

Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geneeskunde South African Medical Journal

Posbus 643, Kaapstad

P.O. Box 643, Cape Town

Kaapstad, 21 September 1957
Weekliks 2s. 6d.

Vol. 31 No. 38

Cape Town, 21 September 1957
Weekly 2s. 6d.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL CONGRESS, DURBAN

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President of the Medical Association of South Africa

Dr. Grant-Whyte expressed regret at the absence owing to indisposition of His Excellency the Governor General, Dr. E. H. Jansen, Patron of Congress, and welcomed in his place His Honour the Administrator of Natal, Dr. D. G. Shepstone, Chancellor of the University of Natal. He went on to express his appreciation of his election as President of Congress and President of the Medical Association of South Africa, and paid a tribute to his wife for her help, forbearance and understanding. He referred with satisfaction to the distinguished company of visitors from overseas who were honouring the Congress with their presence, and proceeded to say:

THE ATOMIC AGE

Most of us here are, in a very real sense, products of the pre-atomic age. We are nineteenth century men. Our university education was taken towards the end of a scientific era which closed with the discovery of the nature of the atom, the amendment to Dalton's atomic theory, the

* Delivered at the adjourned Annual Meeting of the Association at the South African Medical Congress, Durban, on 16 September 1957.



Dr. H. Grant-Whyte

overthrow of the text-book axiom that the atom was indivisible.

This discovery is the greatest single discovery since Isaac Newton. It, and the energies released by this single fact, are changing the world with startling rapidity, altering the shape of all man's activities, shifting the centres of gravity of power, re-orientating social and individual lives and, as it proceeds, maybe calling for a completely new revelation of man's place in the Universe. We live on the very edge of that revelation in thought and action. Now, at its advent, its nature and character are but darkly understood, its future direction unknown, its seas uncharted. But no man can be unaware of it, even at this stage, and there are features of it which are certain to bring vast changes in the education, outlook and practice of every medical man.

It is not my purpose to traverse them all, even were I equipped to do so. Let us, however, consider one of the most obvious, and certainly one of the most interesting features of the new scientific era, the changing industrial scene as automation and atomic power are projected into the means of production,

For many years medical science has directed some of its energies to industrial diseases, of the mind as well as of the body. Man's dependence on work, industrial labour, the sweat of his brow, has had a sort of biblical inevitability, a finality of permanence, around which man has organized all his individual, social and political life. The almost biblically-ordained finality of this order is on the point of disappearing. Yesterday a man was paid to work. The size of our revolution is that tomorrow he will be paid *not* to work. The virtues and compensations of work, daily work, are fast disappearing, and with them will disappear some of the ills of body and mind which are the accompaniments of industrial labour. Already, in some countries the working week and the working day have been so amputated that even now it is possible to foresee a time when the medical problems of men *not at work* will be as important as the industrial problems of men *at work*.

You may have noticed that I have not used the word *leisure* in this context. This word seems to convey a sense of contentment and well-being, but as medical men we are already aware of the ills that beset many people who are leisured in the social and financial sense, some of which ills are the result of being *not at work*, of having *no work*, and of not enjoying the rewarding compensations of work.

It may well be, of course, that the changes of which I speak will come upon us gradually, allowing time for man to adapt himself and his political, industrial and social order to the new conditions. It is true that all scientific progress reveals an ebb and flow, periods of startling advance followed by periods of quiescence, allowing man to catch up with himself, as it were. It seems to be a feature of nature that it shall be so. But what is also true is that the periods of intense scientific activity are occurring at shorter intervals, calling for more rapid adaptation in every department of life, an adaptation which many people fail to make, with results that appear as individual ills of mind and body, and social ills demanding correction and treatment.

I confess I sometimes feel that in the physical sciences and their application, and the early prospect of even greater advances, man may be overreaching himself; and there are many people today, older people, who would advise caution, whisper 'Hamba kahle', go slow, go carefully. But science doesn't work like that, and medical science cannot afford to do so. But I do ask myself quite deliberately whether the sciences—the physical, the chemical sciences, the social sciences, medical science—are moving with the same momentum, the same speed. A striking aspect of modern scientific thought and research, as I see it, is the movement towards a recognition of the truth that all science is one. In the old days, the basic sciences were each treated almost *in vacuo*, as separate studies. Today, physics, the study of the properties of matter, the new physics, has embraced almost all the rest, including a large part, though not all as yet, of medical science.

MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

And in considering the role of medical science in the new world before us, we can pay tribute to the enormous contribution the other sciences have made and are likely to make in the future to the particular science in which we are engaged; noting at the same time that part of the science of medicine which is peculiar and exclusively its own. To-

day we could not do without the modern tools of medicine, the products of research in other sciences, from radiology to radio-isotopes, and in the future we shall draw from all other sciences, and particularly from atomic physics, the wealth of scientific achievements for application in our work.

