The medical hospital and institution is in a position to treat the sick with such appliances and with such measures as no individual practitioner can command. There are no great machines required in the art of healing, but the serious surgical operations which demand special care, the BRAND method of handling enteric fever, the MITCHELL rest cure are measures which one can hardly deny are better employed in a hospital than in the home. Then there is specialization. The dispensaries as manned at present are in no position to give accurate or careful treatment to those who make use of them; but what might not an institution, having in its employ paid specialists and demanding a moderate fee for its services, do to systematizing and making thorough the treatment of those who come to it for relief? The patient would meet the registrar, he would then be sent to the ophthalmologist, aurist, laryngologist and other “ists.”...

The trade unionists fought machinery and were defeated. They preached organization, and organization gave them as weapons only the boycott and the strike, and these failed them because of machinery. The hospital is the machine, specialism is a part of it and against these the doctor will find it useless to fight. He must recognize the trend of affairs, the natural evolution which goes from the general to the more particular and again to the organization of particulars into a complete whole. If he be wise he will strive to adapt himself, he will make use of the machinery about him and he will associate himself with others for cooperation....

The doctor through organizations has been able to accomplish much for his own good and that of medicine in general. By legislation, he has raised the standard of requirements for entering on the study of medicine, thus limiting the number who engage in the profession. He has succeeded in controlling the work of medical schools. He has been able to educate the community to respect regular physicians somewhat as the trades unions have been striving to do with their labels. And the medical society’s boycott is a very strong one. But something more than legislation is required to meet the newer combinations. Laws will not prove effective in fighting hospitals and dispensaries, either in suppressing those already in existence or preventing their spread.

The doctor as a private physician working for himself will more and more find his position disappearing. There will be general practitioners in out-of-way places as there are now; there will be men of rare talent and ability who will attract by their personality and who will remain individualistic in their work....


May 8, 1897

The Physician and the Hospital

A subject which at present seems to provoke considerable discussion in medical associations and in medical journals, is the so-called “Dispensary and Hospital Abuse” question. It is by no means a new one, but probably it is being looked at from a different point of view. The profession of medicine, like that of theology, has seldom been considered in a commercial sense. Doctors are supposed to be poor business men and are usually judged by other methods than those which hold in the laws of trade.

The medical guilds and societies which have existed since the earliest times have been concerned more with the advancement of learning and the forwarding of the science of medicine than with any pecuniary betterment of its members. Guilds in the trades have held out for shorter hours of work, more pay, recognition of members of the union, etc. Doctors of Medicine, however, have usually been their own masters. The tools necessary for the profession were owned by themselves individually. Just as in the earlier days of industry, when each shoemaker, each carpenter, each weaver and potter was his own employer and rendered his services direct to the consumer.

In industry things are changed; the factory has come into vogue and a few persons own the tools and the machinery, while the mass of workers are merely “hands,” whose product belongs to the factory owner who gives in return sufficient only to keep the “hands” alive.

In the medical profession a similar state of affairs is beginning to exist. In the large cities there are no huge factories to employ medical men, but there are huge hospitals which occupy the same relative position. When machinery was introduced the poor individual artisan whose livelihood it took away was very bitter in his opposition. In England the factories were burnt and the machinery for woolen manufacture destroyed by the weavers whom it displaced; but machinery triumphed, concentration of capital increased, the factory system like some great juggernaut swept everything before it, crushing out the lives of the skilled trades and doing away with the individual shoemaker and weaver. Of course, when disinterestedly we take a calm retrospective view of the situation, we feel that this evolution in industry is as important and essential as the change from stage coach to steam locomotive in transportation and not in the least to be regretted.