



WILLIAM OWEN BALDWIN, M.D.
Montgomery, Ala.
1818-1886

*Twenty-first President, A. M. A.
New Orleans Session
May 4, 5, 6, 7, 1869*



W. O. Baldwin

THE SELECTION OF Dr. William O. Baldwin of Montgomery, Alabama, as president, and New Orleans for the annual session was made with the thought of encouraging a larger attendance of members living in the southern states, as well as a renewed interest in the Association. There was the further hope that this meeting, but a few years after the close of the war between the States, would tend to heal the wounded feelings engendered by this great conflict. In the address of welcome by Dr. T. G. Richardson, later president of the Association (1878), were these significant words: "I extend to you a greeting on behalf of a once gay and brilliant metropolis of the South, yet nevertheless can show you in our cultivated gardens a flora unsurpassed in beauty and variety, and exhibit institutions of learning and benevolence of which any city might be proud. And, lastly, we can introduce you to a people whose honest pride has not been broken by defeat, whose recuperative powers are quite equal to the misfortunes they have endured, and whose hearts beat with warmest regard for those whose mission is to heal the bruises and bind up the wounds of our common community."

Doctor Baldwin at the time of his election was just under fifty years of age and comparatively little known by the general profession before the New Orleans meeting. He was born in Montgomery, Ala., August 9, 1818. After receiving a good collegiate education, he began the study of medicine in the office of Dr. McLeod of Montgomery

and later attended the medical lectures at Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky, graduating with the degree of M.D. from this institution in 1837 at nineteen years of age. He became associated in practice with Dr. Wm. K. Bowling (president A.M.A. 1875) and continued until 1848 when he spent a year in Europe visiting the leading medical centers.

After his return he resumed his practice in Montgomery, and with his studious habits and fine medical preparation he soon attained high rank among the foremost practitioners of his section.

His address as president at the New Orleans meeting expressed his scholarly mind and rare scientific spirit. Evidently deeply conscious of the tragic memories of the moment, one marvels at the tactful phrasing of his opening remarks: "To me, gentlemen, this occasion is one of solemnity and significance; standing here in the great metropolis of the South, I find myself surrounded by men representing nearly every section of a country so lately arrayed in hostile strife. At a time when every other organization has been shaken to its center by the passions of deadliest hate; at a time when the most matured conservatism has been overmastered by the vindictive fury which has swayed the popular mind; you have been drawn hither from homes far distant over highways full of painful historic incidents, through territories watered by the blood and tears of a sorrowing nation and you have assembled here as brothers and friends to unite your offerings to a common science."

The theme of his address was medical education. He deplored the lack of more definite progress in elevating medical education during the twenty-two years of Association history.

He stressed the need of cultural training and better preparation for the study of medicine, expressing it thus: "Natural endowments, individual skill, personal ingenuity, the keen insight of genius all have their value, but a professional man of the present time, much more than ever before, must rely for honorable success on an exact and extended education." He made comparison with the system of European medical education and made a strong appeal to the Association to assume a greater responsibility towards elevating the standards of American medical education.

Following the New Orleans session Dr. Baldwin was a faithful attendant at Association meetings and always had a prominent part in its proceedings.

He had been chosen as one of the Vice-presidents of the Ninth International Medical Congress which was to assemble in Washington, D. C. in 1887, but death came to him at his home in Montgomery, Alabama on May 30, 1886 at the age of sixty-eight years.