DR. CHARLES C. BASS, DEAN
AN APPRECIATION Presented by Rudolph Matas, M.D., New Orleans

“This is an address on behalf of the Administrators and Faculty of the Medical School of Tulane University of Louisiana, at a luncheon given in honor of Dr. C.C. Bass, on his retirement from the deanship, on January 27, 1940, at the Hutchinson Memorial Building.

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“You should not be the grave of your deserving; Rome must know the value of her own; ‘twere a concealment worse than a theft, no less than a traducement, to hide your doings”         – Coriolanus, Act 1, Sc. IX
Someone has said that a single flower in a man’s buttonhole is worth a ton of roses piled upon his grave. Today we have assembled here to put a few flowers in the boutonnière of a dear and honored friend. Not that he needs to wear them, but that we need to bestow them; for any nation or institution that fails to honor its citizens who have arrived and achieved, will have no young men of tomorrow capable of arriving or desirous of achieving. And further, does not the Scripture as expounded by its most renowned apostle exhort us “to render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor;” and, are we not enjoined by the same holy authority, “Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.”

Dr. Bass’ life and works are familiar in their greater outlines, to those of us who have lived in his environment, but there are several notable facts in his heredity and early childhood which are important in foreshadowing the most striking features of his professional career.

Born on his father’s farm at Carley, Marion County, Mississippi, on January 29, 1875, exactly 65 years ago, he was descended from a long line of sturdy, long lived, energetic and God-fearing people who have been made comfortable and happy by their wise cultivation of the soil, as farmers and planters, until the Civil War and its consequences came to prostrate them financially. Dr. Bass speaks reverently of his father and mother and of their influence in shaping his future destiny. From them he inherited an unlimited flow of energy and by their precepts and example, he had instilled into him the severe, but salutary, philosophy of a life of labor, constant and faithful devotion to duty, perfect honesty and uncompromising- rectitude.

His mother, Eliza Wilks, still living at 85, is a wonder of energy, managing her household and business interests.

The father, Isaac E. Bass, was descended of a family proverbial for their honesty and inexhaustible capacity for work. “None can work as hard as a Bass,” was the current saying in the county. At his death on October 14, 1933, at age 83 years, he was survived by his devoted wife and seven of their children: Dr. C.C. Bass, Dr. Elizabeth Bass, Dr. Cora Bass (Mrs. A.A. Pigford), Rear Admiral Ivan E. Bass, U.S. N., Mr. Isaac H. Bass (who manages the family estate and owns the Bass pecan industries), and two married daughters, Mrs. A.S. Applewhite and Mrs. H.W. Greer. From an admirable oration delivered over his remains by one of his closest friends- Senator H.C. Yawn, of Mississippi-we are told that Isaac Bass was a cheerful, trustful, hopeful spirit, undaunted in adversity, honest to self torture, in the discharge of his obligations. He lived to recover his lost fortune and to be solaced and comforted in his last days by the consciousness of the great legacy he was leaving to posterity by giving the world sons and daughters who had attained notable distinction in their chosen fields of labor, far beyond his fondest expectation, and who, by their outstanding services to humanity, had not only brought fame to themselves but blessings to the world.
According to one of his best informed biographers, Dr. Bass as a child showed an inquisitive mind, stimulated by his parents, who gave him unceasing encouragement in his school studies and in his boyish but original experiments. As a result, the boy, Charles, doctored his father’s animals; he used his father’s shops to make his own wagons, machines and fish traps; he experimented with such widely diversified hobbies as bees, and flying machines.

At 14, he went to Jackson and graduated from Wyatt business college. At 15, he entered the high school at Columbia, Mississippi, and graduated at 18 (1893). This high school course and his preliminary country school training were the extent of his general education. The next two years he spent at home working with his father. His last farm work was to raise a crop of cotton and his father gave him the proceeds of the crop for his first year in the Medical School.

During these early years the local physician (Dr. L.D. Dickerson) lived in his father’s house and before he was out of his teens, Charles had medical books of his own. Encouraged by his parents, he had read some medicine before entering the medical school.

At 22, he married Miss Coraline Howell, of Edwards, Mississippi, and from this happy union three daughters and a son were born.

In the fall of 1896, he matriculated in the Medical Department of Tulane and was graduated M.D. in 1899. Characteristic of his enterprise, he passed the medical examination of the Mississippi State Board of Health and during vacations practiced in the vicinity of his father’s farm.

