

A Half-Century of Progress—Editorial

RAYMOND E. SOLLARS

Associate Director, Prosthetics Education Program
School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles

"Surgery has changed; the methods of half a century ago are unlike those of the present day. Toxic germs, the bane of the surgeon, have yielded to antiseptics and the mortality attending amputations for the removal of diseased and mangled parts has become minimized. Many lives are now saved by modern surgery which in former times would have been lost. All these have served as important causes in creating new fields and enlarging old ones for the prosthetist."

The preceding paragraph might have well been written last month—but it was actually written more than sixty-three years ago. It will be found as the closing paragraph of the first chapter of "A Treatise on Artificial Limbs," copyrighted in 1898 by A. A. Marks of New York. It is certainly as timely and true today as it was at the turn of the century.

As the reader proceeds through this book of 544 pages, he is brought to the conclusion that many of the devices and concepts now being taught and applied were already being considered at the time the book was written. In many cases it is quite apparent that Marks was stopped more by the lack of materials than by the feasibility or workability of his ideas. If polyester resin, neoprene, anodized aluminum and other such modern materials had been available in his day, the field of prosthetics would have made giant strides forward.

This writer is sorely tempted to refer to the period from about 1900 to the end of World War II as the "Dark Ages," since the advances during that time were minor. The art and science of prosthetics was relegated to the shop, and the voice of the salesman was heard throughout the land.

The salesman is still with us, and no doubt will always be—but the art and science of prosthetics is moving forward again, toward the goals envisioned by such men as A. A. Marks.

Yes, Mr. Marks was a man of vision. Just as we must give him credit for many of the ideas that we consider new today we must also acknowledge that he foresaw the need for prosthetics education.

Again we quote . . . "The schools of medicine and surgery should add to their curricula the subject of prosthesis . . . there is today no textbook upon the subject whereby the student can be tutored upon advanced American methods . . . education is needed, and legal protection should be granted. No man should be permitted to construct artificial limbs until he has given evidence of his fitness. The laws of the state and the country should be as rigid in licensing prosthetists as they are in licensing dentists."

It took a long time, much longer than Mr. Marks might have thought, but today that needed education is available. Just as fast as new materials are making old ideas workable and creating new ideas, new knowledge (and the good "old knowledge") is being disseminated to all prosthetists who have a desire to improve themselves and a will to learn.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is sponsoring the prosthetics education programs now offered, "to enlarge the supply of trained personnel for the rehabilitation of physically or mentally handicapped persons, to improve the knowledge and skills of personnel already engaged in rehabilitation services, and to develop an increased awareness of rehabilitation philosophy and methods on the part of personnel in all fields contributing to the total rehabilitation process."

We have only pity (and little of that) for the prosthetist who still insists that A. A. Marks was wrong, that everything has already been discovered and nothing should change. He is as ridiculous as the man who insists that the automobile must go because it has ruined business for the buggy whip factories.

The man we want to meet is the one who exists somewhere in the United States today—the prosthetist who will make use of all the knowledge and education available to him, and who will then go beyond that to take his place alongside such men as A. A. Marks in the history of prosthetics.

MORE LIMBS FOR OVERSEAS

We have recently received a report from Mr. Eugene J. Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer, World Rehabilitation Fund, concerning response to the article in the March issue of the Orthopedic and Prosthetic Appliance Journal by Howard A. Rusk, M.D., President, World Rehabilitation Fund, appealing for contributions of used but serviceable orthotics and prosthetics.

Within the first few weeks after the article appeared in the Journal, the World Rehabilitation Fund had had approximately 20 inquiries from readers of the Journal interested in making contributions.

Mr. Taylor reported that CARE, Catholic Relief Service — National Catholic Welfare Conference, Church World Service and the American-Korean Foundation are participating in the project. Organizations which wish to make contributions are urged to write to the World Rehabilitation

Fund, Inc., 400 East 34th Street, New York 16, N. Y., sending them two copies of a list of items being contributed (e.g. 5 AK prostheses, 4 BK prostheses, 1 upper extremity BE prosthesis, one child's bilateral leg brace, etc.). The World Rehabilitation Fund will then write the contributor the name and address of the warehouse to which the contribution is to be sent. The contributors are asked, if possible, to pay the shipping costs, which are tax deductible. If this is not possible, the items may be sent freight collect, or smaller shipments may be sent parcel post and the World Rehabilitation Fund will reimburse the contributor the cost of the postage.

Thus far, shipments have been sent to the following countries: Bolivia; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Ecuador; Egypt; Greece; Haiti; India; Iran; Israel; Italy; Korea; Lebanon; Pakistan; Philippines; Peru; Turkey; Viet Nam; and Yugoslavia.