

MEDICAL CHARITIES

SPECIAL CONFERENCE AT B.M.A. HOUSE

A meeting in connexion with medical charities was held, as part of the Centenary Meeting, at the British Medical Association House, Tavistock Square, on Monday, July 25th, under the chairmanship of Sir THOMAS BARLOW, Bt., President of the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund. There was a very large attendance.

The CHAIRMAN said that the primary object of the meeting was to consider the different agencies which existed for helping members of the medical profession in emergency, such as a long and tedious illness, which prevented a man from following his profession, or financial difficulties which very often arose entirely unexpectedly. Medical men were not generally good business men; they were often not wise in investing their money, and did not always realize the importance of insuring their lives. Yet another emergency arose when members of the medical profession died and left their families inadequately provided for. He reminded the meeting that the matter was brought up and discussed at very early meetings of the Association, and at the fourth Annual Meeting, which was held in Manchester in 1836, the Benevolent Fund was instituted, afterwards assuming the title of the British Medical Benevolent Fund, and a few years ago becoming the "Royal." This Fund was always independent, but the British Medical Association was its foster-mother, and to the Association it owed a great deal. Eight years ago the Association took the very important step of forming a strong committee to review and deal with the various medical charities and to allocate grants-in-aid to the different bodies to help them carry on their beneficent work. The Royal Medical Benevolent Fund had received most invaluable help from the Charities Committee, and the committee had also given a great deal of attention to the important work of Epsom College in the education of the sons of medical men, and to the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund Society of Ireland. The Ladies' Guild of the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund was also a most important organization, and had been specially helped by the Charities Committee. Finally, there was the Sir Charles Hastings Fund, which existed for the purpose of giving help to practitioners in case of emergency.

Royal Medical Benevolent Fund

Dr. C. O. HAWTHORNE, speaking for the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund, said that his colleagues in its management desired him to express their appreciation of the action of the Association in affording an opportunity during the course of the Centenary Meeting for the needs and claims of the Fund to be brought before members of the profession. Not a few of the applications that came to the Fund were made by elderly practitioners or their widows, broken by suffering and age and loneliness. They had doubtless started life with the expectation of professional and domestic success, but fate had decreed otherwise, and their closing years were spent in poverty and distress unless the Benevolent Fund was available to help them by means of contributions from those to whom a happier fate had been decreed. The distribution of the Fund could not be ruled solely by sentiment. It required prudent and impartial administration, and every applicant for assistance had to submit evidence of his bona fides sufficient to satisfy a committee which met every month for this purpose. The evidence could usually be checked by inquiries made on the spot by the local honorary secretaries, to whom the Fund could not be too grateful. One thing further was needed—namely, the good will and practical co-operation of members of a profession not without some reputation for practical sympathy with misfortune.

Epsom College

Dr. HENRY ROBINSON, on behalf of Epsom College, explained that the college carried out two functions, which in many ways were separate, although they overlapped at the centre. The first was the alleviation of pecuniary distress amongst doctors and their dependants, and it distributed in pensions each year about £4,700. The other function of the college was to maintain a public school at Epsom, where the sons of medical men or women could receive a first-rate public school education at fees which were within a pound or two per annum of the actual cost. At the centre these two functions overlapped, because at the college about fifty-two sons of medical men were educated, boarded, and clothed entirely free, and a varying number were received at half fees. The college required an income of about £9,500 a year, which had to be collected mainly from members of the profession. The subscription list came to about £6,500 a year, this sum including the very large donations which were given annually by the Medical Insurance Agency and by the Charities Committee, and the remaining £3,000 came from invested funds. He spoke of recent developments at the college, including the last big project—namely, the rebuilding of the school sanatorium, at a cost of about £28,000. The college now had the best school sanatorium in England, and Rugby had recently sent a committee to see it in order to obtain some ideas for the rebuilding of its own. There was a great deal more that could be done if further funds were available, and it was the ambition of the friends of the college that it should never have to refuse a free education to the sons of medical practitioners when it was proved that their parents or guardians could not provide it for them. In conclusion, he suggested that the medical charities might well be remembered in the wills of medical men, and a further suggestion was that more should be done to make known the excellent work of the Medical Insurance Agency and its large contributions to medical charities.

The Irish Benevolent Fund

Dr. ALFRED E. BOYD spoke for the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund Society of Ireland, which represented both North and South. The society had been in existence for ninety years, and during that time had done its best to look after the members of the profession in adversity, their widows, orphans, and dependants. The society was a small one; during the past year it had eight medical men, seventeen orphans, and seventy widows on its list, and dependants brought up the total number to 222. Of the sum distributed—namely, £2,426—invested funds provided £1,530, while subscriptions obtained through the central organization and through the Branch secretaries amounted to £784. Therefore the dead gave twice as much as the living. He asked Irishmen in practice in Great Britain, when they had fulfilled their duty to the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund, to remember the old homeland and their brothers and sisters who needed their help.

The R.M.B.F. Guild

Lady CHEATLE spoke for the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund Guild, which had been in existence for twenty-three years. The desire of the Guild was that every doctor's wife in the kingdom should help it, and if that were the case the Guild would never have to plead for more funds. The main branches of the work were relief and maintenance, and education and training. With regard to the former, it was very difficult for some people to imagine the terrible poverty that had to be faced in many cases. The members of the Guild went into the homes of their sisters, homes that had been devastated by poverty, and tried to help them to rebuild their home life. They got into touch with poor mothers who found themselves practically penniless and with no means of providing for the education of their children. The Guild also had to deal with a very large number of unmarried women, doctors' sisters and the older members of the family, ladies who had never been trained to do any work at all. Every case that came before the Guild was investigated personally, and the members sometimes found these ladies