

# EDUCATIONAL IDEALS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF DENTISTS

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**A**T THE first annual meeting of the American College of Dentists, it would seem appropriate to consider briefly some of the objects of the organization and possibly to make a few suggestions as to lines of policy. It goes without saying that there is a very real need for such an organization as this in the dental profession. In medicine we have in America the American College of Surgeons, and in Great Britain its prototype, the Royal College of Surgeons—both standing for the highest ideals in professional conduct and achievement. If these institutions are needed in medicine, with its centuries of history and tradition, ours is surely needed in dentistry at a time when we are in the midst of making history and creating tradition.

Our educational policies are undergoing such a rapid evolution that it is sometimes difficult to evaluate the new ideas as they are advanced from time to time, and today there is a very decided difference of opinion among men as to what will turn out practicable and utilitarian in our educational systems, and what will not. And it is natural that there should be this difference of opinion, because it is not within the power of any man to predict with certainty just what

the effect will be on the future of dentistry of some of the proposed changes in our educational methods. But of one thing we may be sufficiently assured, that no matter what trend our educational policies may take, nor how perfect we may become in preparing young men in our colleges for the practice of dentistry, there will still remain the necessity of an incentive to stimulate men after graduation to such application as will insure their constant development toward higher and better things in the profession. Say what we may, the purest conception of professional ideals is never consummated in an individual in a college course. The colleges do well if they succeed in implanting the germ, and starting it on its way to growth. The man never gets the full realization of his professional obligations nor is he imbued with the sanctity of his calling till such time as he has been brought in close contact with the intricate problems of everyday practice, and been made to feel their vital relationship to the welfare of the people he serves. No man is worthy of recognized professional status till there has sunken into his very soul the deepest conviction of the moral obligation involved in professional life. The only way this

can be burned into his consciousness is by actual experience in encountering the suffering involved in disease, and by having the problem placed before him of relieving that suffering. Not till he has seen the drawn face of agony change under his ministrations to the peace and calm of relief is he in a position to fully appreciate the sacredness of his relationship to humanity, and the opportunities he has for the best kind of sanctified service.

The argument then is that no man ever attains to the highest conception of the science and art of dentistry until he has been distilled in the alembic of actual professional experience; and if this is true it follows as the day the night that, after all, the education which is the most significant is not that obtained during the college course, but the education which comes after graduation. No one can have a more profound conviction than I of the great importance and necessity of a college course, nor of the serious moral obligation placed upon every individual who aspires to be a teacher. It has been my chief contention for many years that mere ability to impart information was not the only *sine qua non* in a professor in a dental school, but that the thing which stood out with the greatest insistence as a prime requisite was that very tangible and definite entity called moral fiber. I, therefore, am far from minimizing the importance of college education, but I have grown to recognize the fundamental fact that the highest conception of professional achievement comes as a matter of later development rather than when the student is concerned chiefly with the problems of acquiring technical knowledge and skill.

It will thus be seen how very important I deem every movement which has for its object the stimulation of the profession toward the attainment of higher

and better things, and this is why the organization of the American College of Dentists appeals to me so strongly. To create an incentive in our ranks which shall impel men to constant application along lines tending to the uplift of the profession is the very highest function which any body of men can undertake, and thus every right-thinking man should get behind this movement and help develop it to its fullest fruition.

But let it not be thought that it is a simple matter to launch this craft or to steer it clear of obstacles in the early stages of its voyage. In some respects it is the most delicate mechanism that was ever conceived in the dental profession, and it is well that its founders should gain a very clear idea of its objects and the real function which it is intended to perform. It should not be considered merely as "one more society." It is apart and distinct from every other organization in dentistry, and it should remain so. If it is to be an institution to which every sincere, earnest and progressive man would wish to aspire, it must not be cheapened in any way. Better by far to be considered too exclusive than too promiscuous.

