Presidential address to the Optical Society

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE OPTICAL SOCIETY.

April 24th, 1902.

BY MR. CHARLES HYATT-WOOLF, F.R.P.S.

IT is with real diffidence that I undertake the duty imposed upon me by the position to which you have done me the honour to elect me. Not indeed that I could be supposed, in view of my professional experience, to be ignorant of those subjects on which a presidential address to your Society must touch; but I am impressed with the difficulty, and indeed impossibility, of entering on the discussion of some of these subjects so deeply and fully as my talented predecessors in office. The time at my disposal, and the ability at my command, will not allow me to follow Mr. Thornthwaite into the early history of the development of optics and the philosophy of sight; nor Dr. Walmsley into the technicalities of instruments of precision applied to military and other purposes; nor—unless very cursorily indeed—Mr. Dixey, into the highly important questions that arise in connection with the education of the Optician. Mine must be a rather more superficial rôle; and I propose to inflict on you, in the short space of time for which I shall trespass on your patience, some thoughts to which I have been led in the exercise of my profession, with respect to the organisation of the Trade generally, and to the present position in the community, and future prospects, of Opticians.

The development of the manufacturing, and the wholesale and retail, branches of that trade with which we are all so closely concerned, is taking place along several very distinct lines; and the distinctions I speak of are accentuated by marked differences of opinion obtaining between some of us as to the conditions under which certain schemes, intended to promote the honour and dignity and prosperity of the trade, should be organised and administered. The forceful manner in which some such matters of opinion have been expressed will be quite within the recollection of most members of the Optical Society; and the apparent difficulties which still stand in the way of

a conciliatory settlement of all pending questions will doubtless be present to the minds of many of my hearers. Personally, I think that some of these said difficulties with which we are confronted are much more apparent than real; and I believe that with the progress of time, by means of the free and friendly discussions which take place so frequently at the meetings of our Society, and of other societies with kindred aims, a rapprochement will be brought about between those who at the present time stand most widely apart. I foresee of course that we must adopt the most conciliatory manner, and invoke methods of compromise, with reference to the somewhat difficult problems we have to solve; but on the other hand, I myself regret nothing of the outspoken language which has been used by some of our members in this connection; for there is no doubt that, in some quarters, purely personal prejudices, or perhaps the dictates of self-interest, have had results which those affected by them—although really animated by some of the best intentions, and with a genuine desire for the welfare of the Trade—were unable to realise in their true bearings. It is a most difficult thing for any one of us to divorce his judgment in such matters as these from the influence of prejudice and aims personal to himself and to that group with which he is most immediately associated. And I think that, it may be, the drastic “surgical operations” to which the views of some gentlemen have been subjected at certain meetings in this room, afforded the only hope of removing a veil most detrimental to their usefulness among us. I feel that, for tearing down the hood which self-interest and what has been termed self-centration is apt to put before our eyes, there is nothing else equal to a bit of thorough-going criticism in public—such criticism as has been so vigorously administered from time to time in this room. Therefore I say again that I do not regret the hard words which have been used on some of these topics. Their purpose has been served; and so far as the future is concerned, I trust that we of the Optical Society will have the good feeling which will enable us to forget them.

For my own part, I am free to say that I do hold very clear views on most, if not all, of the controversial subjects with whose discussion our Society and kindred associations have been concerned during the past few years; but I feel that the professional position I have the honour to hold, and not less the honorary position for which I am indebted to your kindness this evening, forbid me to obtrude these views of my own so fully and so insistently as I would perhaps like.

It shall be my endeavour now, at any rate, to bring before you a little sketch of the rise and progress of education, of organisation and of prosperity in our optical trade, without either partiality or prejudice with respect to the various agencies concerned.

There is one difficulty in which I find myself, and of which I seek to dispose at the outset. It is that, without touching on my own business, which I am desirous to avoid on this occasion, I am somewhat handicapped in the matter of reference to historical detail. I will just permit myself to say that the organisation and certification of Opticians has been the subject of constant discussion and, if I may use the word, exhortation in the columns of the newspaper I am connected with, since its inception at about this date 11 years ago. In the very first volume of the newspaper I refer to, measures for the certification of Opticians were urged, and the foundation of an institute (based on the lines of the Pharmaceutical Society) was advocated.

Now at the time I have spoken of, 11 years ago, the volume of trade and the class of trade conducted by Opticians on an average was something vastly different from what it is to-day. Referring particularly to the spectacle industry, the quantity of goods sold was much smaller than at the present time, and it is to be feared that among the glasses then adapted for the correction of defects of vision there was a much larger number of misfits. The process that has been going on during the past decade or so, and is responsible for the immensely improved conditions of the trade at present, is a process of education and, as I said before, of the co-operation of many persons for the collective good of all.