There will, however, always be a great difference between medical science and the physical, chemical and engineering sciences. In a sense, medical science includes them all. The great difference is that whereas the sciences, pure and applied, deal with what is embraced by the term Properties of Matter, medical science is the study and care of the individual living man, *Homo sapiens*; and *Homo sapiens* is not only a framework containing all the physical, chemical and engineering sciences, and all the social sciences, but also a mind or, if you like, a soul, with all the creative forces of good within him, and the destroying forces of evil. The medical study of him ranges from his sewerage system to his personality. His ills are not merely functional and organic, matters of engineering and chemistry, and physics. They are psychological and spiritual. *Homo sapiens*, in fact, is a microcosm of the macrocosm of the sciences, not merely of the Universe but of the Cosmos. Indeed, medical science might well, very well, put over its portals the dictum, 'The Proper Study of Mankind is Man'.

And Man is a contrary fellow. He will defy all the laws and the properties of matter. He will go on living when, by all the tests, he should be dead, and he will die when by all the tests he should live. He is at once capable of the greatest sacrifice and courage, and of the harshest cruelty and meanness. Individually a god and a devil by turns, socially an organized insect, an atom in the mass of humanity. Medical science is but one source to which he looks for his welfare and salvation. It is important that it shall be equipped to perform the task awaiting it in the new world.

MEDICINE IN SOUTH AFRICA

For many years we in South Africa have been concerned with the need for the establishment here of advanced schools of surgery and physics, comparable to those of Europe and America, and conferring the degrees and fellowships of the standard and merit we have come to respect elsewhere. These colleges are now in being. They will add much to South Africa's standing in the medical world, and I am happy to think that the first President is with us tonight, my old friend Guy Elliott.

There are other contributions this country and this continent are making and will continue to make to the world's knowledge. Many of our distinguished visitors will no doubt take a piquant and lively interest in our multi-racial society, in Africa's tropical and sub-tropical features, and see something of the work that is being done to meet the peculiar problems that surround us. It has been well said, in this context too, that South Africa is a microcosm of the world, one of the great laboratories of the world, and that it offers in the broad medical sense, as well as in other fields, very special problems for investigation and research.

I have referred, for example, to the manner in which the people of Europe and America are being projected at speed from the pre-atomic age into the atomic age. It is possible, but unlikely, that the passage will be made smoothly, without

ill-effects upon those civilizations. But the African Native, in his millions, is being called on to make a vastly greater change—from a condition of near barbarism, first into an industrial era, and then into an atomic era. The scientific revolution for him is a double one. It is not to be supposed that this can be done without great shocks to African life and well-being.

Admittedly, problems of this size do not touch the average general practitioner, or even the specialist surgeon and physician, though they undoubtedly will do so in the future. I mention them here to call attention to what is, historically, a recent feature of medicine, the World Health Organization and the World Medical Association.

CONCLUSION

Occasionally in recent years I have had the honour and opportunity of attending some of the medical congresses held in other parts of the world, and I have returned only recently from the Congress of the British Medical Association held at Newcastle-on-Tyne. I always leave them with two impressions. The first is how individual a science is medical science, how personal its application, how individual our vocation as medical men, charged with the health and welfare of the patient. I am struck and sometimes awed by the fact that, no matter how vast the changes going on around us, the size of scientific advance, in the final analysis all medicine will continue to depend on the virtues of character and devotion and skill of the general practitioner,

the surgeon, the physician, and all those who come into daily contact with the patient.

And the second is how, in the very needs of men all over the world, there has appeared first the world associations of medical men, and out of them, and possibly because of them, a new 'medicine man', a sort of scientist-philosopher-statesman, some of whom are with us tonight; men who, as it were, have ranged the whole scientific world, who have touched most other worlds, and who hold the promise in them of offering to us, and the rest of mankind, a new revelation to serve us as we enter a new era.

Between the two, between the general practitioner on his daily round and nightly calls, and the statesman of medicine, if I may so describe him, lies the range of medicine now, and the role of medicine in the future. I like to think that both at the top and at the bottom, and in between, the organization we need for our tasks shall never organize away the individual character of our vocation, or socialize out of us, as it were, the instinct of service, the spirit of enquiry, the forward-looking mind, and the simple humanity, all of which should, if they do not, invest the science of which we are a part.

To that end, surely, this Medical Congress is devoted, like so many others throughout the world. To this end, all the organization that has gone into it is intended. I, as President, am grateful indeed to all those who have so willingly given of their time, energies, and knowledge, to impress our Congress as a worth-while occasion for the public good.