

The origin, aims, object, and usefulness of the Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association; presidential address delivered before the Medical Practitioners' Association May 10th, 1894 / by Frederick H. Alderson.

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Alderson, Frederick Henry, 1839-1908.
Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association.
Royal College of Physicians of London

Publication/Creation

Leicester : Publisher not identified, 1893.

Persistent URL

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THE
INCORPORATED
MEDICAL
PRACTITIONERS'
ASSOCIATION.

BY

FREDERICK H. ALDERSON, M. D.

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SL 126-2-a-2761 (06) (42)







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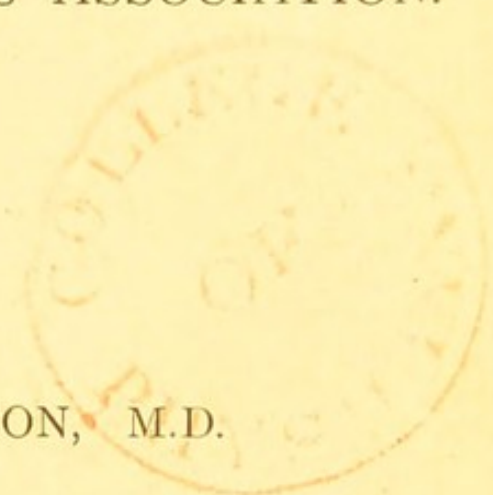
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BY

FREDERICK H. ALDERSON, M.D.



[Presidential address delivered before the Medical Practitioners' Association
May 10th, 1894.]

LEICESTER :
REPRINTED FROM THE "PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL,"
JUNE, 1894.

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THE ORIGIN, AIMS, OBJECT, AND USEFULNESS OF THE INCORPORATED MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS' ASSOCIATION.¹

BY FREDERICK H. ALDERSON, M.D.

TIMES and seasons are useful in retrospection, and on this occasion of our annual meeting I thought it might not be unacceptable or prove uninteresting to occupy the short time courteously placed at my disposal for my farewell as your president in giving a brief history of the origin of this society—of its aims, its objects, and its usefulness.

On the 4th of March, 1891, a few medical men met in Threadneedle Street, by the invitation of Mr. George Brown, to consider the advisability of forming a society that had for its object the improvement and advancement of the medical profession. The new society was proposed to be a bond of union between general practitioners, whom it would weld together through the sympathy of their calling, their common wants, and their varied and too many grievances.

The herald or exciting cause of the birth of the society over which I have had the honour of presiding during the past medical year was in this way: Government had appointed, at the instigation of the Charity Organisation Society, a select committee of the House of Lords to inquire into the causes of hospital abuse, or to ascertain if such abuse of hospitals, as had been so freely mentioned, and were so injurious to the well-being of the medical profession, and so hurtful to the public, did exist. A prominent member of this committee, Colonel Montefiore, wrote to me asking if a body of general practitioners could not meet together and collect evidence that would be valuable to lay before the Lords' Committee, and in reply I referred him to our first president, Mr. George Brown, the editor of the *Hospital Gazette*.

¹ Presidential address delivered before the Medical Practitioners' Association, May 10th.

This suggestion, which I was unable to act on owing to the distance of my house from town, Mr. Brown did, and the result of the meeting convened by him was followed by the birth of the Medical Practitioners' Union, with Mr. George Brown as president, and a council was formed of men well known as earnest reformers in the medical profession.

The objects of the Union were :

(a) To consider the question of the abuse of medical charities and to obtain evidence thereon, and to take such steps as may be necessary to safeguard the interests of the general practitioner.

(b) To obtain increased and more efficient representation on the General Medical Council, especially for bringing pressure on that body to exercise its power in suppressing illegal medical practice.

(c) To supervise all legislative propositions calculated to affect the interests and prospects of that bulwark of the profession, the general practitioner, and to *deal with all matters* affecting the well-being of men in general practice. Such were the early aims of the General Practitioners' Union and if our aims were less high, as undoubtedly they were, compared with the very comprehensive and practical scheme as your Council place before you to-day, and which has been so carefully and ably drafted by my colleague, Dr. Bedford Fenwick, under the presidency of our earnest and vigorous founder, Mr. George Brown, we were soon able to justify our birth, and gave practical evidence of the utility of our existence, for we evidently supplied a long-felt want and did work that no other society could or would do.