Speaking as I do before the Optical Society, it is natural and proper that I should refer in the first place to the origin and progress of our own particular work. The advantages of association for the purpose to which I alluded just now were very clearly and insistently brought before the attention of the trade; and it was, I think, on the 27th of April, 1899, that an informal meeting of some half a dozen gentlemen—Messrs. Aitchison, Cocks, Willmott, Purser, Sanderson, Grenier and Salt—constituted itself as a committee, having for its object the formation of an Optical Society to promote intercourse between all sections of the optical trade—particularly from a social point of view—and to work with and not against bodies at that time existent which were particularly devoted to the settlement of educational and business questions. On the 28th day of the same month, Mr. Thorn-

thwaite, who was at that time Master of the Spectacle Makers Company, quite independently proposed at a meeting of the late Optical Committee that the formation of an Optical Society on lines which had been suggested in *THE OPTICIAN* ought to be considered. Clearly the time had become ripe for the formation of a society such as this which I have the honour to address; but to the seven gentlemen I first mentioned must be accorded the credit of having initiated the scheme and, by their energy and enthusiasm, carried it forward to a triumphant realisation. If without drawing invidious distinction I might be allowed to particularise two only of the founders of the Optical Society, I would name one—Mr. William Salt—whose unselfish devotion during the past three years has done more than any one other agency, and perhaps more than the work of all the rest of us put together, to promote the development and welfare and honour of the Society. I would name also Mr. Aitchison, to whom the Society is indebted for support of every material character, and whose initiative we have to thank for some of the most important departures we have thus far made.

I think I may say that, since the time of which I have just spoken, the progress made by our Society, its growth and its activity, have received no check. What we have accomplished by way of promoting concord and amity among the members of the trade has been most valuable in its effects, both directly and indirectly. Some years ago, it might be said of social intercourse in the general body of the trade, that such did not exist. The members of the trade were divided among little cliques, debarred from effective intercourse with one another by something I am afraid very much like jealousy and distrust. At that time (we all know of the aphorism concerning a house divided against itself) there was practically no "back bone" to the optical trade; by which I mean to say that had the general interests of the trade been attacked from any quarter, the organisation of an effective resistance would have been difficult. There was indeed, as it happens, the means available for intercommunication among the trade; but there was wanting that feeling of confidence and camaraderie so needful to an agreement on joint action where petty differences of interest and inclination have to be submerged. How fully this want has been supplied, and with what promise of still further benefit in future, I need not say.

What are the chief things that we have accomplished thus far? First and foremost I would put (I have already put) our social

organisation. The conversaziones held by this Society are functions in every way quite remarkably successful, considering the yet short duration of our corporate life. The friendly intercourse that we enjoy at these social meetings must, in very many cases indeed, be attended with mutual benefit commercially as well as otherwise. The exhibitions of instruments that we have had, I venture to characterise as among the most valuable features of these entertainments; and I hope that in future such exhibitions and demonstrations may be made a more regular and prominent feature of our social gatherings than has sometimes been the case. We cannot do better than follow the lead of the Royal Society in this matter, and it seems to me that, besides welcoming the exhibits of absolutely new inventions (which of course the organisers of our social meetings will always be glad to do) we must derive many advantages from the opportunity of examining the various types of ophthalmological instruments, under conditions in which there is no obligation whatever to decide whether or not any particular instrument is one that it is desirable to acquire for one's personal use. It must always be remembered that an exhibition of ophthalmological instruments is one of a highly specialised character, and not likely to appeal much to the public at large; so I believe that, if ever an important and thoroughly representative exhibition of such instruments is got together in London, it must be (as I think Dr. Walmsley before me suggested) under the auspices of the Optical Society, whose authority and influence would alone be adequate to ensure success. In the meantime, I am sure that we would all welcome demonstrations at our meetings with the various types of sight-testing appliances—just as we should welcome the accession to our library of a representative collection of trade catalogues.

This brings me to another phase of the work of this Society—that of the collection and collation of trade literature for the benefit of our members. I am sure that the thanks of all of us are due to Mr. Sutcliffe, our present librarian, for the valuable work that he is doing in this department. And at the same time, if our gratitude may take the classic form of “a lively expectation of favours to come,” I would express the hope that, in accordance with suggestions which have been made from time to time, we may find in the near future that the lending department of our library is in full operation, to the benefit of many, and especially of country members.

This mention of our friends in the provinces leads me to express

the strong sympathy that I have, and which we all feel I am sure, with proposals for closer association of our Society with the several bodies now working independently of us, but with like aims. It seems to me that a close affiliation of these local societies with our London organisation would be of enormous benefit; and I am glad to know that the Council has already given this matter some attention.

The subject of standards is one to whose importance we are all alive; and I am not tempted to say more upon the matter here than that I trust no conclusions will be arrived at by any of the sub-committees charged to make recommendations on this point, without the very fullest consideration. And I hope, I am sure together with all present here, that when standards of calibration are eventually formulated by our Society they will be accepted and adopted by Opticians generally, not only in this country but, I venture to say, throughout the world.

Another direction in which our Society is doing useful work is in the promotion and development of scientific knowledge, applied in connection with the Optician's craft. Many scientific societies exist which profess this sort of thing for their sole end and aim. In our case, I am glad to say that we have other objects in view besides the cultivation of pure science; yet I think we may well pride ourselves on the high character of many of the technical papers which have been contributed to our proceedings, and on the scientific eminence of some of those lecturers we have been privileged to hear. I may say without compliment or exaggeration, that several contributions to the proceedings of this Society deserve to take rank with what is best in scientific literature.

