any foundation for the belief and the rumor that the Section would be "controlled" by those "allied" with any trade interests. The Section is officered now, I trust it may be said, and no doubt will continue to be in the future, by those who have the lofty interests of scientific medicine at heart. Such was not the case at one time, when the *Materia Medica* Section of the American Medical Association was the instrument of commercial interests and the organ of such of the proprietary medicine trade as was able to control it. Finally, gentlemen, I commend for your action not only the consideration of this subject, but also refer you to the other recommendations made, and have reason to feel assured that the Section will express, in no unmistakable terms, its feelings, by the course which it will pursue and by the policy which the future will see it develop.

SECTION ON OPHTHALMOLOGY.

ADDRESS OF THE CHAIRMAN.*

H. V. WÜRDEMAN, M. D.

MILWAUKEE, WIS.

The Chairman of the Section on Ophthalmology has but little to say this session, beyond welcoming you to the meeting and making some comments upon the program and plans prepared for our deliberations.

The officers have adhered strictly to the instructions given by the last session, having accepted the prescribed forty papers from the considerable number offered. It seems to me that this plan of procedure, involving as it does a careful selection, while it makes the duties of your officers more onerous, will give the most satisfactory program. We are the representative body of American ophthalmologists, and should not waste our time by unprofitable discussions or on definitely decided diseases or methods of treatment. Our deliberations should be *fin de siècle* and upon new or unsettled subjects, the results of original research. Opportunity is afforded at this meeting for the establishment of the authoritative opinions of American ophthalmologists upon two subjects connected directly with the manufacturing and transportation interests, and for forming a precedent which will sooner or later be brought up in our courts of law.

This plan of program formation and conduction for a medical meeting of this character is the culmination of a long-cherished idea. Three years ago I drew up a series of resolutions for the government of the program committee of the Wisconsin State Medical Society, and as chairman of that committee for the ensuing year had the satisfaction of seeing the number of papers reduced 50 per cent., while their character was increased by a like ratio, and our meeting rendered infinitely more profitable.

From this, or a similar germ, grew the suggestions made in the address of our esteemed presiding officer of last year, from which the seeds are spreading to other sections and to other societies. The method of limitation has thus far proved successful and time will surely show its practical value.

The suggestions of my predecessor, which met with approval by the Section, have been generally adopted by the present officers. There has been arranged one symposium for each day, with stated discussion, after which the subject will be opened for general debate. Those on the relations of visual defects to vocations; on the

amount of injury to the business capacity of the individual from eye defects; on the absorption of ocular exudates, may be considered most pertinent and timely. It is very necessary in this country of vast railroad interests that there should be some uniform standard of visual acuity and ocular health established, by which the great corporations, who are responsible for the lives of each one of us for an average of several days in the year, should be able to select reliable employees.

The time has come when the public demands the utmost safeguards; and corporations have found that their efficiency has not only been increased, but vast sums of money saved, through a proper medical, and more particularly ocular, inspection of prospective employees. The damage to the individual from eye accidents is of great medicolegal interest, and a certain precedent for its estimation may perhaps be reached through our discussion of the subject.

The other papers offered seem to be of present interest and to surpass many of those of previous sessions. This is an evidence of material progress and should be deeply gratifying to all members of the American Medical Association, and to the Section on Ophthalmology in particular.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

THE NECESSITY OF AND BENEFITS FROM ITS MORE COMPLETE ORGANIZATION.*

J. C. BIERWIRTH, M.D.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

In selecting a subject for this address, it seemed to the writer that we might, with profit, turn aside from the well-beaten path of science, and consider briefly what necessity exists for, and what benefits may be derived from, more thoroughly organizing our profession. Recent events concerning this association have pointed out the directions in which we must look for improvements. We need not search very long, nor look very far, for there are many fields, almost barren now, but capable of the highest cultivation and holding out promises of the richest harvest.

Let us pause for a moment and look about us to see what other men, in all the other walks of life, are doing to protect their mutual interests. During the past twenty or thirty years, all professions, except the medical, have organized for mutual benefit. If these organizations had not been needed, or had not accomplished the purpose for which they had been formed, they would have ceased to exist.

Furthermore, these organizations were not made for pecuniary benefit only, but also to protect their members against unjust clients, to protect them when attacked and to aid them and their families in sickness and in death. That the results of this alliance have been more than satisfactory no one will deny. The professional men and women are better paid, and their rights are respected now, where formerly they were not, all of which has resulted in greater self-respect and bettered conditions in all directions.

Let us see how the medical profession compares with other professions in point of organization for mutual benefit. There is no lack of medical societies, "for the advancement of medical science and the maintenance of public health," but how many societies are there in this state, or in the United States, which go farther

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*President's address, delivered before the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Fifth District Branch, New York State Medical Association, May 22, 1900.

than this, which will protect their members against injustice and threatened losses of whatever nature? Not one, I venture to say. What is the reason for this? No one, I think, will deny the necessity for such an organization, and yet we have been going on, year after year, suffering indignities and losses without ever attempting to correct the existing evils.

