

Address of the President : the past, the present, and the future of our Association : delivered at the annual meeting of the American Surgical Association, held conjointly with the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons, Washington, D.C., September 22-25, 1891 / by Claudius H. Mastin.

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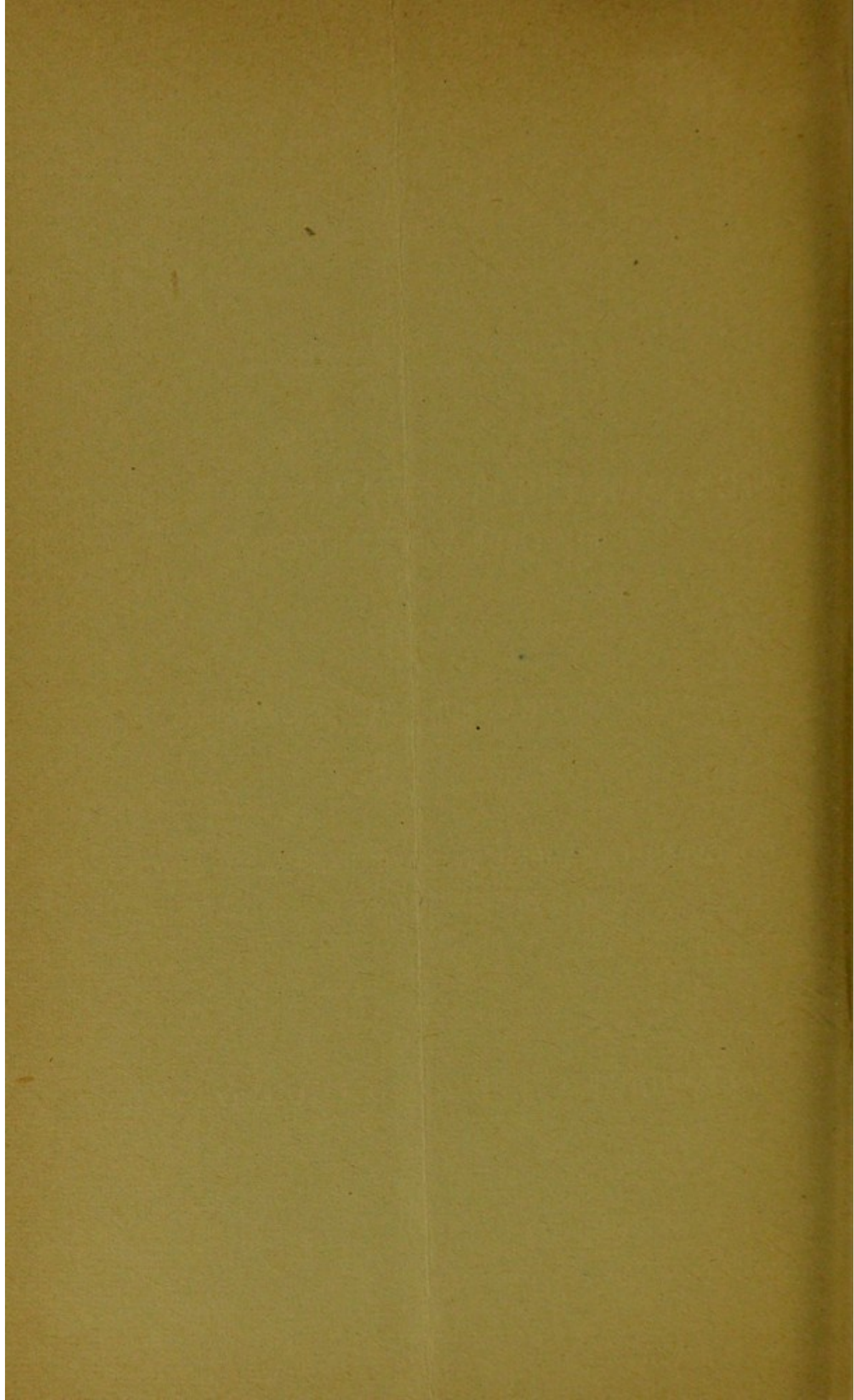
THE AMERICAN SURGICAL ASSOCIATION,

HELD CONJOINTLY WITH THE

CONGRESS OF AMERICAN PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS,
WASHINGTON, D. C., SEPTEMBER 22-25, 1891.