Let us consider for a moment what the College is supposed to stand for. The object is to provide an incentive for men to apply themselves to the solution of the various problems which confront the profession, to stimulate growth on the part of dentists, and to encourage them to reach out for the higher and better things of professional life—in short, to create a class of men in dentistry who are not satisfied to stand still and be content with mediocrity, but who wish to consecrate themselves to the loftiest conception of all that is involved in the purest ideals of human relationship. The details of all of this are to be worked out by this honorable body itself, but, in the broadest concept of what we pro-

pose to stand for, it behooves us at this time to study most carefully every move that is to be made in the initial stages of our organization. It is so easy to make mistakes, and so difficult to remedy them.

One of the most vital problems presented for consideration in these early days is that of membership. No organization can be effective for the greatest good without a rather widespread membership, and yet herein lies the possibility of making the gravest of all errors. To get in men, even a few of them, who are minus the qualifications which should entitle an individual to membership in such an organization is to defeat the very object for which it was organized. And please remember that the task of assuming the responsibility of saying who shall and who shall not be admitted is the most difficult that was ever presented to a body of men in our profession. There are so many things to consider in admitting men to membership, and it just so happens that the very factors which are most likely to be instrumental in gaining certain men an invitation to membership are the ones of all others which should least entitle them to membership. Personal friendship always has and always will play an important part in such matters, and yet it is not so very far-fetched to say that personal friendship has nothing whatever to do with the regulation of membership in this body.

If we are to consider "educational ideals in accordance with the aspirations of the American College of Dentists," then we must eliminate as far as is humanly possible the influence of personal friendship. That is, we must not recommend a man merely because he is our personal friend. If he has done something of distinction, and happens to be our personal friend, the combination is ideal; but his qualifications should consist in the things he has done, and not in his friendships. Merely to be a good

fellow should not constitute a man eligible to membership in this organization.

There should be something outstanding and conspicuously praiseworthy in the achievements of every one seeking fellowship in the College, so that when the list of members is scanned it will at once command the respect and even the admiration of those who see it.

It matters not so much in what field of effort the candidate has won his spurs—the chief thing is that he has won them. It may be in research, in literature, in education, in legislation or in administration; but what he has done must have the stamp of superiority upon it. The College was not organized to encourage mediocrity.

Neither is its function to take men and develop them. This may seem a strange statement, but the present contention is that they should be started well on their way, and should already have proved not only their ability but their inclination to achieve something of definite value to the profession and to humanity before they are entitled to representation in this body. Not that the fundamental idea does not include the factor of growth and achievement after membership is gained—in fact, the hope is freely expressed that men will grow more surely and rapidly than before—but that there must have been demonstrated in the individual those qualities inherent in his make-up which have unerringly in the past driven him to the pursuit of such activities as will most surely redound to the benefit of the profession.

By this it is not meant that a man must of necessity have won all of his spurs and reached the point where he is in the mood to seek the chimney corner and rest complacently on his laurels. This is not an association emeritus. It is an association of workers—the hardest workers in dentistry; not content with the best that has been accomplished, however good it may be, but determined to

carry to greater and still greater perfection every activity which has for its aim a higher class of service to humanity. It should be possible to point to every man in this organization and say not only, "Look what he has done," but "Look what he is doing." In other words, there should be some definite reason why he is a member today, as well as why he was selected yesterday.

It will be seen by the foregoing that I have a rather exalted conception of what is involved in membership in this College, and there may be in the minds of some a feeling that there is too great an element of exclusiveness in my point of view. The contention may be made with apparent justification that we must have numbers in order to wield the influence for good which the founders so confidently hope for. Well and good—but after all we do not need great numbers in order to do great good, and a sufficient number of men to make this

organization representative of the best thought in the profession may be selected without the inclusion of unsuitable material, if we but exercise the proper caution in this formative period of our existence. Men there are in our profession in adequate number to give us a note-worthy membership of sufficient size to exert a powerful influence for good. Why then assume the risk of placing our organization in jeopardy by too great haste, too much enthusiasm, or too little deliberation in making our initial selections? Better far to build slowly and surely and create an institution of which we will all be proud, and into which every ambitious man in dentistry, young or old, will be anxious to seek admission.

Today we have the opportunity of introducing into our beloved profession one of the most potent influences for good that has ever been organized. Let us rise to our possibilities and make the most of this opportunity.