It is a natural transition from the mention of original research and invention, and methods of work in the factory or testing room, communicated through our Society, to pass to the discussion of education in a broader sense—as applied in the process of “qualifying” among those of us who have already attained to man's estate, or else to preparing our youthful friends of the coming generation for those duties to which they are expected to devote themselves a little later in life. This is indeed a big question. And here again the Optical Society is fortunate in having organised a most energetic and efficient committee, to take the whole subject under consideration for the purpose of elaborate report. It is to the initiative of Mr. Aitchison that we are indebted for the constitution of this Committee; but it is very largely

to the activity of Mr. Angus, the Hon. Secretary, that we owe the gratifying progress which has been made thus far in the elaboration of that general scheme of studies which it is our object to evolve. The subject naturally divides itself, broadly speaking, under three heads. First the education of the workman, second that of the young Optician just apprenticed or about to be apprenticed to our trade, third that of the man already engaged in the business, as a merchant handling optical, photographic, electrical, nautical, philosophical and mathematical instruments, as a photographic Chemist often called on to advise his amateur customers respecting the performance of their dark room work, and last, although by no means least, as a Refractionist on whose advice members of the public have to rely for the correction of their mechanical defects of vision, and to whose hands the execution of Oculists' prescriptions is entrusted.

For the education of our workmen there can be no doubt that the workshop is the proper place—it is the educational institution *par excellence* ; but the extent to which it is employed for this purpose of turning apprentices into workmen having a competent all-round knowledge of their trade is, naturally, a matter of private contract between master and man ; it is a matter of arrangement in which the employer is compelled to act with due regard for his own interests, present and prospective ; and it is unhappily quite true that, under existing conditions in the manufacturing industries, circumstances often necessitate that workmen should be occupied, from the commencement until, perhaps, the end of their industrial career, in a very limited range of manual operations. Here then, in view of this diminution in the educational facilities of our workshops, brought about by the introduction of complex machinery and the sub-division of labour in its use, we can recognise the enormous utility of such places of manual learning as is the Northampton Institute, presided over so ably by our past President, Dr. Walmsley. The technical classes held there provide a substitute for such variety in workshop experience as is not now to be gained by young men whose parents are unable to afford a substantial premium for the privilege desired. There is no doubt that, simply by bringing under the attention of the Trade those special advantages which the Northampton Institute and some other institutes of the same kind offer for the instruction of young instrument makers, our Educational Committee will do a valuable work.

When the intention is that a young man should apply himself not merely to mechanical work (a certain amount of mechanical work

is called for even in the retail shop, if small repairs are to be done, and slight adjustments in spectacle frames are to be executed, as they should be), but if in addition to this mechanical work the beginner intends to devote himself to the professional occupation of testing eyesight for the correction of its non-pathological defects, then a broader and higher education is, of course, called for. The professional Refractionist ought to be a man of refinement and of general culture, so that he may impress his customers with a feeling of confidence in his ability. The public have to judge by superficial evidence, of course, as they know nothing of the technicalities of our science; and it is certain that they will be inclined to accord most credit for professional ability, in those quarters where the possession of a good general education is apparent. No doubt these considerations will have due weight with our Committee as they formulate their scheme for the preparation of young men intending to adopt the career of an Optician.

Happily the advantages of modernised technical education are not confined by any means to the coming generation. That "it is never too late to learn" is true in the most literal sense of the words; and the movement that has been on foot for some years past, having for its purpose to bring about a higher standard of knowledge and of skill among those established in the industry, has been attended with results of a most gratifying character. The impulse to this higher technical education, in the matter of sight testing and so forth, has come from within the body of the Trade itself; although as a reflection, perhaps, of the tendency that has manifested itself so strongly in trade journalism during the past decade. Some of our leading Opticians—I do not take the liberty to mention names here—have made a close study of the optical characteristics of the human eye for very many years past; but others there are, as I say, whose interest in the more recondite branches of the art of sight testing has only been awakened in comparatively recent times. Many of these latter must feel a real debt of gratitude towards our friends, Mr. Lionel Laurance, Mr. Sutcliffe and others, who have devoted themselves to the exposition of the science of visual optics as it is involved in the business of a retail Optician. I am sure if we have regard to some of the papers that have been read before the optical societies in this country, by men who were avowedly quite ignorant of the subject of refraction up till the recent period I speak of, we must admit that the progress made in these studies among the older members of our industry has been

phenomenally rapid, and most creditable both to our teachers of visual optics and to the students themselves. A special faculty is called for in the work of education when undertaken with reference to matured minds, long unaccustomed to the reception of knowledge from the mere school teacher or lecturer; and I think that in this particular respect the members of our trade in this country have been most fortunate at a critical juncture in the development of events.