BY

CLAUDIUS H. MASTIN, M.D., LL.D. UNIV. PENNA.,
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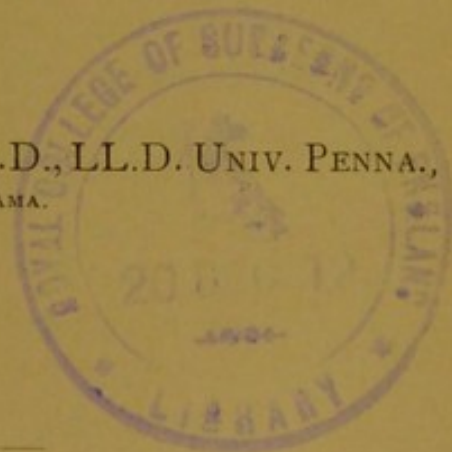
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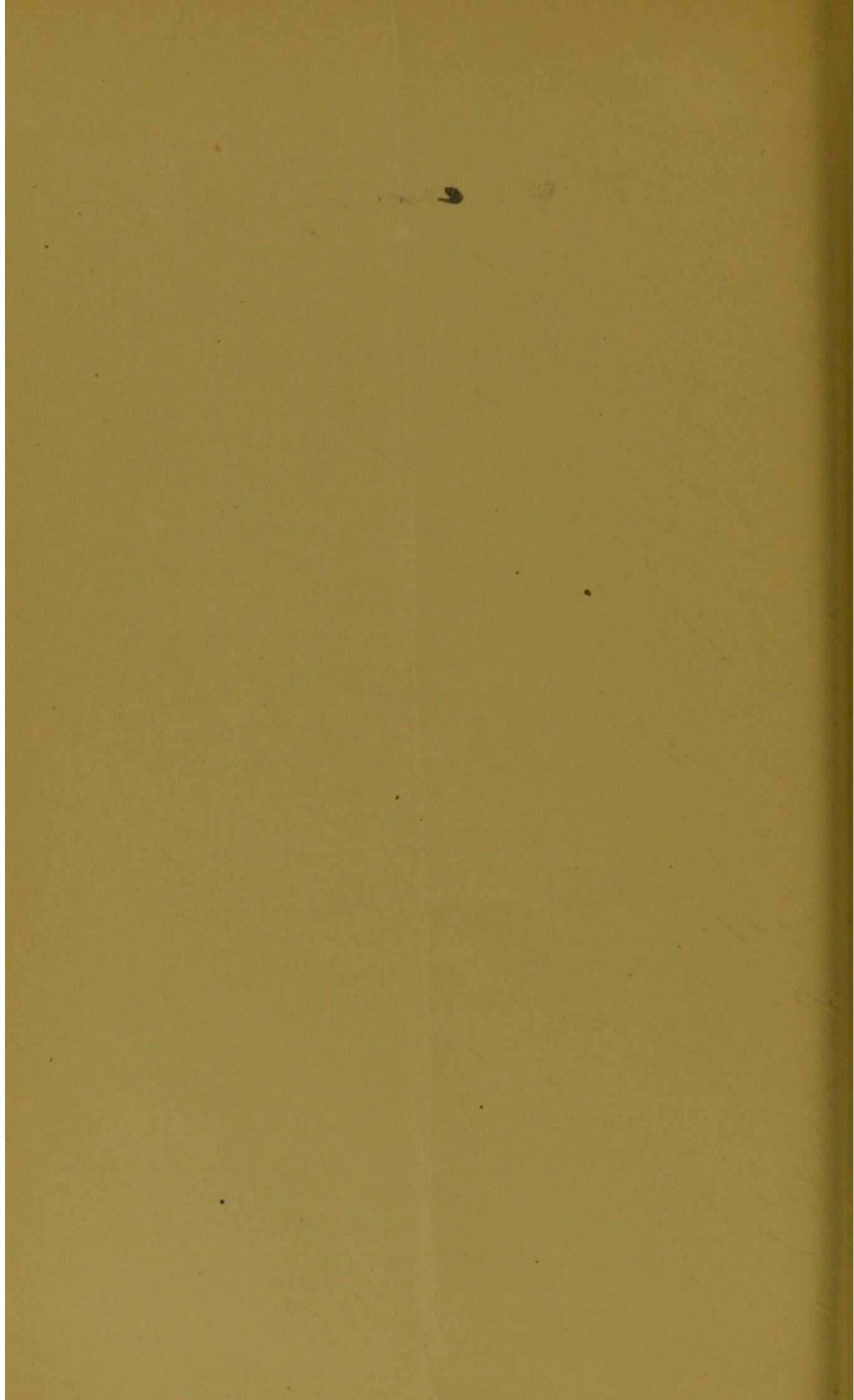
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PHILADELPHIA:

