

## Editorial — On the Ideal Medical Student

The Editorial Board

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I was tempted at the outset to call this article “the Ideal Medical Student.” The magnitude of the title obsessed me. The picture of an ideal medical student is truly hard to paint. “Random Reflections” suggests a bewildered and irresponsible attitude of mind. One hopes that however random the reflections are, glimmers of truth may be seen — the contrast tends to sharpen the vision.

In attempting to lay bare a few common defects which all students show in some stage of their career, the more sensitive of us may be offended. To them I will quote the famous lines, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our own philosophy.”

Broadness of mind is a quality which is pitifully lacking in many of us. The famous Chinese philosopher’s story of a frog in the bottom of a well, telling his visitor the sea-crab, of the large heaven that is above him and the spacious world that is around him is a fitting description of many medical students. A medical student after joining the course, begins to work with an earnestness that characterises an Oriental. He reads Anatomy with a devotion that borders on insanity; he attempts to memorise Gray from the first word to the last; no other books interest him and no other opinion troubles him. One almost wonders if he is trying to find the meaning of Life in between the lines of Gray. To broaden our mental horizon, we must cultivate a sympathetic and tolerant mind. Not satisfied with a professional training alone and utilizing our spare time to our best advantage, we must try to get an education, if not that of a scholar, at least that of a gentleman. Sir William Osler discussing what a medical student should read, said “I have put down a list of ten books which you may make close friends. There are many others; studied carefully in your student days, these will help in the inner education of which I speak, 1. Old and New Testament 2. Shakespeare 3. Montaigne 4. Plutarch’s Lives 5. Marcus Aurelius 6. Epictetus 7. Religio Medici 8. Don Quixote 9. Emerson 10. Oliver Wendell Homes — Breakfast Table Series.”

When we have cast aside our narrowness of mind with its inevitable self conceit, we are on the threshold of Learning. For it is impossible for a man

to begin to learn when he has the foolishness to say that he chose not care to know or a conceit that he already knows.

Medical students are often accused of being prematurely specialised. The principle of specialisation when applied to then medical profession has admittedly its force and purpose. It is essential for the community's welfare that some medical men should be set aside for special work in laboratories — dissecting, weighing, probing and injecting. But it is only excusable, when such research work is done after their education and not as their education. Let us take the case of a medical student who matriculates at the absurd age of 16; joins the medical course and is at once initiated into the mysteries of medical education; he spends the precious five years in learning nothing else but medicine; his ambition is realised when he graduates; he attaches himself in haste to a special department and after another precious five years publishes a thesis on the circulation of a toad's web. A few people read his work, the majority ignore it. He is a specialist, par excellence, but he is not cultured. He has run himself into a groove from which he will never extract himself. Our learned Professor of Medicine's rendering of Martin Luther's famous lines into

“Who loves not football, fun, and music

In later life will cure but few sick”

has its truth as well as its humour.

The Learning about Man himself is an education which will enable us to render the best possible service in our later lives of our one or ten professional talents. There are many means to that end; sport is one and social life in the University is another.

There are far too many Gehazis among us who serve for shekels, whose ears hear only the lowing of the oxen and the jingling of the guineas. It is disastrous to begin our student life with that ideal in front of us. The Chinese are said to be very materialistic and individualistic. Our parents send us to school with the pious hope that after graduation we may be able to add to the accumulated wealth of the Family. The worship of money, the West would have us believe, is an ingrained habit of the Chinese. One thing is certain,

the West, too, worships money under the cloak of Capitalism and Industrial Progress. Such a mercenary outlook of mind is fatal to our profession. All values are only worth considering when such values are interpreted in terms of values of Human Life; so are our services of real value when such services are for the service of Humanity.

Chinese individualism tends to foster the spirit of indifference which shows itself in many of us. That spirit is antagonistic to the highest ideals of the medical profession. It is the nursery of a crippled personality. Our lives are too mutually interdependent for us to ignore the welfare of others. Medicine is a high calling and the best work of our profession is only done when men are willing to give up their lives to Science so that others after them, may live. As future members of a noble profession, let us develop a spirit which will not cast any slur on the physician's well deserved title of Friend of Man. Rather let us follow the unselfish footsteps of the great masters who have ennobled the Medical Guilds of to-day.

What personal ideals must we have? To quote once again Sir William Osler. "I have had three personal ideals. One to do the day's work well and not to bother about to-morrow....The second ideal has been to act the Golden Rule, as far as in me lay, towards my professional brethren and towards the patients committed to my care....And the third has been to cultivate such a measure of equanimity as would enable me to bear success with humility, the affection of my friends without pride, and to be ready when the day of sorrow and grief came to meet it with courage befitting a man....What the future has in store for me I carry with me; as I shall, the memory of the past you have given me. Nothing can take that away." Truly the past has been given us and we must learn its lessons; the present we have with us and we must live it well. The future has its root in the past and the Present. What we sow, we shall reap. The ambitions and imaginations of Youth are conducive to creative work. Our noble aspirations shall fire us with a zeal that is unquenchable, and perchance they shall have a part in the shaping of our future.

One last remark. Be loyal to our University — an unnecessary reminder you may say. It has often been said especially among the superficially educated foreign students in China that Hongkong University is not as good as such and such University. It is an injunction which only the feeble-minded can put

forward and it is the worst form of pedantry which one meets in China. If we all will remember that we are the only vehicle through which the University can justify its existence, we are going a long way towards making this University the true “Lighthouse of the East.”