

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS ADVENTURES IN DERMATO-VENEREOLOGY*

by
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In the beginning, let me assure you that I shall try my best to rise up to the responsibility of the highest office which an association can call upon a member to accept. As a president, I shall not review the difficulties and problems of our speciality calling. With the help of my former chief and our past president, Dr. Fernandez, we had done this in the souvenir of the IVth All India Conference at Bombay. I commend you to look back to the "Speciality Problem of Dermatology" abstracted therein and to the presidential address. I have personally considered these documents as articles of faith and tried to follow many of the suggestions. Based on these, we have initiated changes in the organization of our department. We have now introduced M.D. at the Bombay University so as to put our speciality on par with the other specialities in standards of proficiency and training. With the help of our esteemed colleagues from the Northern India branch, we have also tried to follow up this policy on a national level by representing the views of our association at the conference on the postgraduate medical education which was organized by the Indian Medical Council. I have to request you to try to do your best wherever you are by following up these suggestions so as to bring about a national uniformity in our speciality.

It is on the theme of adventures in dermatology that I wish to crave your indulgence today. These are adventures of building our speciality organizationally, academically, scientifically and in its practice. Each one of us has an adventure in store in any of these directions which may suit an individual's genius. We have just begun to build a plinth on the solid foundations laid by our predecessors. I also have a vision that the edifice of Indian Dermatology would be fine. To fashion this edifice aesthetically, each one of us should have an artist's urge of creation. It is immaterial if an individual creation is a small or a big painting, or a sculpture, or whatever place an individual's contribution may take in the final gallery, but each single contribution has a place, and there are vacant places for every contribution.

Now I hope to recount some of these adventures which some of my colleagues and I have enjoyed, and I beg to be excused if elements of personal performance creep in this account. At the beginning of organization of the IV Congress of our Association at Bombay, I mentioned to my colleagues of the Western India Branch who were to bear the brunt of organizing, that the objectives of holding the conference would be two. The first objective was to show the depth and the range of our speciality to the public, as an act of public relations. This function is the most essential one which can only be performed with credit by an association and not by any member individually, however eminent he may be. The lay as well as the

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non-dermatologic medical public do not know what we are doing or are capable of doing. The second objective was to create a platform for exchange of scientific knowledge and to set a stage for academic competition. Looking back to know how far our expectations were achieved by this conference, I may be permitted to give some statistics if you believe in them: To acquaint the public with our speciality, we had organized an exhibition of Skin in Health and Disease in 17 sections with more than 500 photographs illustrating the intricate structures and functions of the skin, microbiology and mycology of infectious dermatoses and histology of skin, hairs and nails. We chose many pictures of picturesque diseases, illustrating the gamut of dermato-venerology and leprosy. We put up these pictures to acquaint the public with our speciality and to gain their sympathy and support for our cause. The exhibition was attended by more than 7,000 spectators and on the last evening there was a long queue to get in before the closing time. Watching this gave me a special pleasure, because I saw our idea coming into a reality. As a follow-up of this exhibition, we got an invitation from the All-India Radio to put up a scientific discussion, on the problems of our speciality. This was done by a panel of four members who remained anonymous in the highest tradition of public conduct. All these activities resulted in scientific and financial gains to our association. The former is reflected in increased and improved scientific contents of our journal. Our managing editor is now taking an adventurous step forward to make our publication bi-monthly. It is reasonable to presume that the journal and the scientific activities of the association are interdependent and one cannot thrive without the other. Finally the objectives of creating a platform for scientific exchange and for generating academic competition are being now achieved better by making our meetings annual. I take this opportunity to thank the Governing Council of the Association of physicians of India for welcoming the amalgamation of our meetings, despite many inconveniences. I may mention here that ours is a unique liaison not to be found in many parts of the world. Moreover by our liaison with the bigger body of physicians, we have a chance to present the dermatologic view of medical problems to them and improve our knowledge of the internal medicine content of our speciality.