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1891.



*With sincere regards of
The Author*

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT.

THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE OF OUR
ASSOCIATION.

BY CLAUDIUS H. MASTIN, M.D., LL.D. UNIV. PENNA.,
MOBILE, ALABAMA.

FELLOWS OF THE AMERICAN SURGICAL ASSOCIATION: At your last meeting, in May, 1890, you selected me to be your presiding officer at this session—a session of especial interest, because it is the occasion when the several special associations conjointly assemble to constitute the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons.

Thoroughly appreciating the importance of the trust, and acknowledging the very great honor you have done me, I embrace the first opportunity which has presented to thank you for this generous manifestation of your confidence and esteem.

It now becomes my pleasing duty to welcome you, together with our distinguished confrères from abroad who have honored us with their presence, to this, the beautiful capital city of this great, growing, and prosperous Republic—a city surpassing in beauty and rivalling in grandeur the older and more favored capitals of the Old World! Noted both at home and abroad for its intellectual and scientific advances, it is to become in the not distant future, the centre of the science, the literature, and the arts of the Western Hemisphere; as it is, even now, the political pivot around which revolve more than sixty-five millions of freemen! It is here that the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons holds its triennial sessions, and it is the home of this Association. To this and to these, I bid you a thrice hearty welcome!

Since the organization of this Association, a body having for its object the advancement of the science and the art of Surgery, a decade has passed away, and with the opening of this session a new epoch in the history of the American Surgical Association begins. It, therefore, is a fitting time to take a retrospective view of our history, to congratulate ourselves upon the auspicious present, and linger for a moment in the contemplation of the future. This, I conceive, will be a more appropriate theme for the occasion, than for me to weary your patience with a scientific dissertation, especially so since the efficient Committee charged with the preparation of the programme has laid before you a feast rich in this particular.

It was in May, 1879, during the meeting of the American Medical Association, then in session at Atlanta, Georgia, that the founder of this Association called around him a few selected friends and disclosed to them a plan, which for many years had been a cherished object of his ambition, that of organizing an association which should bear a national name, and embody in one harmonious whole, the surgical talent, experience, and wisdom of this great country.

The question was pertinently asked, "What need is there of such an organization, since the country is full of all kinds of medical societies?"

It was argued that the surgical section of the American Medical Association offered all the requirements necessary, and that the organization of a special association, having for its object the advancement of the science and art of Surgery was not called for, and would be looked upon as having for its purpose only the injury of the old Association—striking, as it were, a direct blow at its surgical section! With the far-seeing wisdom characteristic of the man, he thought differently and believed the effects would be directly the opposite. He believed and said that the time had come in the history of medical and surgical affairs in America when such an organization was a necessity, and should be created. He disclaimed then, as we do now, any opposition whatever to the old Association, and he asserted that it was impossible for any new organization to be in the least detrimental to it.

