THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF SURGERY

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME VIII.

GLADLY accept the kind invitation to write a prefatory note for the eighth volume of the JOURNAL, because it gives me the opportunity of saying a few words about "The Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland". Such an Association was very present in the minds of those who started the JOURNAL seven years ago; in fact they had already made up their minds to do their utmost to form one. They worked hard and strenuously, and by 1913 it looked as if their efforts would soon be crowned with success, and as if another year would see the Association firmly established, and adopting the JOURNAL as its megaphone, through which the word spoken in the ear might be, if desired, proclaimed upon the housetops. Five years of war have, however, upset all our calculations as to time; but they have not shaken the firm resolve that British surgeons shall have, not only a journal, but an Association worthy of their country.

During these five years the JOURNAL has appeared regularly in spite of the enormous rise in prices and in wages. It has been well supplied with papers dealing largely, but not exclusively, with the new military surgery, and now that the Association has at last emerged from its larval condition, the JOURNAL starts upon a new phase in its history.

It may be asked what the JOURNAL has to do with the Association anyway; and why it should utter a jubilant note at the Association's birth. The Association, it may be said, meets only once a year, and can only supply a modicum of the matter which will appear in the JOURNAL. I am not sure that this is true. The Fellows of the Association will, it may be hoped, freely bring their new facts—or facts supposed to be new—and their original ideas—or ideas supposed to be original—before the Association, knowing that they will not be at the mercy of reporters, and stimulated by the prospect of free and informal criticism. Then, chastened or elated as the case may be, they will take them back and incubate them. If they hatch out well, but only if they do, the chicks will be exhibited from time to time throughout the year as they mature and get into condition, and the produce of one meeting should not be exhausted before the next comes in sight. Another bond between the JOURNAL and the Association is that the Fellows of the Association will be receiving the JOURNAL throughout the year, and will thus be reminded that they belong to a body which is active and awake, not merely in a state of suspended animation except for a short spell in the month of May. Moreover, they are almost bound to read it. A quarterly periodical is not like a weekly journal which one has hardly time to open before the next number arrives. And our particular journal, if we may be allowed for the moment to boast, will by the excellence of its general get-up and the beauty of its illustrations force the Fellows to see what the articles are about. It is therefore obvious that the interests of the JOURNAL and those of the Association are inextricably combined.

The first meeting of the Association has now taken place, and everyone speaks of it as a delightful occasion, one for making new acquaintanceships and renewing old ones,

a time of instruction and even of inspiration. It is right, however, that we should thoughtfully take stock of it and make up our minds that, if in any ways it came short of our ideals, these particular shortcomings shall not be hardened into precedents for future meetings. I therefore venture, with all humility, to make the following observations.

For my own part I enjoyed the whole of it thoroughly ; but when it was all over I was left with the conviction that, if the Association is to lead to real advance, its discussions will have to be more concrete and less didactic. To begin at the beginning : we all listened spell-bound to the fascinating and suggestive oration of the President, and we shall never forget it. It was quite right that the delivery of the inaugural address should be a formal and stately occasion ; but if the time of the meetings is to be limited to two days and a half, I think that the opening address will have to be quite short—the concentrated quintessence of the President's wisdom—and that it should be followed by, and perhaps actually lead up to, the first full-dress debate. Then the second meeting might almost be called a brilliant intellectual display, but, in my opinion, the subject was too large for a profitable hour's discussion. I doubt if anyone was converted, or went away with his faith in the perfection of his own methods in the smallest degree shaken. This again was quite right for the first occasion ; but another time we might perhaps do worse than take one small part of the vast subject, say, for example, "healing by first intention", which was only mentioned in passing, and see how our debate compares with the striking discussion at the International Medical Congress of 1881, and how far our views of this fundamental subject have matured in the last thirty years. The third meeting was intensely interesting ; and it was inevitable, for the opportunity was a unique one. But we must guard against the danger of drawing the surgical intellect of the country together to hear lectures. We must bear in mind that the object of their coming together is for the interchange of thought and the expression of opinion ; not merely for seeing one another's faces, but for hearing one another's voices ; not so much for listening to discourses *ex cathedra*, as for traversing the statements of the expositors.

I hope it will not be thought ungracious of me to dwell thus upon matters which seem to me to be capable of improvement, rather than upon the undoubted merits of the first meeting. The latter are obvious to all and need no praise from me : the former are less likely to be formulated in thought or set down in words. It is only because the chance of saying what I feel has been unexpectedly put in my way, and because I am so anxious that the Association should be a real living success, and because I think that there is a danger that the 'defects of the qualities' of the first meeting may form the pattern for subsequent ones, that I venture to make these criticisms. And, having been so bold, I will make one more. We met this year in our overgrown and conservative old metropolis, bound by antiquated customs and leaning on ancient traditions. In the future we shall visit the smaller metropolitan cities and go-ahead provincial cities and towns. If we insist upon making our meetings severely business occasions, times of hard thinking and Spartan simplicity, I am confident that all that we hope and expect for the Association will be obtained.

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