This brings me to rather a difficult and thorny part of the discussion which I am inflicting on you. It is not my intention at this moment to detail those qualifications which I have been led to think should be possessed by a thoroughly competent Refractionist. But what I have said respecting education naturally brings under review such work in this direction as has been done, encouraged or aimed at, by the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers. Since trade journalism was established in our industry, I feel that I may justly claim that the requirements of the trade were strongly and pointedly urged on the attention of the Spectacle Makers Company; and these requirements, expressed through the medium I have indicated, were promptly and fully recognised by Mr. Past-Master Thornthwaite, without whose aid it is unlikely that any such important undertaking as is the scheme of the Company would have been brought to fruition. We are faced with the facts that, despite the revolution—I can call it nothing less than a revolution—that has taken place in the conduct of the retail optical industry, and in which the acts of the Spectacle Makers Company have borne an important part, there is still considerable disaffection towards the Company evidenced among our members, whom we are bound to regard as representative of others in the trade at large. What is the cause of this? I feel bound to put to myself and to bring before you this question, for the reason that I have stated before, viz., that I think there is nothing to be lost by any of us by reason of an outspoken “political” discussion, and there is everything to be gained by frankness and publicity. I certainly think, with all deference to the earnest work of Mr. Thornthwaite and to the zeal of Colonel Sewell, that the labours of the Consultative Committee had everything to do with the solution of those difficulties which confronted the founders of the scheme at its inauguration. And I can understand the feeling of our friend, Mr. Aitchison, that, by declining the further aid of the Consultative Committee, the Spectacle Makers Company (acting, indeed, well within their rights) did in a considerable degree divorce themselves from that intimate connection with the

trade which should be a chief source of their strength and influence.

On the question of the Official Instructorship too, we are compelled to formulate and to state some opinion, if we wish to meet and to weigh all the facts of the case in a straightforward manner. And I must say that it is my own personal opinion that our able friend, who holds that post, had been well able to maintain his position among us without it. I do not agree with those who say or hint that there has been any impropriety in the appointment of our esteemed friend as Official Instructor. I have carefully looked into the matter, and collated the information I have been able to obtain from many and various sources, and as a result I feel able to say most emphatically that, of all men, Mr. Laurance is "the man" for the position. But, then, why this position, under the circumstances obtaining just at present? And if it is not absolutely necessary that an Official Instructor should represent the Spectacle Makers Company among us, why should the feelings on this matter of prominent members of our industry and liverymen of the Company be pointedly ignored? It is not my place as an individual, and certainly not my intention as President of this Society, either to endorse the propriety of the question put or to suggest an answer to it. I will just say this, to illustrate the attitude of mind which I, myself, adopt with regard to the matter at issue: I consider that if any serious measures were taken by the Company to further the optical education of Refractionists, then the appointment of so able a teacher as Mr. Lionel Laurance would be well warranted if not, indeed, essential. I do not, myself, admit anything in the nature of backstairs methods or underhand proceedings in the conduct of the S.M.C. affairs; and I am convinced that those who suspect something of that kind to exist are utterly mistaken. No one who knows Colonel Sewell personally, as I have the pleasure of doing, can imagine that a gentleman so honourable would lend himself to anything of that sort; nor would anyone who lays claim to the friendship of Mr. Lionel Laurance suppose for a moment that he would seek or exercise any undue influence on the conduct of the Company's affairs. But the Spectacle Makers Company, like Cæsar's wife, should be above suspicion; and it is just for that reason, I surmise, that some of our members think the Company would have done well, even while retaining, perhaps, the aid of their Official Instructor, to have retained also those advantages in the way of opinion and counsel and other assistance which were theirs so long as the Consultative Optical Trade Committee remained in office.

There is another very important undertaking which is directly the outcome of suggestions put forward in the manner I have already indicated. The British Optical Association had its origin just like the Certification Scheme of the Spectacle Makers Company, in the journalistic discussions to which I have already referred. The great fault, if I may be allowed to say it, in the proceedings of the British Optical Association at a very early stage in its career, was that the formation of the Society was unattended with such full and free publicity in the trade as had already proved its usefulness, by bringing to a focus that co-operative zeal which resulted in the organisation of the B.O.A. itself. There was lacking such a representative character, and such a reliance on the popular vote, as would have ensured to the B.O.A. almost unanimous support throughout the industry, and would have disarmed a good deal of criticism which at that time found expression, to the detriment in some degree, perhaps, of the prospects of the Association. The bureaucratic constitution that was at one time attributed to the Council of the B.O.A. is now a thing of the past; and while not so fully representative of all classes as is the Optical Society, we may now claim for the B.O.A. that it speaks with authority upon behalf of a very large and important section of the retail trade—on behalf of practically all our most advanced Refractionists. And one vital advantage that is possessed by the B.O.A. over the present examining body of the Spectacle Makers Company—an advantage on which it is hardly possible to lay too much stress—is that sight testing is clearly recognised as a part, and the most important part, of the curriculum in which the proficiency of students is to be tested and certified by examination.