As his father had suffered heavily in a great financial panic, Dr. Bass sent himself through his second and third years in the medical school, using borrowed money to a great extent.

After graduation (1899) located in Columbia, Mississippi. It was the town where he had been a lively school boy. The family physicians of the region were two mature, well established men, to whom everyone readily accorded the title “Doctor,” but Bass was a plain “mister” to these people. However, “Mister Bass” or “Doc Charley” understood his native country and its people and at the end of five years was “Dr. Bass” in earnest, with an extensive country practice. Before the end of the period he began to realize his need of a fuller knowledge of medicine. In 1903, he attended the meeting of the American Medical Association in New Orleans. There he heard papers read on hookworm disease, which had not, at the time, attracted general attention, nor was it supposed to exist in the United States to any extent.

While listening to these papers, he said to himself, “Hookworm! That’s what the matter with those children back there in the country.” He bought a microscope and went back determined to study those children. During the next seven or eight months he was able to recognize and treat 75 or 80 cases of hookworm disease and in this way was one of the first to appreciate the importance of uncinariasis in the South (1903).

These early revelations of the advantages of scientific training for laboratory research deeply impressed him, and it was his varied laboratory experience that was the most important factor in molding the plan for his later life. Realizing the paramount importance of the microscope in the diagnosis of disease, he registered at the John Hopkins Hospital in 1904, where he spent the greater part of that year working at clinical microscopy with Dr. Charles E. Simon and in the clinics and the laboratories of the Hospital. It was then he realized his liking and decided inclinations for research.

After his stay at John Hopkins School he decided to locate in New Orleans and he opened offices in the Macheca Building in October, 1904. He soon realized that the people of the city differ greatly in their living
conditions and ways from the farmers of Marion County and that he, himself, was a "country doctor." Presently, Dr. John B. Elliott, Sr., took him under his kindly patronage and gave him a chance to teach as clinical assistant at the College, in his department (1905). It was a great opportunity for a young man, although no salary was attached to the position. As he had little practice, he devoted himself to research. To this end he fitted a private laboratory in his own home, where he did most of his work in perfecting the technic and epidemiology of hookworm disease. His continuous work in this field put him in line for promotion; his teaching and laboratory ability became recognized and in the spring of 1907 he was appointed a salaried assistant in the laboratories of clinical medicine. With this appointment it may be said that Dr. Bass’ scientific career fairly began and once started, his curriculum vitae sped on at a rapid pace. From 1907 to 1909 he became the director, and continued in charge until 1912, when he was elected Professor of Experimental Medicine, a position which he has held to this day, despite the arduous and time consuming duties of the Dean’s office, to which he was elected in 1922, and has continued to hold to the present day of his retirement, January 29, 1940,-18 years.

In summing up his professional career, we see that he has been 41 years a Doctor of Medicine, M.D., Tulane (1899-1940); 35 years continuously a teacher in Tulane, including 18 years of his deanship in the faculty. He was 24 years old when he graduated M.D.; 30 years when appointed instructor; 37 years when Professor; 47 when Dean, and 65 at the close of his deanship.

It would be out of order on this occasion to attempt to enumerate the multitude of researches and productive experimental studies that he contributed to the progress of hemic and intestinal parasitology in all its aspects. His work on malaria and his discovery of a method of cultivating the specific organism (1911)-the Plasmodia-in all its polymorphous aspects in vitro, outside of the human body may be regarded as his magnum opus and a great technical triumph in hematic parasitology. It has permitted the study of the natural history and reactions of the parasite in all its purity and its differentiated types. All the great parasitologists and hematologists, such as Theobald Smith and C.W. Stiles, had deemed this feat impossible. But Dr. Bass’ ingenuity, skill and patience prevailed over obstacles, and he fairly succeeded in raising a pure and unadulterated breed of the parasite at will, just as he has succeeded previously in isolating the ova of the uncinaria, or hookworm, by making them perfectly free from the intestinal excreta.

