

MEDICAL LIBRARIES.

"For Libraries are the standing armies of civilization."—O. W. Holmes.

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THE WORK OF AN ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL LIBRARIANS.*

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While war and all the forces of devolution are most actively in function it behoves those who believe in progressive evolution to do their silent and unnoticed work all the more self-sacrificingly in order that after them may live tendencies and institutions which shall make the world better. It is a most noteworthy fact that, during the stage of their inception and formation, the constructive agencies of scientific and social advance are unknown and unrecognized. I can imagine few things that are more pregnant with far-reaching influences than this little movement of ours. Surely a profound and magnificent role in the regeneration of the world is accorded and awaits scientific medicine. Just as certainly scientific medicine depends upon a rigid and thorough-going literary systematization of the results reached by the world's million individual workers. In no branch of human endeavor is there such instant practical application to the needs of humanity as is ours, and in none may the findings of a solitary worker in Asia, Europe or America, be immediately needed by any other physician in a hamlet or hospital continental distances away. I look forward to such an organization of the literary records of medicine that a puzzled worker in any part of the civilized world shall in an hour be able to gain a knowledge pertaining to a subject of the experience of every other man in the world. It seems to me strange beyond all belief

* Introductory Suggestions to the Association of Medical Librarians at the Meeting for Organizing the Association, held in Philadelphia, May 2, 1898.

in the stage of civilization which we have reached, when trade-unions of a thousand kinds are local, national and international; when every place of human activity has recognized that the *sine qua non* of progress is organization and intercommunication, that the pricelessly precious results of medical knowledge should be given over to the rapine of commercialism, and to that barbarism of unorganization in which our medical libraries at present do not flourish. In saved lives and spared expense, our state and national governments would make money by devoting millions of dollars to establishing medical libraries in every city and village of the land. Alas, that nobody nowadays cares a fig for preventing social waste, communal expense, and averting the evils of the next generation. Our trick seems rather to be to load our after-comers with debt, and to trundle our burdens of all kinds upon the shoulders of the next generation. Those attempting to arouse a recognition of the tremendous influence that must come from the organization and founding of medical libraries have met with a strange and regrettable indifference on the part, even of some libraries. "Of what use to *our* library can such an organization be?" has been asked. Of what use is medicine, or life itself? might be replied. If the use is not patent and self-evident, then we hardly need attempt stimulating its recognition. Some people are so made and habited that the perception of the light of unselfishness must traverse the London smoke of their life-worn spectacles, and reach the lethargic brain with the dingy tinge of selfishness. To such, argument is useless, and we may hope that their places will sometime be filled by psychic emmetropes who love and will labor for the realization of an unselfish morality and the dissemination of a world-renovating science.

As it appears to me there is measureless beneficence and medical utility in the increase of the number of medical libraries, and in the organized co-operation of these, one with another, by means of such an association as we purpose to found. At first only half a dozen or a dozen may perhaps thus be brought into common understandings, and mutual helpfulness; but sooner or later the inevitable necessities of developing society and science will end in the extension of the scheme until at last every small city of America shall have a public medical library to which the worker within a hundred miles can come and learn in a brief visit what all the workers of the world have done or discovered concerning any one of a thousand great questions involving matters of life and death for the patient. At present every one of the libraries represented here or that may for the next twenty-five years join with us, is poor, financially, and

as the psychologists would say, hardly struggling above the threshold of perceptibility. We cannot therefore, as we should, have any central or strikingly corporate existence, with well paid assistants to carry on the severe drudgery required to bring our labor to any degree of practical efficiency. Hence we can only parcel the work out among ourselves, and meet say once a year to compare notes, to give out our stints, to take council together, and to re-awaken in each other's hearts the sacred altar fire of self-sacrificing zeal.

The work to be done and to be parcelled out is sufficient, and is so easily divisible that each one of the participants will find enough to do, I suspect, during the coming year. As it seems to me the following are the most important objects:

1. The systematization and practical carrying out of a method to effect the exchange of duplicate books whereby such volumes not needed by one library may by exchange or purchase find their way to the library heretofore without them. To the committee undertaking this work I can perhaps give some hints of practical value. Every library has or will have large numbers of such duplicates, and it only needs a little intelligence and zeal to systematize a most useful machinery of exchange.

2. A committee is needed to make effective some means of bringing to public medical libraries the books of physicians deceased, or retiring from practice. At present thousands of physician's libraries are being ground into pulp, or are rotting in attics. An official circular should be prepared setting forth the usefulness to the profession of medical libraries, and a local committee, or librarian should be charged with its distribution in every part of the land and with persistent watchfulness for possibilities of gathering much now wasted medical literature into libraries.

