

Editorial — On the Establishment of The Hong Kong University Medical Society (excerpt)

The Editorial Board

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Through the untiring zeal of Professor Digby and Dr. G. H. Thomas, the University Medical Society was founded twelve years ago. The membership then was not large but what was lacking in numbers was amply made up for in zeal. There were fortnightly meetings which were held in the Anatomy School. For ten years the Society existed without an organ for its articulation, and then in 1922, the Caduceus was born. From that humble beginning the Society has grown to its present size, with a widely circulating journal and a membership in many parts of the world.

Encouraging though the results have been yet we feel they could be bettered, if the aims of the Society are more clearly and widely understood by members and their friends. The Society knows neither race nor creed; we recognize no party interests nor politics, our principal aims being social, scientific and educational.

As a social factor in university life, it is intended to be the common ground where undergraduates, graduates and their friends can meet for a quiet chat over a cup of tea. The advantage of thus bringing the Past and the Present together is immense and we need not dilate on it here.

In this connection, we would like to remind our members and friends of the Annual Reunion Dinner held under the auspices of the Society, which will be announced later; we trust every one will make an effort to attend this great function of the Society.

Following on the practice of the Society in the past, we hold fortnightly meetings at which a member or a friend presents a paper on any scientific subject of medical interest. By thus fostering the students' interests on things scientific, and encouraging them to think on and discuss these things, the Society is adopting the right method in moulding their thoughts and directing them into the proper channels. One cannot overestimate the importance of such meetings where experiences are shared and views exchanged. Personally,

we have always felt that the memories of such meetings have made our love for the University richer and fuller. But we are often disappointed with the poor attendance and our lady-undergraduates are often conspicuous by their absence. And yet it is the mass of undergraduates who will benefit mostly by the Society.

With the increasing and more exacting demands of the medical curriculum, students do not have much opportunity for reading anything outside their work. And yet there are a great many subjects related to Medicine that a medical man is expected to know which is not included in the curriculum. What then can be more profitable than to sit leisurely on an afternoon listening to a paper carefully prepared by the lecturer for that day?

Again, while papers are occasionally solicited from graduates and their friends, yet preference is always given to undergraduates for it is one object of the Society to encourage them to read papers. The experience thus gained is invaluable. We do not expect a high standard of originality from students, whose time and facilities are necessarily limited, but there is nothing to prevent them from reading more or less extensively on a subject, collecting their facts, and then advancing their own views either for or against the prevailing views. In this way the attributes of fearless enquiry, courage of one's own conviction, and independence of thought are early engrained into the students' character, thus preparing these youthful minds for the Great Adventure, whose god is truth, whose confines are vast humanity, and whose aim is the relief of suffering.

The labour spent in preparing a paper is not labour lost, and the confidence obtained by getting accustomed to face an audience is an advantage not to be despised. Whatever qualifications a man may have as a scientist, as a clinician, as a researcher, or even as a general practitioner, yet if he lacks the art of conveying ideas clearly and convincingly even though on paper he labours under great disadvantage. We cannot too much or too frequently impress on our undergraduates and friends the fact that education does not necessarily mean booklore or even practical work alone. We hold that he is rightly educated, who most permits the various factors and agencies to bring out and develop the fullest capacities in him, and the Society seeks to help to develop the best and the noblest in every student.

But there is also another advantage. In the preceding paragraph, we made reference to the art of writing, but the art of speaking is equally if not more important. To speak clearly, interestingly, and impromptu, is an art not easily acquired, and only practice will improve if not make perfect. The surprising thing is that few students will seize this opportunity of educating themselves, and the result is that at each meeting the discussion that follows is but weakly participated in by the undergraduate body.

A lecturer once told the present writer that it is most disconcerting to address an audience of young critical minds whom he knows is calmly weighing all that he says, and yet when he sits down he cannot help feeling extraordinarily uncomfortable at not knowing what they think of him or of his lectures. Shyness of course and not mental stagnation, is mainly responsible for this non-committal attitude, but one would have thought that shyness as an attribute thrives only in a girls' school. Each student expects the other to begin speaking, and the result is an awkward silence broken only by an occasional shuffling, as each attempts to kick his neighbour on to his feet to begin the ordeal. The truth of the matter is that we all make mistakes in public speaking at one time or another in our lives, and it is far better to make them now than when in our mature years.

In this connection, it is interesting to note in the Nineteenth Century Review for November 1925, that a certain Mr. Keeton in a lengthy article speaks of the Chinese students' "interminable orations which are inevitable even at the committee meetings of the most insignificant recreation club in a Chinese university." For our part we have very seldom heard "orations," and "interminable orations" as descriptive of profound silence is certainly a unique way of expression. Mr. Keeton's article may be a correct description of his own class or university, but to generalise loosely, as he has done, betrays an ignorance which for a lecturer can only be described as phenomenal. All that he has said is not true of many students and certainly not true of our medical students, whose good name it is our duty to protect. To interpret the mind of the people of another race, to describe their characteristics, their customs, their history, their habits of thought, and their failings, are at all times and in all places a most difficult subject, but Mr. Keeton rushes in on grounds where older and wiser men fear to tread. We ourselves do not know him, but judging

from the article, we suppose it is written by a very young man. For youth is the age of omniscience, and gaily to undertake a task of such magnitude does require a very youthful person indeed! Still we would recommend our students to read the article even though for no other purpose than to see in what strange form courage may take.