In April 1912, he sailed for Panama, with Dr. Foster M. Johns (Tulane, 1912) as assistant, under the auspices of the Department of Tropical Medicine of Tulane, and remained there three months working with all the facilities afforded by Col. Gorgas, at the Government Hospital in Ancon. Time and constant watchfulness are necessary for the success of such investigations. Dr. Bass has been heard to say (but not for publication) that during his stay in Panama, he worked 15 hours a day and took only two Sunday afternoons off. On his return the cultures, specimens, photographs, apparatus and technic employed were exhibited by Dr. Bass at the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography held in Washington, September 23-28, 1912. Dr. Bass’ malarial exhibit was regarded as the leading feature of the Congress. Bass had triumphed and completed the pathogenic trinity of malaria causation. A Frenchman, Laveran, had been the first, in 1880, to discover the parasite in the blood; Ronald Ross, an English army surgeon had described its mode of transmission by the anopheles mosquito in 1899; it remained Bass, an American, once a Mississippi country doctor, to discover the means of breeding it at will in all its purity that it might be the better studied.
There is no doubt that if an anthology of the malarial plasmodium—this beautiful, but fearfully dangerous parasite—is ever published, it will claim Dr. Bass among its most conspicuous contributors.

It was for his commanding position in the field of research and for his contributions to medical education that he was chosen President of the Southern Medical Association in 1926.

His scientific merit has been recognized by many societies which have conferred on him numerous titles and honors, notably by the award of gold metals by the Southern Medical Association, by the American Medical Association, by the Mississippi Medical Association, by the Orleans Parish Medical Society, all in recognition of the originality and great importance of his scientific work and conspicuously for his research in malaria; and no less, a gold medal by the National Institute of Social Sciences for contributions to the welfare of mankind.

Without pretending to do justice to his work in other fields of research besides malaria and uncinariaisis, his early investigation of the opsonic index and autogenous vaccines, which took him to England in 1908 to study the methods of Sir Almroth Wright; his later work in the vitamin diseases, beriberi and pellagra (which he was the first to recognize in Louisiana); his simplified methods of diagnosing typhoid fever; his known studies in pyorrhea and amebiasis; and, latest of all his discovery of the cause and mode of transmission of the “quail disease” so important for the future success of the quail farming industry, will suffice to show Dr. Bass’ versatility and enterprise. This last contribution was undertaken after Dr. Bass’ sixty-fourth birthday, and while very busy and active with the administration of the Medical School.

In closing this very sketchy survey of Dr. Bass’ activities, I can only stress his merit as a contributor to the progress of the medical science in the particular department in which he figures most conspicuously. I believe the judgment of the experts who are most competent to pass upon his merits has long ago accorded him a high seat in Louisiana’s Hall of Fame, and has inscribed his name as an indelible intaglio in the memorial tablets of America’s contributors to scientific discovery for the good of humanity at large.

From the viewpoint of Tulane, the benefits derived from Bass’ 35 years of teaching have been incalculable, especially the thousands of our alumni who have been trained under his eyes in a department of medical science (clinical microscopy and experimental medicine) which is a sine qua non in the modern concepts of a doctor’s training, a department which Dr. Bass, himself, lifted in the school from the pioneering stage to the present proud position it now occupies in all progressive medical schools.

But more than this, the scientific career of Dr. Charles Cassedy Bass will remain a perennial example of success of the highest scientific order attained despite the hardship and obstacles that the actual practice of medicine in a rural district would seem to oppose to the realization of any scientific ambitions on the part of the practitioner.

In going over the biographic records of the 13 professors who have occupied the Dean’s office in the course of the 106 years that the medical department of Tulane has been in existence since its foundation in 1834, we find that they were, each and all, men of outstanding general ability, and distinguished experts in the various departments in which they specialized. Apart from the functions of the deanship, all, with very rare exceptions, have left their imprint upon medical history or upon medical literature. As a whole, they represent a great and glorious company of whom this institution may well be proud, for they are all worthy of a crypt in the pantheon of Louisiana’s medical immortals.

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While Dr. Bass’ record as a scientist, discoverer and teacher needs no further commentary, I beg for a few more moments of your indulgence to comment briefly on the final results of his administration. Here we must halt the very threshold of the discussion to recognize that no dean, to my knowledge has been tasked with heavier burdens or more complex problems than those assailed Dr. Bass at the very onset of his administration. Suffice to mention the building of the Hutchinson Memorial, the delicate negotiations required to meet his specific bequests and those of the philanthropic foundations; the architectural problems involved in erecting a structure that would meet not only the actual requirements of medical education, but those of the near future which were looming in the horizon. It was in meeting these requirements that Dr. Bass employed an originality and clairvoyance that has made this building and the teaching that is being conducted in it an unique school, unrivaled by any other building designed for the same purpose. One outstanding feature is the arrangement of private offices for each senior medical student who consults patients and conducts his office in a professional manner for a year before graduation. This system, first instituted at Tulane, has been adopted by several other large medical schools.