3. A committee is needed, with the special tasks of keeping a list of all the medical societies in the world which publish reports or transactions; of soliciting exchanges and gifts of these reports, etc., to each one of our membership-libraries; and of effecting a method of inexpensive transfer through a central or single official. Perhaps it may be that the United States Government through the Surgeon-General's library might become the agent between America and Europe for the transfer and distribution, in exactly the same way as the Smithsonian Institution now acts for the interchange of books in pure science.

4. Another committee might have in charge the work of keeping in touch with the antiquarian medical book-stores of the world; of looking out for auction sales of physician's libraries; and of being

on the alert for bargains in medical books. I have known of a number of most astonishing sales that had our libraries only known about, they might have enriched their shelves at a ludicrously little expense.

5. Another useful work would be that of bringing to the attention of the wealthy and of older physicians the present sad state of medical libraries and the tremendous possibilities of good that would come from endowing, founding and organizing institutions for bringing medical literature within the practical use of the physician and scientists of every community. At present, rich men seem to be afflicted with a strange sort of infatuation to do evil with their charities; they are, for example, building hospitals to curse both the people and the profession, and are giving millions of dollars to enable a million empty headed people to read a million fatuous novels. Let us show them what good they could do by bringing to every individual physician, tormented to save the lives and health of his patients, the experience of the world's workers.

6. Each library necessarily differs from every other, and thus certain works can only be found in certain libraries. A catalogue should therefore be prepared in which certain rare, or useful works possessed by one library could be brought to the notice of the other libraries of the association, and of the subscribing physicians of the locality, and thus by a system of guaranteed loans, by other means, any local worker in any part of the country could secure the consultation or use of the rare work.

7. I can easily see how our library association may soon become so useful and strong that local librarians and assistants may be more or less permanently employed in abstracting or epitomizing articles in rare journals and books for the benefit of distant or busy investigators. The preparation for such a useful function is distinctly within the range of objects of our Association.

8. One librarian will undoubtedly be found to take especial charge of, and to communicate to the others, all information pertaining to the procuring of library supplies, the prices of mechanical devices, the methods of cataloging, the care of books, etc.

To recapitulate, I would suggest the following committees:

1. On Exchange of Library Duplicates.
2. For Securing Libraries of Retiring or Deceased Physicians.
3. For Securing and Distribution of Transactions of Medical Societies.
4. On Antiquarian Books and Auction Sales.
5. For Securing Endowments of Medical Libraries.
6. On Rare Works in Single Libraries.

7. For Supplying Special Information, Securing Useful Abstracts, etc.

8. On Library Management, Technic, Devices, Binding, etc.

If these and other labors should, in the future, be brought into practical out-working by our association, you will at once foresee that it can be done only by means of mimeograph typewritten circulars or letters systematically supplying all association subscribers with information and with the results of the labors of each committee. It is a pity that this cannot be done through an official and regularly published journal of the association, wherein could be unified the work of all and of each for the common benefit. Whether the establishment of such a medium of intercommunication is at present feasible, and how its bills are to be paid by impecunious libraries—are questions the answers to which I leave to impecunious librarians.

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THE PHYSICIAN IN FICTION.

I.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AS SEEN BY CHARLES DICKENS.

By J. C. DANA.

The novel writers of the 19th century in this and other countries have been in many cases people of great genius, of imagination and of great insight into human character. They have often tried to portray the heart of the life of their day and time. They have, often with intent, and always in some degree whether with intent or not, reflected in their pages the current opinion of their fellows. From their pages we should be able to gather hints, at least, and perhaps positive evidence, as to the views which the men and women of their time and country, held of their laws, customs, religions, professions and callings. These hints and these bits of evidence, coming from men of insight and imagination ought to be of intense interest; in many ways they must be to the student of society of value. That they are of interest is sufficiently proved by the popularity of the novel. We like the story, the plot, the incident; we are pleased to be introduced in the very heart and soul of certain of our fellows as the novelist dissects them for us; but we are also interested, and intensely, in the analysis of our own daily life, in the careful exposition of certain of its aspects which the novelist makes for us.

One of the secrets of the charms of art is that it exalts the commonplace, fixes the passing thought, and brings us to see with delight that which is always with us but is rarely truly seen. And so the novelist pleases, partly because he tells us of our very selves.

The great novelist, of course, following this line of thought, is true to his time. He gives us the world; he does not give us himself.

How did Dickens reflect his time? Truly, or with distortions due to his own personality? How, especially, did he view the medical profession? Did he