From the day on which the old Association was organized he had been an active and influential member, once its president often a contributor to its volumes of *Transactions*; governed by its code of ethics, he remained true and loyal to all its requirements, as evidenced by the fact that when on his death-bed he was asked by a friend what message he desired to send to the American Medical Association, he replied, "Give them my love!" Also, the very last paper he ever wrote was being read in that Association during its session of 1884, on the same day that he died.

It is my honest conviction that neither our illustrious founder nor any Fellow of this Association has ever entertained any sentiments of opposition to the old Association. On the contrary, as American physicians and surgeons, we feel an honest pride in the work which she has done, and we are the last who would obstruct the progress of an association which is so necessary to the professional interests of the country at large. We are free to admit, however, that we know the time has come in the history of medical affairs in this country, when the special branches of the profession must be separately recognized, not that they should be divided into departments having no reliance one upon the other, but as integral parts of a great and undivided profession, they should be so organized as to stand—"distinct as the billows, yet one as the sea!" The Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons is simply a development of this principle.

But he was building even better than he knew, and now the ten years which have passed so rapidly away have answered the question, "What need is there of such an organization?"

The first regular meeting of this Association, held for the transaction of scientific and practical work, took place at Coney Island, in the State of New York, in September, 1881—a meeting which was attended by a very small number of its Fellows, yet the character of the work which was done was useful, and laid the foundation of the triumphant success which has since been attained.

Nomadic in its beginning, the next meeting was in the city

of Philadelphia, on the 31st of May and the 1st and 2d days of June, in the year 1882. At this session a fellowship of only twenty-five were present, but the work was practical, full of zeal, and showed that the Association was to become, in the not distant future, an altar upon which would annually be laid valuable contributions to surgical science; and the world saw, even at that time, its membership was destined soon to become earnest and zealous, as laborers in the interest of human progress and human suffering.

The third session was called together in the city of Cincinnati, on the 31st of May, 1883, and forty Fellows, all told, constituted its full strength. Its first volume of *Transactions*, which was published after that meeting, attests the amount and value of the work which was accomplished. Everything then seemed to foreshadow a bright future, and nothing transpired to dim the occasion, save the absolute refusal of our beloved founder and president to accept a reelection to office. That great man, the Nestor of modern American surgery, the founder and the cherished idol of this Association, Samuel David Gross, standing without fear and without reproach, held that he had no preëmption right to office, and contended that he had occupied it long enough. He thought that his reelection would be at variance with the genius of our republican institutions and the habits of the American peoples. He believed that rotation in office should be the order of the day, not only among politicians, but among scientists and professional men. He felt that his highest ambition, as respected this Association, had been accomplished. He appreciated clearly that the work which he began was exceeding his most sanguine expectations, and was surely destined to pass into history. We knew that we were losing the guiding hand of a great pilot, and we were loath to permit him to leave the helm of office to serve in the ranks. In the language of a gifted Fellow of this Association, "Had the constitution conferred upon us the power, we would have put on him the royal purple, and, hailing him chief among all, have bid him wear it for life." But he was inflexible, and that meeting was the last he ever attended. Those of us who were present on the closing day of

that session can never forget his trembling words and tearful eyes when he said: "Now that I am about to retire from the discharge of these duties, I feel sure that the interests of the Association will be perfectly safe in your hands, and in the hands of my distinguished successor. I have no greater ambition than to live in your affection and esteem, and to witness the ever-increasing prosperity of this Association. Its success is closely associated with the remainder of my life. I believe that we have here an Association which is destined to become a power for good in the land, and when I am dead and gone, you will not, I am sure, relax in your efforts to make it what its founders intended it should be, a great and lasting institution. God bless you, gentlemen, in all the relations of life! and may you ever be faithful to the interests of the profession, and the code of ethics in connection with which we have carried on our work."

Gentlemen, these were the farewell words of an old patriarch to his children, and they should sink deep into your memories, for they were spoken by a truly great man, one of those who are—

"Born beneath the aspect of a bright-eyed star,
And whose triumphant adamant of soul
Is but the fixed persuasion of success."

In less than one short year from that day, he rounded up his great life—and rested.