Several of our members gave valuable evidence before the Lords' Committee both on the hospital question, and also against that crude and ill-advised Midwifery Bill; and second, to the great efforts of Dr. Rentoul, our society, perhaps, did more to prevent that ill-digested measure from becoming law than any other body. A Bill which the Lord President of the Privy Council designated, with the cautious words of a statesmen, as "an impossible Bill."

It was this society that first called forth the evident opinion of the profession that the direct representatives of the Medical Council should be general practitioners. Such

was a little of the direct work during the first year of the Society's existence ; but its *indirect* value in having proved the power of combination, the strength of union, the fellowship of sympathy, has been, perhaps, greater : neither should I omit to mention that by the society's influence your president polled the great number of 4,818 votes at the last election of the direct representatives of the General Medical Council, and my colleague, Mr. G. Brown, a still greater number (5,065). And if at times the action and influence of the society seemed somewhat silent and apparently inappreciable, it has, nevertheless, been very real.

In the society's second year (its most trying period) we were known as the General Practitioners' Alliance ; under the ægis of Dr. Oswald we became stronger, and shortly evinced sufficient robustness of constitution to successfully overcome the trials and difficulties inseparable in societies as in humanity from infantile life ; very much was undoubtedly due to its president's judicious guidance, and ripe experience. Dr. Oswald was ever courteous, assiduous, and ever on the alert to supervise the action of Parliament in medical matters, and especially watchful as to any attempted resuscitation of the obnoxious Midwives' Bill ; at the same time the association recognises, I feel sure, the need of wise legislation to supervise and prevent the irresponsible practice of the great number of ignorant and untaught midwives so pregnant for evil and the origin of so much misery and suffering, as well as not infrequently both maternal and infantile death. These great exciting and lamentable evils have been forcibly brought to the notice of both the profession and the public by Sir Henry Thompson, our coroners, and other public men, and your council have recognised the existence of these evils resulting from the ignorant, untaught, and incompetent midwife, and by the assistance of Dr. Bedford Fenwick, have drawn up a well-considered scheme that will remedy these evils, educate our obstetric nurses, and safely protect the interests of the general practitioner, we have given much attention, much thought, to this matter of the Registration of Midwives, and will continue to watch that no Bill shall become law that would be injurious alike to the public interest, the public health, or to the medical man, by preventing him from having sufficient

opportunities of gaining practical knowledge that can only be acquired by practical experience and actual frequent attendances on women in their labour, without which experience it is impossible to become capable and competent obstetric practitioners. It is therefore the aim of our association that if midwives are to be registered it shall be not as midwives, but as obstetric nurses, or nurse-midwife, as has been more recently proposed by Mr. Bryant, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons.

For my own part, I believe, and I think every member of this Association also, if not of the profession generally, is of opinion that the general practitioners of this kingdom are able, and would be willing (if authorised) to see that every woman is skilfully attended and nursed during labour, and for such time afterwards as might be necessary to ensure her early convalescence. I have ever advocated, both by writing and argument, that every obstetric nurse should be under the supervision of and responsible to the family doctor, and neither do I think that this would entail too heavy, or prove an impossible burden upon the profession. If every woman in London were delivered by a legally qualified medical practitioner it would only give an average of about twenty-four births annually to each of the 5,000 medical men resident in the metropolis; in the provinces, where medical men are fortunately comparatively scarce, perhaps thirty per doctor.

It is true that many doctors do not care to practise midwifery, but there is a far larger number of general practitioners who would gladly, and even thankfully increase their obstetric engagements two or three-fold; and neither would it be a very laborious task for every general practitioner to have the care of thirty, or even forty midwifery cases annually. I used to know several medical men who attended 200, or even 300 and more labours each year, and a large general practice in addition. I am one with Dr. Robert Rentoul² when he writes that: "Our aim is to supply all pregnant women with medical practitioners of the highest skill; to improve the education of monthly nurses, and if needs be, and I think it is the best and only way out of the difficulty, to register such in the Register provided by the Royal

² *Vide* preface to the proposed formation of an Inferior Order of Midwifery Practitioners, by Robert Reid Rentoul.

