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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1888.

THE NUMBER AND VARIETY OF MEDICAL
SOCIETIES.

In THE JOURNAL for November 24, 1888, we made some suggestions in answer to the question, whether the formation and support of so many American associations of medical specialists was not tending to the disintegration and final destruction of the American Medical Association as the great representative organization of the profession in this country? While we then freely expressed our conviction that no fears need be entertained of such a result in the future, and candidly admitted that such National specialist organizations were affording a useful field for some members of the profession to work in, who would not work in any other, another and perhaps more important question demands more attention than it has yet received. Are there any evils arising, or likely to arise, from the organization of an unlimited number and variety of medical societies, each acting independently of all the others?

If, as is the fact, we have in each of the larger cities from six to ten independent medical societies, and in each State not only one general State medical society but several State societies of specialists, and then several societies receiving members from parts of several States, does it not almost necessarily tend to so far divide the time and work of the working members of the profession as to impair the efficiency and influence of the whole? No member of the profession engaged in active practice, can well afford to attend and

sustain properly more than one local medical society meeting weekly or semi-monthly; one State society meeting annually or semi-annually; and one National society meeting annually in different parts of the country.

If he divides his time with a larger number of societies, he lessens the amount that he can give any one; or if he tries to contribute something to a larger number he either presents the results of his work so hastily and imperfectly prepared as to be of little value, or he reads substantially the same paper to three or four different medical societies as an original contribution to each. One of the most important defects in the contributions to medical societies in this country is, incompleteness, arising from insufficient time and attention given to their preparations. But those who advocate the organization of as many independent medical societies, local, State, and National, as there are special departments of the science and art of medicine, evidently overlook one of the fundamental and important objects to be gained by professional society organizations. This object is, to bring those representing all classes and interests in the profession *together* at stated intervals, that by personal acquaintance, friendly intercourse, and mutual interchange of knowledge, personal and sectional prejudices should be removed, the common-stock of professional knowledge and skill increased and more widely diffused, and the unity and power of the profession as a whole greatly strengthened. Instead of fostering this fundamental object, the organization of an independent society, local, State and National, for every *specialty* in medicine, only tends to keep the cultivators of each isolated from the others; or if any attempt is made to obviate this by bringing representatives of all these together once in three or five years, it still leaves the great body of educated and faithful general practitioners out of recognition, and directly makes the line of distinction between the specialist and practitioner more plain, and more rapidly develops into full maturity the class distinctions of specialists, consultants and general practitioners with their inevitable jealousies and bickerings.

On the other hand, with one general medical society in each city, county and State, with one National society constituted of representatives from all these, and in each of which the practitioners of every department of the healing art

can meet on a common platform ; and yet within the regulations of each, sections sufficient to accommodate the more detailed work of every legitimate specialty ; we would have the most complete professional organization possible ; combining all the inspiration, homogeneity and power derived from unity, with every advantage for detailed scientific work in the several Sections, that could be afforded by any number of separate specialist organizations. We wish every intelligent, earnest worker in our profession would give more thought to this subject. If in "union and harmony there is strength," it logically follows that in segregation and discord there is weakness.