Branch will be able to make its voice heard and its grievances attended to, because its representatives in the Council will have no excuse for not attending to their duties. If your honorary secretary is unable to absent himself from his practice four days in the year, you can and ought to elect another member in his place who may be able to do so; and the payment of such representative's travelling expenses by the parent Association now proposed will materially expedite his journey to and from London.

The next duty which the Branches owe to the Association is to further to the utmost of their ability those movements in the interest of science, which it is now more and more disposed to institute and to foster. I need only cite the last great effort in this direction—viz., the collective investigation of disease, so happily and so ably initiated by my predecessor and friend, Professor Humphry of Cambridge. Our Association is now, as I have just said, both rich and powerful. By the use which it shall make of those great moral forces will it be judged both by the profession throughout the world, and by the educated public at home. As time goes on, and the vista of medical research opens up wider and farther upon our mental vision, fresh subjects will present themselves for investigation, fresh difficulties to be overcome, fresh honour, let us hope, to be won. Do not leave all this work to the parent Association. Every Branch may easily make some contribution to the general stock; for it must be unfortunate indeed if, within its area, there be not some inquiring minds, some men with leisure and ability to add to our stock of observed knowledge, or to work out vexed questions by the powers of strict induction.

The Branches, moreover, owe a moral obedience to the parent Association. The decision of the majority must be more likely to be for the general good than the desire of the minority; and no great Association composed of units of equal privileges and equal aims, as ours is, can afford to dispense with the moderating power of the general body.

Lastly, let me call your attention for one moment to the duties which the Branches owe to themselves and to their members reciprocally. Every Branch should endeavour to absorb into itself every member of the profession residing within its area, who is not excluded by moral considerations. It is clearly the duty of the honorary secretary of the Branch to look up every new comer, and to remove the scruples of those who hitherto have stood aloof from joining it. Nearly one-third of all the members of the Association are still unattached to any Branch. It is true that a great many of these—army and navy men, and residents in foreign countries—are unable to join any Branch with effect; but there are still numbers close to our doors who do not take the trouble to join a Branch. These should be told that they owe it to the Association to strengthen the Branch to which they are neighbours. As the Branches have a moral right to the knowledge which their individual members can afford to lay before them, so has the Association also a right to that of unattached members, which is now almost in every case lost to the general good.

The duty of members to the Branch to which they belong I take to be, to attend the meetings as frequently as they possibly can, and communicate everything worth relating to the Branch. Let it be remembered that there is nothing now known even in the very fountains of medical knowledge—the metropolis and the great medical schools—which cannot be learned by us in the provinces within a very short time from its publication. There are men in every Branch quite capable of assimilating such knowledge, and throwing it before a meeting for comparison with the experience and the thought of every member present. Thus, and thus chiefly, can knowledge be diffused.

One more important point. The greatest care ought to be taken to make sure that each man, before he is admitted to the privileges of a Branch member, is a fit and proper person to associate with gentlemen. Every year our mutual intercourse is becoming more intimate; we are becoming better known to each other; and we are often enabled by it to appreciate the good qualities of those upon whom in our ignorance, we may have been led to look upon with some suspicion or distrust. It is absolutely necessary that those who disregard the moral laws of our Association should be eliminated from our society. This is not to be easily done. The greater necessity is there that care be taken that *unclubable* men be not admitted into our assemblies, which are clubs in everything but the name.

Hospitality is the great bond of friendship; let us foster it to the

utmost of our power. But, to do so, black sheep must be sent to the limbo of vulgar self-assertion, of false pretence, of dishonesty, or of gross immorality. Let us begin the new era, the second half-century of our existence, with a determination to be gentlemen first, and scientists or politicians afterwards; and so with hopeful boldness we may exclaim, *Floreat sempiternæ Medicorum Britannicorum Societas!*

AN ADDRESS

ON

THE MEDICAL ACT AMENDMENT BILL.*

By W. M. CROWFOOT, M.B., Beccles,
Ex-President of the East Anglian Branch.

[AFTER thanking the members of the Branch for the courtesy shown him during his year of office, and the honorary secretaries for their assistance and advice, Dr. Crowfoot proceeded to comment on the Medical Act Amendment Bill. He said:]

After perusing the original Bill as given in the JOURNAL for the 24th March last, the amendments which were introduced into it during its passage through the House of Lords, and the comments of the medical press upon it, I think it cannot be doubted but that the Government have made an honest attempt to grapple with the difficulties of the question, and to provide the profession with a complete and efficient code. They have adopted the suggestions of the Royal Commission, and also to a great extent those of the Reform Committee of this Association, in framing the Bill; and there seems to be a general agreement on all sides that the main principles of the measure are good, though, in the opinion of many, there are certain points which require alteration. Under these circumstances, I think it is the bounden duty of all the Branches of this Association to give the Bill their careful consideration, to support it so far as they conscientiously can do so, and to use their influence to get such amendments introduced as may be required in order to render it as efficient as possible.

The main features of this Bill seem to me to be: 1. The establishment of a single comprehensive minimum examination as a sole requirement for obtaining a licence to practise medicine; 2. The introduction into the Medical Council of members elected directly by the profession throughout the country; 3. The penal clauses.

The establishment of a uniform minimum examination will do away with the anomaly, which at present exists, of numerous examining bodies, not one of which tests the knowledge of the student in all the three branches of medical science which the general practitioner requires to know. The framing of rules for medical education, and the actual conduct of the final examination, is entrusted to medical boards, of which there are to be three, one for each division of the kingdom; but, according to the amendments introduced into this part of the Act, it would seem that the duty of conducting any examinations previous to the final one is to remain with the existing examining bodies. The Medical Boards are to act under the supervision of the Medical Council. The Medical Board for England is to consist of sixteen members, viz., eight for the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London, Durham, and the new Victoria University of Manchester, and eight for the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons. The principal objections to this part of the Bill come, as may be supposed, from the medical corporations and the Medical Council. With respect to this last body, however much we may respect the individual members composing it, yet I do not think that as a body it has conferred such benefits on the profession at large, or so far fulfilled the anticipations which were formed on its establishment, as to render its extinction, at least in its present form, a matter of regret. With regard to the Colleges, however, the feeling in the profession will, I think, be somewhat different. They have undoubtedly in times past done very much for medical education. Had it been passed in its original form, this Act must, I think, have tended very considerably to reduce the importance of these bodies; and, as at present amended, I fear its effect must be to lessen their influence, and probably their funds. To meet their objections, an additional member on the Medical Board has been given to each of the Colleges, so that they now have as many representatives as all the

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