MEDICINE AND THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY¹

In its inception medicine represented the effort to palliate or cure ills already fastened upon individuals. With advancing understanding of value in social machinery there came naturally a development of interest on the part of the community in organizing itself to guard against disease or ill health, and in some measure in protecting itself against the individual. As in practically every form of scientifically planned activity for human benefit, medicine rapidly passed beyond the stage of mere palliation, correction or warding off evils, and became a positive or constructive agency building along new lines where once it sought only to repair or to protect.

Methods and rate of advance in evolution of medicine have varied greatly. The development of a desire to carry proficiency to perfection has produced an art. A permanent cast of open-mindedness has produced research.

Achievements of the science and art of medicine which have made possible modern wonders of antiseptic surgery and of immunization are now followed by efforts aimed toward complete elimination of diseases, as in the epoch-making activity of the Rockefeller Foundation in eradication of yellow fever.

In addition to correction, cure and prevention of disease, much constructive work has been done in bringing our physical condition, at various stages in development of the individual, to a level of effectiveness not known in earlier generations. Research on the eye, coupled with utilization of lenses, gives continuing effective sight. Increase in number of deaths from troubles of the heart and of the circulatory system in general, which seem to come with higher average age, stimulated study of these organs in their relation to physiology of the whole body, with results which may give us new lease of life.

Although its effort must always be directed largely to curative and preventive functions, medicine is now in the distinctly constructive stage.

Discussion of questions touching evolution of society implies justification for the assumption that society will continue to exhibit changes of the nature

¹ Read at the public exercises of dedication for the School of Medicine and Dentistry of the University of Rochester, October 25, 1926.