There is no question in my mind that it is an unfortunate circumstance for the trade that the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers have not yet seen their way to act more independently—with less regard for the susceptibilities of the medical profession. Not that I would suggest for a moment that any Optician, any member of our Society or of the associations with which we are allied, would wish to encroach on that province which is legitimately restricted to medical men. Anything that savours of quackery is an abomination to me, and I feel sure to any and every self-respecting member of the optical industry. But it has been made quite plain—so plain that I do not propose to weary you with any reiteration of the well known argument—that ordinary defects of sight, corrigible by spectacles, are mechanical and non-pathological; and that the fitting of spectacles to remove such ordinary defects of eyesight is no more a surgical or medical proceed-

ing than is the adaptation of a pair of boots to fit the feet. More skill is demanded of the Optician, much more intelligence and far larger range of technical knowledge than is required in the case of the boot maker which I have ventured to cite; but I repeat that, so far as regards any claim by the medical profession to regulate and control the retail spectacle trade, there is no more warrant for it than if such claim were advanced with respect to the "artist in shoes." The British Optical Association, I say then, fulfils a most useful function, auxiliary to those of our own Society and of the Spectacle Makers Company; and from what I am told by some who know of the B.O.A. system of examination, it is quite an ideal one for eliciting the technical knowledge and skill possessed by a Refractionist. However, one is compelled to recognise the practical difficulty that there is in the way of procuring men of the highest scientific attainments, whose names carry weight with the public, to lend themselves for furthering the interests of a trading class in our community, and in a direction somewhat resented by many members of the medical profession. I suppose we must, therefore, resign ourselves to waiting, with such patience as we can, for the education of public and professional opinion in this matter. It is a process that is already in operation, although progress is but slow; and it may be, perhaps, not until after some years that we shall find leading Oculists and scientists making themselves responsible for an examination which is avowedly conducted as a test of the proficiency of sight testing Opticians. Such a test is demanded in the interests of the public generally; and I hope that the example and aid of the British Optical Association may have the effect of bringing about such a development as I have indicated, and almost all of us would like to see realised. It is devoutly to be hoped that, undisturbed by individual differences of a personal nature, the several organised bodies representing sections of our industry may come together more and more, in a genuine attempt to further the interests of sight testing Opticians, while at the same time not neglecting such means as scientific lectures, exhibitions, meetings for discussion and so on, calculated to raise the standard of technical and commercial knowledge in the instrument-making trades.

Speaking of the instrument-making trades, the term Optician, which we apply to one employed in connection therewith, is a term that is not infrequently interpreted in too narrow and literal a sense. The Optician surely is any person who is engaged in the manufacture or sale of philosophical instruments in general—not merely eyeglasses

and spectacles, as some purists would have us believe. There are, indeed, very few of the instruments devoted to purposes of scientific research, which do not depend very directly on some application of the laws of physical optics; and even where there is no such dependence, as in the case of many electrical appliances handled by Opticians, the same sort of acquaintance with practical physics, that is so useful to one dealing in telescopes, microscopes, opera glasses, spectacles, cameras, and so on, finds its application. The Photographer's outfit is essentially of an optical character since the lenses and other appliances we use in "painting by light" involve applications of all the principles that we employ in constructing the more severely optical instruments, such as opera glasses and so forth, and even necessitate the further elaboration of these principles to a very considerable extent. There are comparatively few Opticians who do not handle photographic apparatus now-a-days; but this is only another way of putting the fact that to-day everybody is a Photographer. The camera is omni-present; and those who by their scientific training are qualified to handle such instruments intelligently, and to advise their customers on the special applications and use of the various kinds of objectives, yet do not do so, sacrifice deliberately one of the most interesting and lucrative parts of the Optician's trade. I think it is becoming ever more widely recognised that all kinds of instruments of measurement and observation—whether they relate primarily to optics as the field glass, or to electricity as the inductorium, or magnetism as the compass, or heat as the thermometer, to acoustics as the phonograph, to chemistry as the balance, to physiology as the sphygmometer, or to electrolysis as the galvanic cell—all these things are such as it behoves Opticians to concern themselves with. For what retail (or for that matter what wholesale) merchant other than an Optician possesses the necessary technical knowledge to fit him for adjusting or operating and explaining the various instruments in question?

So wide is the scope of all that information which distinguishes those we term qualified Opticians, that it is hardly to be supposed this could all be attained in any reasonably short course of instruction, nor be attested by any examination for which we can fairly expect members of the trade in general to enter. We must not hope to realise the ideal as yet; we must be content with the accomplishment of those things which are feasible. And if we look to the ground covered by the Spectacle Makers' examination, for instance, while we

regret, as I have said before, that there is no definite reference to sight testing, we should not, I think, regret the fact that only the rudiments of those sciences which it does refer to are covered by the questions set. A general knowledge of applied physics is the very best foundation on which a retail Optician can build up that sound judgment (in such matters as the adapting of spectacles) which is so important for success in his career. We must not suppose that a man's judgment and skill in the affairs of his business or professional life are to be gauged absolutely by any examination. The examination may show and ought to show that a sufficient ground work has been laid, and that the general principles which must guide one in dealing with the problems of refraction have been grasped ; but it can scarcely demonstrate the extent to which a student is fitted, by the type and development of his own mind, to apply those principles successfully and with facility when dealing with the complex forms of ametropia met with in every day practice. Even young medical men, at the conclusion of their arduous course of studies, find themselves equipped with a theoretical rather than a practical knowledge of many such disorders as they are, later, called upon to treat. It is learning in the first place, but also experience, that makes the skilled physician ; and I venture to say that the same statement may be made with reference to Refractionists also. Let us seek by all means to have the principles of sight-testing explicitly recognised in our examinations ; but let us not be misled into supposing that to pass an examination is the chief end and aim of those studies in which young Opticians are counselled to engage.