I consider that the remarkable and unique success of the architectural plans of the Hutchinson Memorial Building to meet the requirements of medical education, medical charity, medical library and the manifold socio-medical functions of hospitality in the service of medical organization—which it fulfills so admirably—is largely, if not entirely, due to the clear almost prophetic vision of the future needs of the medical school by Dean Bass. For this magnificent achievement the University and the medical profession of this city and state, I believe, have contracted with him an unpayable debt.

The transfer of the Medical school from Canal Street to its present site, at the close of 1930, and the formal opening of the Josephine Hutchison Clinics for the poor in 1931, finally brought the long delayed and long desired consummation of Mr. Hutchinson’s dream of a fitting memorial to his beloved wife, Josephine, for which he had left the bulk of his fortune, amounting to nearly a million dollars at his death, on December 7, 1902. As the physician and friend to whom Mr. Hutchinson’s had confided his intentions, I deem the moment opportune to express Mr. Hutchinson’s gratitude, were he living, on seeing his philanthropic, educational and memorial purpose so admirably fulfilled in the beautiful and marvelously conceived building that the masterful mind and endless devotion of Dean Bass brought into a living, pulsating reality during his administration.

The most notable and momentous event in the history of Dean Bass’ administration was, no doubt, the establishment of another medical school across the street, in Charity Hospital, immediately following the erection of the Hutchinson Memorial, which the malevolent spirit of a despotic politician had conceived as a deadly thrust at the prosperity of Tulane. Fortunately, this menace has been dissipated and made groundless since the erection of the new Charity Hospital. The just apportionment of its vast resources as planned by the late Director, Dr. Bel, to meet the demands of medical education, conjointly with the wisdom of the administrators of the Hospital in recognizing the fundamental rights of the Medical School of Tulane University of Louisiana as an inseparable and inalienable past of its foundation and historic mission, has given to our school every opportunity to pursue its educational mission unimpeded and in perfect harmony and cooperative relationship with the Hospital. Again, the Faculty of the new school is so largely constituted by our own graduates, that the operation of the two schools, side by side, under the same roof in the hospital has led to the feeling that the
new building actually stands for an expansion of space to accommodate the growing needs of the same family. At any rate, what was at one time a nightmare, has been converted at the close of Dean Bass’ administration, into a pleasant dream for which, I am sure, we are all thankful.

What is most comforting and assuring is that the Medical School of Tulane has never been more prosperous, more renowned and in greater enjoyment of its historic prestige and in the effectiveness and efficiency of its educational mission than at the moment, now,-at the close of Dean Bass’ term of office. I say this with all due deference and admiration of the achievements of his illustrious predecessors, and gladly, for it is within the most fragrant wreath of laurel on the desk of Dr. Bass, and the greatest inspiration for the waiting energies of his incoming successor.

If I were to sum up the distinctive characteristics of Dean Bass’ deanship, I would say they are precisely like those which he has displayed in his scientific work, which, in turn, are largely those of his hereditary traits, namely; capacity for taking infinite pains in the accomplishments of his task, seeing problems and working with perseverance to solve them, skepticism in interpreting phenomena as facts without much retesting of results, precision and exactness in technic, uncompromising fidelity to truth, rectitude and straight dealing in all the relations of life, with inability to disguise the true sentiments-moving always in straight lines, seemingly avoiding curves and detours. Evidently never believing in the quadrature of the circle, he has not accepted the circling of the square. Diplomacy, in its politically accepted sense is certainly not one of his arts, but he leaves his office with perfect demonstration that very successful accomplishments are possible without resorting to undulant lines.

Finally, my dear, Dean and friends, I have come to the real purpose of my task,—a task made seemingly interminable by the luxurious wealth of your achievements, but still necessary since a recital of these seemed to be required in accordance with academic and military usage as a citation of achievement before, presenting the insignia of merit. Therefore, in compliance with the wishes of the Faculty and Administration, permit me to transfer to you this token of their respect, gratitude and admiration, for the services, honor and glory that you have given your Alma Mater, and to us, her sons, the alumni.

In conclusion, the Faculty fully realizes that this tablet is intrinsically an insignificant token of their appreciation, but trusts that you will always keep it in the spirit which it conveys. Your real reward lies in the monument that you have erected for yourself in the spot on which we stand,—in this way closely reminding us of the famous inscription under the statue of Sir Christopher Wren, the Architect of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, which reads, *Si monumentum queries, circumspice!*