One of the main reasons for this is a lack of proper organization. There are too many medical societies in this state. The multiplication must of necessity increase the difficulties of closer organization, because it divides the interests instead of consolidating them, and makes it harder for the members to concentrate their energies for the common good. I do not wish to be understood as not favoring special and local societies; on the contrary, what I do wish to emphasize is that all members of our profession should unite their efforts to make the representative society of this state the center of their energies for the common welfare of the profession and public at large. If this is done, as I hope it will be, then we may soon see the time when the existing evils will disappear.

What are these evils by which we are beset? They are many and have been too long endured. First of all, is the lack of respect of the public for our profession, as shown by the constantly increasing number of malpractice suits without adequate cause.

Do you suppose that our State Legislature would oppose any measure which was sanctioned by the New York State Medical Association, representing, say, 10,000 physicians of this state; or that any individual would have the courage to sue his physician unjustly for malpractice, if the latter's cause were defended by the medical associations of this state?

I doubt it very much. The experience of this association at Albany in regard to the legislative matters has always been that the legislature is ready, at all times, to grant proper relief if there is no factional opposition. It is a well-known fact that suits for malpractice are of almost daily occurrence, and, without doubt, more than 90 per cent. are for inadequate cause, and for blackmail only. It is too well known among a certain class of individuals, as well as among a certain class of lawyers, that doctors are an easy prey. They are sensitive, also, to their reputation, which must always suffer from suits of this kind; they abhor publicity, and are only too glad to compromise to prevent this and save trouble. But what a different state of affairs would exist if every unjust suit for malpractice were defended by our State Medical Association and if the people knew that they have to deal with a powerful society instead of a weak individual.

Another crying evil to be remedied is the indignity heaped upon a number of physicians every year, by having to suffer unjust arrest for a supposed criminal abortion. The occurrence of the past year, where two physicians were arrested for a case of this kind through the stupidity of a police official, is still fresh on the memory of every one. They were entirely innocent of the charge and had attended the woman as a charity patient because she was in need of medical aid. Such cases as this one should be resented by every medical man in the state and country, and we should see to it that repetitions of this kind are made impossible. If a law to effect this end is needed, it should be obtained without delay. If the officials know that to arrest a physician unjustly for a supposed complicity in an abortion case may be fraught with the gravest consequences for them, if they know that the medical association of the state will pro-

tect its members to the utmost against such outrages, then they will think twice before proceeding, and they will require more than vague suspicions or stupid deductions from the facts at hand before resorting to arrest.

The much-discussed abuse of medical charities is another evil which has existed too long, and which, it is to be hoped will be speedily remedied by the "Dispensary Bill," enacted last year through the efforts of this association. This dispensary evil had assumed such vast proportions that it threatened to seriously affect our profession.

Another evil which flourishes and needs speedy correction is the lodge or association doctor, who makes a yearly contract to treat the members of an organization for a few dollars a year. He can not do good work, because his work is cheapened and he has to work harder and faster in order to make both ends meet; and the patient is the sufferer.

The members of the council of this association, having recognized the need for correcting the existing evils, came to the conclusion that this could be done only by first organizing the profession of this state into a more harmonious whole, and that in order to be able to do this successfully more legal recognition was necessary. An endeavor was therefore made to obtain from the legislature of this state a charter which would confer all the requisite power. After a great deal of hard work on the part of our committee on legislation, especially its chairman, Dr. E. Eliot Harris, and also the different members of the council, our efforts were crowned with success, and we were granted, on April 14, of this year, a charter which will enable us to carry to a successful end all the proposed improvements in our association. This charter is the foundation upon which we may build a structure of any magnitude, without fear of overburdening its carrying capacity; but the erection of this building should be slow and deliberate and should be wisely superintended, lest we commit errors in construction which it may be difficult or impossible to correct later on.

One of its provisions is to the effect that the New York State Medical Association may form district branches and county associations. This forms the real foundation for its construction, upon which the superstructure may safely rest. By virtue of this provision, all members of the county associations become members of the state body, and thus increase its membership materially. The county associations of New York and Kings have already ratified the action of the council of the state association, and have added thereby to its membership about seven hundred members. It is purposed that each county in this state shall have its association, and these different county bodies be grouped under the now existing five branches of the state association. Each county and branch will then have its pro rata representation in the governing body of the parent association. It will thus be seen that each county will be represented with full voting power in all matters pertaining to the welfare of the association and its members. Believing in home rule to the fullest extent, it is thought best to have all members admitted to the association through the county bodies, because applicants for membership are best known in their own communities and their fitness for membership can be best determined there. It is further purposed to protect all members against unjust malpractice suits. If a member is sued, a committee, together with the counsel of the association, will investigate the facts in the