If it is to these matters, and to the solution of the problems they involve, that we of the Optical Society must apply ourselves, how much assistance may we not derive from an association with those kindred societies professing aims similar to, or identical with our own, and of which I spoke a little time ago ? How important it is that we should seek to become even more fully representative of the whole trade than is the case at present, by affiliating ourselves with some of the smaller societies whose zealous and creditable work is so often brought under our attention. I believe, from what I am told by my friends in the provinces, that these societies are quite anxious to become connected with us ; and I imagine that the sole reason why they have not yet approached us with a pressing request for affiliation, and a plea for joint action in many matters, has been the existence of some slight misconception which it is in our power to remove. There

is a good deal in a name sometimes, as we all know; and I am told that the term "local section" carries with it, in the opinion of some of our friends, an implication which members of trade organizations distinct from our own would be apt to resent. If such is the case—if my information is correct—surely there can be no reason why we should not substitute for the proposal to establish local sections one of those others which convey less the idea of absorption or loss of independence on the part of those with whom it is our wish to co-operate. The possibilities of vexatious interference by one society with another should be minimised; and I think we all of us admit that a generous scheme of affiliation and the open hand of friendship should be extended by us to the various smaller societies in our own trade. I am sure that this has always been the view held in the Council of the Optical Society; and if anyone is of the contrary opinion, I am convinced it is due to a misapprehension which is, perhaps, largely the result of a mere question of the choice of terms.

It is altogether to publicity in the discussion of these matters that we must look for the elucidation of that *modus vivendi* under which we can "work out the salvation" of the Trade. And I am glad to say that, just at the present time, there is evidenced on the part of some of our representative men a gratifying readiness to come forward and express their views in the press, and state arguments concerning questions of trade policy. I could wish—and I hope that I shall not be going too far in saying this much by way of criticism—that such expressions of opinion or statements of fact should always be made with due regard for the solidarity of trade interests, by which I mean the close ties of a commercial nature which bind together the retail optical trade, in relation to matters respecting which the public upon the one hand, and the medical faculty on the other, have their own axes to grind. We should try by all means to discover points of unity rather than grounds of difference between ourselves; for if we fall into the natural mistake of carrying too far our expressions of dissent from this or that method used by our neighbours or competitors, we shall put weapons into the hands of those people who profess to think that spectacles and eyeglasses should be sold at the lowest of store prices by every stationer, ironmonger, *et hoc genus omne*—refusing to recognise the claim of the Optician to be paid on a just scale for skilled professional work. And again we shall strengthen the position of those medical gentlemen whose desire is to substitute, for such chaos in the retail optical trade as is implied by the state of

things I just now mentioned, a system under which the public would seek prescriptions for spectacles only from their medical advisers, while Opticians would be reduced to occupy the menial position of dispensers only. Let us be careful not to "foul our own nest" with danger of such consequences as these. For it is exceedingly clear—at any rate it is so to my mind—that with a strong pull, and a pull together, retail Opticians are now in the position to assert themselves and vindicate the rights of their calling with such effect as has never hitherto been possible. I have said that the trade has developed largely within the past 10 years, which is a fact upon which we may all congratulate ourselves; but I would add that, in my humble opinion, the expansion of trade in the next 10 years should far exceed anything hitherto attained. We have just learned that, for the future, military men are to be freely permitted to wear glasses for the correction of those visual defects from which, as we all know perfectly well, they are by no means exempt. It is a tardy response on the part of the War Office to a call which I myself gave expression to, a number of years ago, and which has been repeatedly urged on the attention of those in authority—notably by our energetic friend, Mr. Laurance. And now that it *is* come, the result is bound to be a radical break down in the absurd prejudice against the wearing of glasses, with which we have had to contend for so long. The prejudice I speak of arises perhaps mainly from the fact that spectacles were at one time regarded as the escutcheon of old age. The idea has, however, lost ground very considerably, since it has become public knowledge that there are many defects of sight in which the use of spectacles is advisable and highly advantageous, even from the earliest years. But there is another deeply-rooted prejudice against spectacles, which finds expression in the idea so long and so obstinately entertained by our military officers, that wearing glasses is in some way inconsistent with a man's efficiency, in that occupation which calls for the fullest expression of all manly characteristics. And I believe that the effect of the new army order, by dispelling this misconception and demonstrating that wearers of glasses are as eligible as other people for all field sports (because even for the great field sport of war itself), will be to break down altogether the last vestiges of dislike to using glasses on the part of the young and athletic section of our population.