The future was before us! When from Cincinnati the Association took a new departure, and under the leadership of that venerable and gifted surgeon, Edward Mott Moore, we next assembled here, in the city of Washington, on the 30th day of April, 1884—from that time it can truly be said that we have had "a local habitation and a name."

Time does not permit me to enter into the details of our annual sessions which have been held in this city each spring nor to mention the interest and enthusiasm of our Fellows, which have made these reunions so pleasant and instructive as they have been. Suffice it to say, our successive and successful meetings from then until now, under the guiding hands of Moore, Briggs, Gunn, McGuire, Agnew, Cheever, and Yandell,

have gradually passed from small beginnings to the present prosperous and renowned Association which has assembled here to-day.

When this Association was first organized, anæsthesia had but enlarged the domain of surgery; to-day, antiseptics followed by asepsis have emboldened the surgeon to undertake and to perform operations hitherto deemed impossible.

Whilst anæsthesia had measurably lessened shock, antiseptics with asepsis have gone a step beyond, and done much toward the prevention of septic results, thus making the possibilities of surgery even greater.

In the last decade, the rapid and steady advances of the chirurgic art have far outstripped all other departments of the profession, and with the constant and seemingly never-ending improvements now going on in all the branches—the discoveries in chemistry, with the consequent additions to our *materia medica*; the revelations by the microscope, leading to a proper understanding of pathological lesions and the clearing up of doubtful points in physiology; together with the many new precisions in the study of all the branches of medicine—have enlarged the vista before us, so that no one can predict the limitations which may not be reached in the next ten years. It was but yesterday when the closed cavities of the body were held as sacred; the organs within the abdomen, the lungs and heart within the thorax, the brain and spinal cord cased by the skull and vertebral column, were each surrounded by a deadline which none dared to cross. To-day, they have each become the legitimate fields into which the surgeon has carried his knife.

The Old World, and the New World, shoulder to shoulder, have been busily engaged in blazing out the pathway from art to science!

If our friends from abroad should ask what has been done here in America, and what hand has this Association taken in the good work, I could tell them, if it would not be considered invidious for me to use names, what our Fellows have been doing in abdominal surgery; their operations upon all the organs

contained in the abdomen; their improvements in the treatment of gunshot and other wounds of the intestines; their work done in the thorax; and show them that the brilliant achievements of Horsley, Godlee, Macewen, and others across the Atlantic in brain surgery, have been reproduced here with equal success. Even were it proper to do so, time will not permit me to enter into detail of the brilliant work which has been successfully done by the Fellows of this Association in all the regions of the body, both external and internal; suffice it to say, American surgeons have not been idle, nor non-progressive, and their work has been placed on record.

Whilst this Association has been advancing the cause of surgery, and doing much to alleviate the distress of suffering humanity, it is sad to have to relate that Death has been busy in our ranks, and that some of our best and most eminent Fellows, even in the midst of their labors and the height of their usefulness, have fallen in his harvest and been gathered to their fathers. Their loss has proved a serious and irreparable one to the Association, no less than to the country.

Since our organization, we have been called to mourn the loss of twenty-one of our brothers, among whom we chronicle the death of two ex-presidents, four ex-vice-presidents, four members of the Council, and seven of our Honorary Fellows. Only a very small number have resigned; whilst, on the other hand, the applications for membership have vastly exceeded the number of admissions.

It is, indeed, gratifying to know that those who have fallen from our midst were earnest and zealous laborers in the cause of surgery, and enthusiastic in their efforts to advance the best interests of this Association.

Now, when we pause to drop a tear of sympathy and sorrow upon the green sward which covers them, we are solaced with the recollection of their many virtues, and the assurance that, although they have passed to the great majority, they had reached eminence in their profession, and have left behind them records of well-spent and useful lives—they live honored in our memories!

It is proper to mention that much of the success of this Association has been due to the indefatigable labors of our efficient secretary, who, from the date of our organization to the present time, has been distinguished for the unwearying and unselfish zeal which he has shown in the duties of his office, and he deserves the highest commendation for the work which he has accomplished. No less are we indebted to the recorder of the Association for his labors, for to him especially is due the editing and publication of the beautiful volumes of *Transactions* which have followed our annual meetings. Lastly, though not least, all praise should be accorded to the Fellows themselves, for their zealous coöperation in all the labors of our annual sessions, and their successful endeavors to make the Association what its founders intended it should be—"a great and lasting institution."