Charter of the Royal British Nurses' Association." And this I have repeatedly advocated at our council board, and have proposed that H.R.H. The Princess Christian, the president of the Royal British Nurses' Corporation, should be graciously asked to open a register for that object (but with nurse duties only), as Dr. Rentoul wisely adds.

Our hon. secretaries have alluded in their annual report to our sessional meetings that have been held monthly ; these meetings on medico-political subjects have been well attended, especially when we remember they were held during a busy period of the year, and to many men at an inconvenient hour. The discussions that followed the reading of the papers were always good, and animated. My object in proposing these sessional meetings on medico-political subjects has been so far gained, for I think by such meetings, and consequently more frequent communications with our members, we shall more exactly, and more correctly obtain information as to the voice of the profession, especially on such subjects as are likely to come before Parliament for legislation.

As the direct result of these meetings two special committees have been formed, with myself as chairman, one on medical clubs, the other on death certification ; and although these committees have not yet met we propose to do so during the summer session, and have no doubt we may, as a result, suggest a plan to remedy these evils that may prove both useful and practical.

Before introducing to you my very able successor to this chair I have to announce that this Association has gone through the formality of even a third baptism, and yet hardly a formality merely, for we are now a legally registered society, and in our new and larger title of the "Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association" I believe we have gained in prestige and in security. I predict a great future for our newly incorporated association. I feel sure around it will soon gather a numerous and powerful section of the profession, and by which the prosperity and happiness of its members will be greatly increased. It is perhaps desirable to mention that this step of registration was rendered needful and had become almost a necessity by the Society having enlarged its borders, and with larger aims and greater powers

and scope for enterprising usefulness it was considered by your Council, who had given the subject great consideration, advisable to limit the liability of its members to any risk to ten shillings and their small annual subscription. By this step of registration, with articles of association, under the title of the Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association, we have prevented any possibility of further risk or liability on the part of its members.

And now, gentlemen, my pleasant duty has ended, save and except that of recording my grateful thanks to our two honorary secretaries, Mr. Robert Oswald and Mr. Frank Greaves, and to your very efficient council, who have so kindly seconded every effort I have made or attempted to make in extending the usefulness of this most important association, which, in the ensuing year, under the able guidance of its new and talented president, Dr. Eady, to whom this society is so greatly indebted in obtaining our articles of association and in seeing us safely through the perils and chances of registration. I predict large things never opposing, but possibly in the far future, under the presidency of a succession of equally able successors, this society may become a not unworthy second to that greatest of all medical societies, the British Medical Association, whose founder, Dr. Hastings, will ever live in the memory of its members. The British Medical Association is renowned for its excellent journal, and its development of science, of scientific research, and of the learning of its prominent members, as also for its annual meeting, with its enjoyable week of excellent papers, lively and profitable debates, healthful excursions, and friendly re-unions.

The Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association will have for its objects the more commercial and the too much neglected wants and disabilities of its members. It will endeavour to ensure the better remuneration of the profession, and it will in due time, I think, see that we are at least in part exempt from the income tax ; that we pay for our house tax not ninepence, as rich private occupiers, but sixpence, as professional residences ; that death, vaccination, school board and other certificates are paid for, and that when medical information is wanted a corresponding and not illiberal fee should follow ; to jealously guard the interests

of the profession, and to hold intact our too limited privileges, of which it behoves us to watch and see that there is no encroachment, such, for instance, as the recently revised suggestion of Sir B. Richardson, who would legalise the counter prescribing of the chemist, to the injury of the public and to the great detriment of our interests. We hope in this and like manner by the present extended scheme now submitted to you to protect and greatly increase the interests of the profession, and add materially the scope for increasing the far too slender and contracting incomes of the large majority of medical men.

My presidential duties are ended, and I shall ever remember with gratitude and pleasure the honour I have received from the "Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association."