case, and if convinced of the member's innocence, the association will carry the case to its end, and will not compromise. Another protection which this association hopes to be able to afford its members will be in cases of arrest for supposed complicity in abortion cases. One case, fought to the bitter end with all the power and resources of our state association, will be sufficient to prevent many repetitions in the future. Let it be known that any one who assails the honor and dignity of a member of the New York State Medical Association assails the honor and dignity of all its members, and that all will rise in a body for the protection of their fellow, provided he is in the right. The creation of a death-benefit fund for the dependents of its members is another important feature in our new charter. There should be no difficulty in making this successful in every way. The details for it can not at present be outlined; they require much thought and care in their arrangement. But its success is assured if all members will lend their help and work for it. It should be no difficult matter to so arrange the finances of our association that we are able to pay to the family of each deceased member a sum of money that will insure to them all freedom from immediate want. What that sum will be is at present impossible to say.

Another advantage to the members of this association is the "Medical Directory of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut." It is a revival of the old "green book," published for many years by the late Dr. William T. White, under the auspices of the New York Medico-Historical Society, and now published by the New York State Medical Association. The first volume was issued in 1899, and the volume for this year is well under way and will be ready for distribution some time in August. Every member of this association receives a copy free of charge. The labor and care necessary for publishing this work has been stupendous and can not be estimated by any one unacquainted with its details; it would have been impossible, had it not been for the unselfish devotion of a few of our members, who were willing to give much of their valuable time, as well as money, for a good cause, and without expectation of personal gain. In order to make the directory as perfect as possible, the committee on publication need the aid of all the members of this association. Every one should keep a record of all the mistakes he finds, and promptly send them to the secretary of the committee for correction in the next issue; every one should encourage the advertisers by patronizing them, when possible, or by telling them that he has been pleased to have seen their advertisement in the directory. To obtain advertisements is hard work, and the financial success of the book is largely dependent upon them. The members can further aid by seeing that the book is in the hands of all who should have it, such as hotels, druggists, newspaper offices, etc., by asking for it, and if it is not at hand, offering to sell it.

In the foregoing I have endeavored to enumerate briefly the existing evils, to point out the ways and means for their remedy, and to outline the plan of the Council of this Association for a closer organization of its members. Our endeavor must be to produce an association of which all shall be proud, and in which membership shall be an honor, coveted by all! If every one will do his duty and give his aid, success is assured beyond a doubt, but all must be willing to set aside personal strife and personal differences for the common welfare of all. When we stand shoulder to shoulder, and present a solid front, none dare to assail us, and our

friends will respect us. It is to be hoped that the example to be set by our State Medical Association will be followed by every other state medical association, and that the spirit of closer organization will pervade all state societies. It should then be the endeavor of the delegates to the American Medical Association to infuse this spirit into that body, and to produce a national association which shall be second to none and which shall have a controlling influence in all national affairs pertaining to public health and the science of medicine.

137 Montague St.

Original Articles.

THE TREATMENT OF ACUTE ALCOHOLISM BY LARGE DOSES OF DIGITALIS.*

HENRY P. LOOMIS, M.D.

NEW YORK CITY.

Suggestions for the use of large doses of digitalis in the treatment of acute alcoholism came from Sweden and England. Fothergill and Jones, of Jersey, England, were the first to introduce its use to the medical profession. Both recommended it very highly. The latter publishes a report of over seventy cases treated by this method alone. He claims that he never saw any alarming symptoms following the use of one-half ounce doses of the tincture. A few clinicians in this country have tried the remedy with varying success; among them Dr. Horatio C. Wood, of Philadelphia, who speaks highly of its effect in a certain class of cases. It is interesting to note that a drug whose use even in moderately large doses is supposed to be fraught with some danger, can be given in one-half ounce doses without producing any of the ordinary symptoms of digitalis poisoning. Various explanations have been offered to account for the tolerance of these enormous doses. Wood believes that its explanation lies in the fact that the heart has become by long habit very much benumbed to the influence of stimulants, and explains the narcotic effect of the drug by the fact that the rest and sleep which follow its use are not the result of the cardiac stimulation, but are principally due to the increased flow of blood to the nerve-centers. Others have explained the effect to the digitalis controlling the arteries and compared its action to that of ergot in hemorrhage.

All investigators agree that in acute alcoholism there is singular tolerance of this remedy and the majority believe that it can be used in these large doses with but little danger. Ringer, in an extensive discussion of the subject, recommends it highly and closes his article with these words: "It remains to ascertain the form of the diseases amenable to digitalis."

While this remedy has been used quite extensively in England it has had no extensive trial, so far as I am able to ascertain, in this country. During the past spring, while on duty as attending physician to the alcoholic wards of Bellevue Hospital, I used the tincture of digitalis in one-half ounce doses in a series of ten cases of acute alcoholism. These were selected so as to include different classes of individuals—the strong and the robust, the weak and the anemic, the young and the old; those with nephritis and those with surgical complications. In treatment of those of delirium tremens a routine practice was followed. They were ordered one-half ounce of tincture of digitalis, to be given every

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