During the ten years which have passed so rapidly away, it will be observed that the Association has steadily advanced in prosperity and usefulness, winning for itself an honorable station among the learned societies of this country, and claiming the admiration of those of the Old World. Its volumes of yearly *Transactions* are replete with valuable scientific productions, worthy of their authors, and honorable alike to the Association and the Nation. Its membership, comprising the leading surgical talent of the land, has fostered an *esprit du corps*, such as is to be found only among refined and agreeable gentlemen.

Bound together as we have been for ten years, new acquaintances have been made, and they have ripened into friendship; old ones have been renewed and cemented; and to-day the American Surgical Association stands before the world a united brotherhood, inspired with one sentiment, that of doing good to suffering humanity, and advancing that department of the healing art to which they have consecrated their lives.

In this connection, a justifiable pride impels me thus publicly to say: from the day of our organization to the present hour, in all our public and private relations, in our intercourse with each other, in our scientific discussions and social reunions, there has not been one single occurrence, one harsh word to mar the har-

mony of the occasion or disturb the friendship of its Fellows! Verily, this is a record strange and unusual in the history of medical associations, and deserves more than a passing notice.

Such, in brief, is the outline of our past, and whilst we have every cause to congratulate ourselves upon the successful termination of the decade we are leaving behind, it is still necessary that we shall comprehend the importance of the trust which has been placed in our keeping by the founders of the Association.

Holding in our hands its spotless record, it is a happy privilege to be able to feel that we desire its history hereafter to be but a just development of that which has gone before, so that the ever-opening pages of its future may continue to be lighted, as they now are, by a bright reflection from its past. Now, let us here to-day join hands around this family altar, and renew our vows to make her still greater than she is.

Before closing, I beg to be permitted to make a few suggestions, which, I trust, will not be taken in the light of criticism of the past management of the Association. First, I suggest that a Business Committee be provided, whose duties shall consist in the preparation for and arrangement of the scientific work of the meetings. Such a committee, duly authorized, would relieve the president and secretary of much labor and responsibility, and the work which they would accomplish would better serve the interests of the Association than if left to the will and pleasure of the presiding officer.

At the session of 1886 a resolution having this end in view was offered as an amendment to the by-laws, and, under the rule, was laid over for one year; it, however, failed to secure the approval of the Fellows at the session of 1887, and was finally tabled. I now recommend that proper action be had to the effect that the resolution of 1886 be taken from the table and passed, so that the by-laws will require a committee, composed of the president of the Association, its secretary, and the recorder, together with the two senior members of the council, to take charge of the preparation of the scientific work of the Association. Their duties should be to select such subjects for the regular essays as they deem best, and have the appointment

of those Fellows who are to lead in the discussions of these papers as, in their judgment, they believe will serve the best interests of the meetings. It should be fully understood, however, that all volunteer papers be left to the option of the Fellows, without the interference or control of the committee.

Although there has not been, as yet, any constitutional provision for such a committee, still we have had, during the present session and the one immediately preceding it, the benefit of an unofficial committee, which has been of vast service in the organization of the meetings; and I now take this opportunity to acknowledge my own indebtedness to them for the very valuable assistance which they have rendered to me in preparing the work of the present session.

Secondly, I suggest that our present limit of fellowship be increased from 100 to 150. I am induced to make this suggestion entirely in view of the vast extent of our country, and the large number of young surgeons throughout its wide domain who are rapidly rising to eminence in their chosen branch. When this Association was first organized it was then the part of wisdom that our restrictions should be limited, and our membership confined to a small, select body of workers. Now the situation is different, and, having passed the stage of adolescence, we are prepared to extend our field of operations, and in doing so it is but proper that we should remove the obstructions of exclusiveness. With our present limit of membership we are arrogating to ourselves too much when we claim to be the representative body of American surgeons.