Much more might be said, in my opinion, to emphasise the views which I have ventured to bring before you; but I will conclude with this remark, which is, I confess, a favourite remark of mine, that

publicity—publicity which reaches all our fellow citizens—in respect to almost everything concerning spectacles, their adaptation and their use, is that upon which we of the optical trade must rely to bring a speedy realisation of that heightened prosperity which I venture to predict.

MR. DIXEY: Mr. President, we are a very young Society, but we are not so young that we have not our traditions, and one of our best is, I think, that the President's address should be accepted, like some other benefits, I won't say without comment, but without controversy. (Hear, hear.) The President, in the very able address which he has just given to us, has touched on many subjects, upon most of which every individual in this room has his own opinion, and certainly those opinions would not all exactly tally with the opinions which the President has given such able expression to. The remark applies certainly to me as much as to any other individual in the room; but in rising now, it is not my intention—as he has so ably put it—it is not my intention to emphasise differences of opinion, but rather to express my gratitude, and if I may so far presume, the gratitude of other members of the Society too—(cheers)—for having given so able expression to many opinions which we all hold in common. I alluded to the traditions of this Society; and as I say, one of the most pleasant traditions is that the past President should have the privilege on this occasion of proposing a hearty vote of thanks to the President for his inaugural address. (Cheers.) This vote I have the pleasure of proposing now. If I make any further observations on one or two subjects which our President has alluded to, I will ask you to remember that it is not by way of controversy at all, but simply if I can, to strengthen the suggestions that the President has made. I was very glad indeed that he mentioned—in talking of our social meetings—that he advocated and put forward the view that interest in them would be very much enhanced if we had more exhibits of instruments, and so on. (Hear, hear.) It is a strong point, on which I am sure we all agree. Those members of the Society who are in a position to make exhibits of this kind want some such little variety as our President has mentioned, and I think it is the duty of all of us, who have it in our power, to increase the attractiveness of our social gatherings in that way. It is the duty of all of us to take that observation to heart, and to carry it out to the best of our means. The President has contrasted the condition of the optical trade now with its condition 10 years ago. I fully agree with the opinion that he expresses. That is really my experience of the optical trade, which goes back

now for 25 years, and I believe I am quite right in thinking it is really healthier and more active than it was 10 years ago—(Hear, hear)—and that is not a thing one can say of many trades. Lately there have been certain things not altogether satisfactory; but, taking it generally, all round, we are now in a better position, with more promise for the future than one could have said 10 years ago. (Hear, hear.) The President, in speaking of the defects of sight, has divided the defects into two classes, pathological and mechanical. I hope you will not consider it controversial if I say that I do not altogether accept the words. I do not think they include everything, and I do not altogether like the expression. It is very difficult for me to sit down and hear it put exactly like that. I want to suggest to him with reference to the word “pathological”—what he means by that—that he should choose a better word, and then I should agree with him cordially. A word such as “morbid.” As a matter of fact mechanical defects of sight are, with possibly very few exceptions, pathological. Almost every defect of sight is pathological in the general acceptation, and the literal meaning of the word, but there are certain conditions of sight which you may regard as defects of sight, which are morbid; and, therefore, we shall all, I think, agree that they certainly ought never to be touched by an Optician. With regard to the co-operation of the other societies, I think the question is one a little bit difficult for us to approach. We have a large number, and we value our country members, the members that come to us from other towns and the provinces—(Hear, hear)—but after all we are mainly a London Optical Society; the advantages that our Society has to offer are principally available to the London members; and after all I can fully sympathise with any man living in such a town as Hull, Bradford, or Manchester (I must not name the towns lest I leave some important one out, but the large northern towns), I can fully enter into the feelings of a citizen of one of those towns saying to me, “What good do I get from this Optical Society; when I have an Optical Society in this important centre?” York, say, or Liverpool or Manchester. That does not exclude co-operation. But after all, I want you to think of the thing definitely. How are we to co-operate? What can we do except to have cordial feelings for each other? We can agree with the Optical Society of the city of York or Manchester, but when it comes to definite ideas of co-operation what can we do? Are we going to allocate a certain portion of our funds to help the Society in Manchester, or is the Society in Manchester going to help the Society

in London? I do not think so, gentlemen. But at the same time that does not alter our feelings for any reciprocity that can be displayed. Referring to the military use of glasses, it is quite right that we should be thankful for it. It is a small mercy, but we ought to be grateful. But one important thing has not been done yet, and that is a modification of the optical test for admission to the army. That is a thing that really, in my poor opinion (it must go for what it is worth), is a most important thing that wants reconsideration and reorganisation. Possibly, that is a blessing to come. I must apologise, Sir, for having spoken at rather greater length than perhaps I should have done, and in sitting down I remind you of my object in rising, which was to propose a hearty vote of thanks to the President for his very able address. (Cheers.)

