The Sixteenth Joseph M. Mathews Oration
The Legacy of the Mathews Orations*
GARNET W. AULT, M.D.
Washington, D.C.

The Joseph M. Mathews Oration was established by the American Proctologic Society as a tribute to one of its Founders, its first President, who was the first ethical physician in America to limit his practice to Proctology.

These Orations are our heritage from the past and our guides to the future. It is our good fortune that the Orations have embraced a broad spectrum of intellectual interests, for we have been rewarded by many thoughtful presentations. From them, we have received inspiration and wise counsel.

Historical Background

At one time, some confusion existed as to who had given the first Mathews Oration. As a result, incorrect numerical designations were assigned to some of the early Orations. The official list, which I obtained from the office of the Executive Secretary of our Society, has served to guide me in assigning the proper numbers to these orations.

During the 1929 meeting of the Society, held in Detroit, Dr. Granville S. Hanes of Louisville, Kentucky, presented a biographical sketch of Dr. Joseph MacDowell Mathews. Dr. Hanes, who had been a student, associate, and partner of Dr. Mathews, gave his appreciative audience a first-person intimate glimpse of Dr. Mathews. So far as I can discover, this was the first biographical sketch of Dr. Mathews presented to this Society. Since then, this 1929 paper has sometimes been erroneously referred to as the first Mathews Oration.

During the 1938 meeting of the Society, held in San Francisco, Dr. Alfred J. Zobel of San Francisco delivered a paper entitled "Historical Proctology – Three Decades of Proctology." This was an account of 30 years of practice, beginning with his student days, but it was not designated a “Mathews Oration” in the 1938 Transactions of the American Proctologic Society (page 178).

During the 1938 meeting, the report of the Secretary-Treasurer, Dr. Curtice Rosser, stated “that the Council had under consideration . . . perpetuation of a biennial oration to honor the founder of the Specialty and our first President, Joseph M. Mathews.”

During the 1939 meeting of the Society, held in Brooklyn, New York, Dr. Rosser informed the membership that, "We agreed, in San Francisco, to the continuation biennially of the Joseph M. Mathews Oration. The second of these will be delivered in 1940."

Therefore, it appears that the decision to designate the paper of Dr. Zobel, as the first Mathews Oration was made at the 1939 meeting of the Council.

The Orations

The first Mathews Oration (1938), delivered by Dr. Zobel (President, 1916) at the San Francisco meeting, was a delightful nostalgic reminiscent account of the practice and development of proctology covering a span of 50 years. "Historical Proctology—Three Decades of Proctology" was a most appropriate beginning for the Mathews Orations.

The second Mathews Oration (1940) was delivered by Dr. Alois B. Graham (President, 1920) during the Richmond, Virginia, meeting. Dr. Graham was a Senior Fellow at that time. He had been elected to membership in 1908. Dr. Graham, in a kindly and gracious manner, told us of his stimulating contacts with some of the Founders who were vigorous proponents of the specialty: teachers, organizers, good surgeons and courteous gentlemen, whose wise counsel was sought by all who had contact with them. His Oration, "An Appraise-ment of the American Proctologic Society," discussed the growth of the specialty and the training of specialists and evaluated the role being played by members of the Society in the development of Proctology.

The third Mathews Oration (1942) was delivered by Dr. Jerome M. Lynch (President, 1917) at the meeting held in Atlantic City. His oration, "Know Your Patient," was a thoughtful philosophical discussion of the need for, and desirability of, a more personal knowledge of the patient. It is of interest that Dr. Lynch felt that the physio-

logic surgeon would be the internist of the future. His discussion of physiology and surgical practice of his era is interesting.

The fourth Mathews Oration (1946) was delivered by Dr. Curtice Rosser (President, 1932) during the San Francisco meeting. Of the many respectful tributes accorded to Dr. Mathews, this oration "The First Proctologist," is the most comprehensive study of the man and his era contained in the records of this Society. There is abundant evidence of detailed study and research on Dr. Mathews' life and the accomplishments of our remarkable Founder in this Oration: "Here was a man of better than average training, certainly well above the average intellect of the physicians of his period, whose interests and published observations included all the phases of colonic and rectal disease then known. . . . Joseph MacDowell Mathews, because of native intelligence, industry and medical honesty, nevertheless left behind a record far above this goal."

The fourth Oration represents an objective that many may strive for but few will attain, for it obviously represents a labor of great dedication and respect for Dr. Mathews and our specialty. This Oration is replete with examples of the medical and surgical practice of the era. It is most informative with respect to the local and national attainments of Dr. Mathews. Our Society can be proud of the substance of this Oration, presented to us by a dedicated physician, an excellent surgeon and a distinguished proctologist.

Dr. Louis J. Hirschman of Detroit (President, 1912) presented the most significant Oration of historical interest when our Society celebrated its 50th Anniversary during the 1949 meeting in Columbus, Ohio. Our colleagues, honored guests and friends, many of whom were members of the Royal Society of Medicine, met with us. Dr. Hirschman chose "The First Fifty Years of Proctology" as the title of his Oration. Historians will find a wealth of significant