In this I do not desire to be misunderstood, because I would urge that all due vigilance be exercised in the admission of new Fellows; the present high standing of the Association must be preserved; age, scientific attainments, with surgical experience and general culture, should be the necessary prerequisites for admission.

We have set up for ourselves a high standard, and we can maintain it only by guarding our portals against unworthy applicants. Besides protecting ourselves, we must remember that

each one of the conjoint associations is in honor bound to stand sentinel at the doors of the Congress; and as membership in that body can only be had by virtue of fellowship in one or another of the special societies, it is a duty which each one owes to the other to protect the purity of the confederation.

It should be our aim and attainment to make the Association the representative body of surgical science in America, and to accomplish this most desirable end, "genuine ability and solid work must be the indispensable qualifications for admission, and continued scientific activity the recognized duty of membership." With such a standard before the world, it will soon become a high and coveted honor to be known as a Fellow of the American Surgical Association.

Now, leaving the larger views I have expressed for a subject which should be nearer and dearer to us all, though not on that account a narrower sentiment, I ask your indulgence only a few moments longer.

It is well known to the world at large, no less than to the profession of which he was an honored member, that Samuel David Gross stood first in the foremost rank in his chosen branch of the profession, and that the high position to which American surgery has attained all over the world is largely due to his example and his teachings.

Since he has passed away and his life-work gone into history, we fully appreciate his real worth, and therefore it is that his friends and admirers have been inspired to erect a monument to his memory—such a monument as will bear testimony of their gratitude, and be in the future an incentive to those who are to come after us to like noble deeds. To further this praiseworthy enterprise, I suggest that a committee from this Association be appointed to confer with the friends and admirers of Dr. Gross, and with the medical profession of the whole country, to determine the best method to be adopted to secure the requisite amount for the erection of a monument, either of marble or of bronze.

Such tributes to the memory of distinguished men are common, both in this country and abroad; and when in our own

profession a man is found who has done so much to adorn it, it is meet that we should show to the world our appreciation of his works.

Dr. Gross was probably more widely known and appreciated than any American surgeon of recent years; and when we remember the thousands of his pupils scattered throughout the whole of America—men who sat under his teaching, and who still retain of him the warmest memories—it is not expecting too much when we feel assured of their coöperation in raising speedily, and without difficulty, the requisite amount for the completion of such a monument.

I do not suggest that this work be done by this Association exclusively, nor would I advise it if it could be. I would prefer to see it done by the profession of the entire country, because Dr. Gross belonged to no exclusive faction, but was a member of the profession at large. It is proper, however, that this Association take the initiative in beginning the movement, and I feel assured that there will not be the least doubt as to the successful issue of the undertaking.

If any man in our profession has merited such a tribute, surely Dr. Gross was most eminently entitled to it; for he was a man "animated by fervent attachment to the science and practice of his profession, and it was the duty of his life to augment and exemplify the resources of surgery; and by most assiduous and successful application of his time and his talents, his name has become known and honored, not only in his own country, but in every land."

Appreciated and honored as he has been in life, let us now, since he is dead, build to his memory such a monument as will bear witness in after years to the estimate in which the profession of to-day holds its distinguished members.

If it were asked of me where such a statue should be erected, I would answer: Not at Easton, in the State of Pennsylvania, the place of his birth; neither at Cincinnati nor Louisville, where he laid the foundations of his future greatness; nor even in the city of Philadelphia, where that greatness culminated in all its grandeur—but here, in the city of Washington, the capital

of the country which claims him as her own. His name and fame are a sacred heritage to the country at large, and to the profession he loved so well! Then, here in this beautiful city, amid these verdant parks and hard by these massive piles of classic architecture, let us place it; place it among these statues, emblems of a nation's gratitude to her illustrious dead—her statesmen, her warriors, her jurists, her philosophers—build it here, so that in the ages to come, when the youth of the land make their pilgrimages hither, they will behold the monument which their forefathers reared to commemorate the life and character of her greatest surgeon. It will teach them to emulate his example!