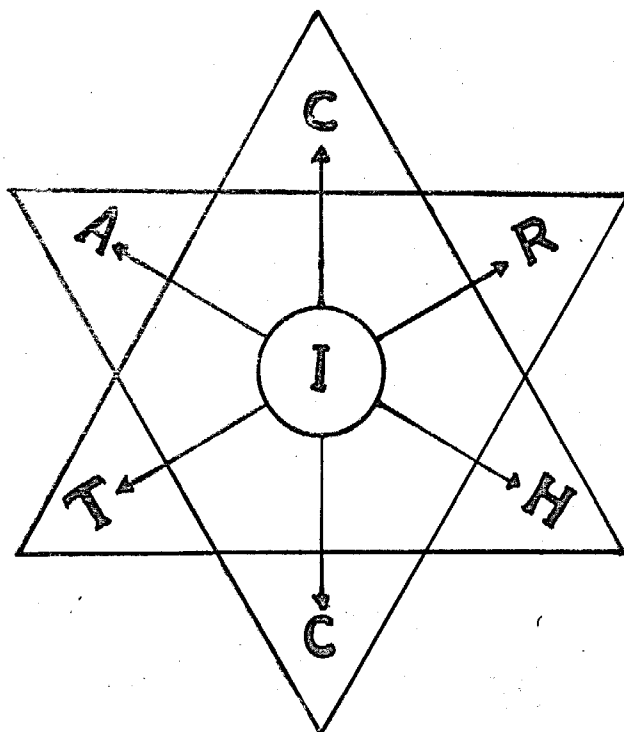
Here I should like to bring to your notice one of the most memorable adventures in dermatology I was privileged to experience in the United States and which I wish our association may emulate. This was to see the organization and working of one of the biggest training programmes put up by various schools of dermatology at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Dermatology. These programmes were attended by as many as 1500-2000 enthusiastic dermatologic disciples consisting of the youngest first year trainees to the oldest dermatologists, who were still capable of learning. I viewed these meetings as a speaker and a spectator and I got a feeling of being in a fixture of dermatologic sports of intense academic competition and associated with an all-round good comraderie. I hope that we may devote a part of our meeting in future in organizing training sessions in our speciality on similar lines, so that our confe-

rence may also serve as one of the forums for all India dermatologic education and training. These are some of the organizational adventures in store for those who have a capacity for this work. This will also set the stage for others to perform with a worthwhile dermatologic message to give.

To improve the quality of the message, I may take the liberty to indicate some of the basic requirements for a scientific adventure in dermatology. The stage is now set for anybody who has an "Itch of Curiosity" and an "Inherent Ability" to pursue a dermatologic hobby. These are the first two of the most basic raw materials required for a scientific pursuit and in the latter I include investigative as well as clinical research. Prepare a proposal setting forth the aims and objects, set down the methodology based on your working facilities and abilities. Work out a minimum budget and send it to the Indian Council of Medical Research and hope for the best. The Council has recently set up a committee to promote researches in dermatology; while specialist committees on leprosy and venereology are already in existence. To help members in this area, our association had set up a small scientific committee before the Bombay Congress. Barring two or three inquiries this committee had an easy and a sleepy time. Make it work by sending your proposal for a preliminary chat with your friends on this committee, if you wish. Ask others who are at this game to find out how your ideas sound. I have found that this process helps in correcting deficiencies in one's objectives or in methodology. After this preliminary processing do what you like—in or against the light of your friends' suggestions. I should like to call this process as that of an "Intellectual Rapport", which is necessary in the present circumstances when all of us do not have an access to the vast literature. I found this an interesting procedure which may or may not improve one—because some of us are beyond improvement; but at least it builds good dermatologic friendships. The next steps in the making of a scientific adventurer have been found to be more difficult. They are "Individual Tenacity", "Individual Critique" and lastly "Intellectual Honesty." Setting up of methodology for a new experiment may take time to establish—and sometimes it may never. This process requires tenacity to persevere. At this step you may have to modify the method or drop the project. At the next step the results start coming in. These may be, and usually are "funny". I mean by this word "not as expected" by the working hypothesis. This situation requires a good "Individual Critique" to interpret the results. You may be able to fit them into a new hypothesis and proceed further. If one cannot proceed on this, one comes to the last and the most difficult step of having the need to exercise "Individual Honesty", and to report the results not as expected but as they are. Honesty is the most important ingredient—as the Squibb would like to put it—to establish one as a reliable worker. This quality also develops in one the ability to retrace wrong interpretations. Interpretations go wrong more often than the observations, even with the best workers. Surprisingly we find that many—particularly those who do not take scientific pursuits as an adventure—find it difficult to correct or report on their misadven-

tures. By this process, one rises in stature in the scientific world. If it is realized that it is not the scientific abilities of a worker which are at stake in the process of withdrawal but the scientific truth and their reputation, things would become easy, since no price is too big to pay for one's reputation.

In summary, I should like to present a diagram of these attributes which are required in the making of a true adventurer in science as six-pointed star. By now, perhaps you have already guessed that these attributes also operate in the broad fields of life and not only in science.



This brings me to the end with a plea that please do not consider my presentation today as a "Star" example of an "Egocentric Individual" or as pious platitudes of a president, but use this star as an instrument of judging the star value of the endeavours of each one of us—members, scientific participants, teachers of dermatology, and office bearers of our association—in the glorious adventure of building the edifice of Indian dermatology organizationally, academically and scientifically. All these activities must lead to improvements of standards and of quality of our practice, and this must be the ultimate aim of the dermatologic common weal. Let us do it in friendship, and with equal regards for each other's abilities which may be in any of these fields, none of which is more or less important than the others.
