OUR MEDICAL INTERESTS*

By ISADORE DYER, M.D., New Orleans.

It is a privilege to appear before a representative audience composed of Southern gentlemen, soldiers in the service of medicine, gathered together for the first time in this metropolis of the South and in the halls of this ancient institution devoted to medical science. New Orleans welcomes you, and those of us who are living here amidst the shades of the monumental spirits of Richardson, Hunt, Stone, Bemiss, Bruns, Jones and Miles acclaim the occasion as one to be remembered as epochal in the history of medicine in New Orleans and in the South.

In the onward march of our guild in these United States, the vanguard has been made up largely of those who have been unfettered by either circumstance or opportunity. In the council we have frequently had one of our own to sit, great among the wise men directing the affairs of our profession, but for the few decades just past we have had to look after our people at home.

Prosperity has been slow to perch upon our house tops and our roof tree has enjoyed the benisons of a gladsome and hopeful heart with a scanty purse to build upon our opportunity. But the dead leaves of a sad summer have been buried by the winter of reflection and of toil, and our springtime is at hand, promissive of a season of harvest and joy.

As the watchman in the night, our profession has stood by, closing each door of menacing danger, and sounding the alarms until the day has broken fair and our rest and our reward are on the way.

We have merited these, but our work is not yet done.

Our people have risen from the ashes of

war and of disease; they have harnessed fresh hopes to the yielding soil and have developed fields of energy which have gained everywhere for them the title of the "New South"—as if they had been born again.

We cannot rest at the first applause, but must go on developing our industries and our interests until they are as far-reaching as the ends of the world and as useful as their reaches may be wide.

Our children have been gradually emancipated from the ignorance of their fathers and the school-house grows more and more important as a step towards citizenship; our commercial institutions grow stronger and stronger in their stable relations to the world's marts. Our industrial products are each year in greater demand—*everywhere*. But the medical conditions of our Southland need revision.

Our professional schools are responding to the higher standards and to the needs of meeting them; better trained doctors are bound to follow.

So long, however, as the curse of a half savage race is burdened upon us, the problem of conserving our people and our interests must be before us, to be worked out.

The interest of the medical profession lies here and the future success of the coming generation of medical men in the South rests upon the quickened action of our own selves against the evils of the day.

The government has greatly exploited its intention of investigating pellagra, already the Public Health Service has interested itself—and the object is a worthy one.

Last year it was the privilege of a large

* Annual oration delivered at the meeting of the Southern Medical Association in New Orleans, November 10, 1909.

part of the New Orleans profession to listen to the inspired appeal of Dr. C. W. Stiles to the intelligence of the Southern people aimed at the hookworm disease. He delineated types of those dying and sick with this disease in such vivid narrative that these poor beings were brought to us as if they were dying before us.

The burden of a pioneer was one self-imposed by Dr. Stiles, but he has flashed a mighty beacon of illumination among the medical profession of the South, with a fervent hope that every Southern doctor shall join the cause, not only to save those who are sick and dying now, but to safeguard the coming generations.

It is indeed gratifying to know that philanthropy has responded with an active assistance in this cause.

The \$1,000,000 of Mr. Rockefeller cannot efface the immortal record of deaths from the "dirt-eaters' " disease, but it can aid in the cure and prevention of this disease—in bettering the conditions of the peoples among whom it spreads, and by offering hope to those on the way to a certain end.

It is mere Chauvinism to dispute the presence of a condition proven to exist, and it is a false purpose fulfilled for the press to attempt to discount the importance of uncinariasis in the South. If the evil exists let us fight it, and if a \$1,000,000 will save but a hundred lives, it will be well spent.

Dr. Stiles also dwelt on the evils of promiscuous relations among the whites and blacks, a horror which has only started in its evil results.

The negro is a living incarnation of a real Frankenstein, anarchistic in matters of health, breathing the evils of infection and planting the seeds of every possible communicable disease not segregated and wherever his feet lead him. Our schools teach no hygiene, and it is too late when the man or woman reaches the age of average intelligence. We physicians must commence and prosecute the work of education.

Louisiana began the education of her people in sanitary measures over ten years ago. Kohnke's name will always stand for the realization of a modern idea of the mosquito and the abolition of incendiary quarantines in the South.

Mississippi systematically is educating her people through the lectures and labors of Fred Mayer, a worthy native of this State, who goes from town to town preaching health and sanitation to the people in the hope that some seed may fall on likely ground.

The like should be the labor of every Southern physician—in his own circle creating a school for the dissemination of a knowledge of health.

The Titan task of eradicating tuberculosis among our people has started, but the movement is not yet strong enough. Everywhere a mere handful of the medical profession is engaged in this labor in a public cause. A more general medical interest may in time awaken the conscience of the State and of the Nation to the needs of this great cause.

Our profession in the South has these problems to solve—sooner or later they will be brought to us and we should be ready.

The mission of any large body of men is ultimately for good, and I take it that the Southern Medical Association has come into being for the purpose of general good.

We need to protect our interests as physicians, arming against the parasites among the under-educated and unscrupulous who follow a prostituted trade rather than an honorable profession. Educate our people to know that pretension is not knowledge. We must more and more find our place as citizens so that we can demand that the righteous needs of our profession are satisfied in institutions, in our schools and hospitals; laws of sanitation and our public spirit ought to have such reward.

The array of names of men of the medical guild who have been martyrs to science, who have filled positions of state, who have added glory to the corona of literary geniuses, all

argue that we of the South should find time to work at idle hours in molding forms for future history.

Citizenship is not incompatible with the profession of medicine, and the wisdom which contact with human nature inculcates must be ripe enough to bear worthy fruit.

There is no greater task for accomplishment in the whole civilized race than that of a successful preventive medicine—but it needs the individual effort of every man who is honest in the practice of medicine.

Most of us today may fall by the wayside without reaching a goal, but by working for it we shall have offered the example to those who follow after us. Our legislatures should have in their halls of deliberation and debate men of the medical profession, pledged to further the interests of the public health until their work shall shine before the people in such a way that the light shall reach far enough to impose an obligation upon the Nation to provide a central bureau where the people of this great republic may receive as much consideration as do the dumb beasts.

Organization has no usefulness without purpose, and unless the gathering of our profession in the South aims at some great object it has failed. The burden of any body of men must be for a community cause, and I take it

the highest aim of our profession is universal healthfulness.

When the labors of medical men have resulted in the past one hundred years in reducing mortality rate, in obliterating many contagious diseases, in advancing medical education for the good of humankind, the future of that profession must not be barren of like results.

The public is a self-constituted critic, prejudiced against the profession and clamoring for demonstrated achievement, but the public is like a great child needing to be led into the way of cleanliness, godliness and health. With the spirit of today the public is ready for education, and we owe it to ourselves to go more than half way in the effort to instruct them. When that day comes in Utopia, when the State will care for all its sick, educate, train and keep its staff of physicians, lay restrictions of community obligation to health on all citizens, provide for the prevention of disease by instruction in schools and in the communities of peoples, as well as the means to safeguard the individual, then our labors will have ceased, but until such a dream is realized, we must continue to knock at the door of the Empire of Hygeia, begging the spiritual and economic aid of all to further our cause, always humanitarian in its purpose and conservative in its results.