DR. WALMSLEY: I should like, Sir, to be allowed to second that vote of thanks. I do not know whether the tradition to which Mr. Dixey has alluded extends to the past President once removed, but I should think it would be a nice tradition to establish if it could be, that the duty of seconding the vote of thanks to the President should fall upon that particular officer each year. I may have a selfish motive in suggesting that, as if it were the custom I should not be called upon to officiate in this way again. However, I should not say that, Sir, because it is a distinct pleasure to me to be allowed to second this vote of thanks. Mr. Dixey has told us that the subject of the President's address is not a subject for discussion, and that one of our traditions is that it should not be discussed in the same way as a paper; and that tradition is common to every society with which I am acquainted. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Dixey has allowed himself to make one or two remarks upon the address, and if you will allow me, I also will make one or two. I shall try to refer to even less controversial subjects than Mr. Dixey did. That subject of Local Sections, for instance. I am rather surprised to learn that the title is a stumbling block; but I accept the statement that it is so. But it has not proved a stumbling block in other societies. The word was not coined by the Optical Society—it is in wide use already. And if I may, I should like to suggest one method of co-operation, provided the nomenclature can be altered, and I have no objection to altering it in any way you like. One method of co-operation is that the papers which are read before the provincial or other societies which may hereafter be affiliated to the Optical Society—that those papers be published in our proceedings, and thus be brought before a wider circle of readers than

if they simply appeared in the proceedings of a single society. In that way I would suggest there is a distinct line for co-operation between the Optical Society and its brother societies in the provinces. I should also like to emphasise the remark made not only by our President, but by Mr. Dixey—that we should like to see at our meetings exhibits of new instruments with which some of us in our work have not the opportunity of becoming acquainted. And I would tell you that a notice to this effect appears regularly upon the official notices that are issued by cognate societies. For instance, in the case of the Physical Society of London; almost every notice that goes out, at any rate with reference to meetings, has a footnote that the Society is always willing and glad to receive at its regular meetings exhibits of apparatus which its members may bring forward, even though this apparatus is neither original nor new. And I would like the members present to take notice of that proviso—that it is not necessarily something new that we want to see; not necessarily something original in the man who brings it forward, but we want to extend the usefulness of the Society—to have exhibits from time to time of apparatus with which, as I said before, we are not, all of us, familiar or get the opportunity to become so, however ancient it may be. (Hear, hear.) And now, Sir, I should like, in concluding the few words I have to say, to express my personal thanks for the very able review you have given us of the history of the trade. Whatever opinions we may hold about the various controversial matters, we all of us must, I think, be thankful to have put into concise form the history of the optical trade for the last 10 years. (Hear, hear.) I, Sir, feel that I am fallen under an obligation, for I have not—I confess it; I do not say that I blush for it—but I have not been acquainted with the history of the optical trade for that length of time. My duties have led me to Scotland and India, and I have not had the chance of being in London for long during the last 10 years, and I am very glad indeed to have available for future reference this history; because I presume the vote of thanks will be attended with the request that the President will allow his address to be printed, and, in due course, circulated amongst the members of the Society. (Hear, hear.) I, therefore, gentlemen, very cordially second this vote of thanks, and as our President cannot put it to the meeting, I put it to you. Is it agreed? (“All.”) It is unanimously agreed, Mr. President, that we accord you a hearty vote of thanks for your address. (Cheers.)

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Dixey, Dr. Walmsley, and gentlemen, I thank you very sincerely indeed for the extremely cordial vote of thanks you

have passed on the matter of my address. I was exceedingly doubtful as to the advisability of introducing into my address matter which Mr. Dixey has criticised as controversial. Well, it is of course more or less controversial, because everything in this world is controversial—(Hear, hear)—but as Mr. Dixey has said, every man in this room,—I have his words here—every individual in this room has his own opinion. I do not know whether he meant that we were likely to be divided into two parties on the questions I have raised; but my opinion with regard to many of the matters touched upon is that every individual—and I gather that there are something under 200 of our members here to-night—(laughter)—but if there were the whole of our hundreds of members present here, they would carry into effect what Mr. Dixey has told you, and each have a different opinion on almost every subject I have dealt with. Therefore, gentlemen, I do not apologise on the score that my remarks were controversial. But notwithstanding his intimation that it was improper to criticise the address of the President, Mr. Dixey touched on one subject upon which I would wish to put myself right. It was the question of defects of vision, as to these being divided into pathological and mechanical defects. Now what I really wished to imply, whatever my words were, was that the treatment of defects of the eye might be divided into pathological and mechanical treatment. Mr. Dixey told you that “morbid” would be a better description of the diseased conditions of the eye than “pathological,” but if “morbid” is not included in “pathological” then I am rather confused over these same terms. My point was rather this, when I spoke of mechanical treatment of the defects of the eye—that is to say, treatment of mechanical defects—I made reference more particularly to such physical defects as might be classed with muscular deficiency of any part of the body, or bowed legs, and kindred things of that description, which do not come under the purview of a medical man at all. If a child has bowed legs, the recognised treatment is to take him to an instrument maker. If a man is dissatisfied with his muscles, he goes to Sandow or some kindred school of muscle training. (Laughter.) However, I am not going to touch further upon this subject, and it only shows how the mere slip of a word may place a totally different construction upon a word or a phrase than was primarily intended. I want to thank you again for the exceedingly kind manner in which you have received me to-night, and for the compliments with which you received the vote of thanks accorded to me. (Cheers.)