

Notes and Comments — On The Birth of “Caduceus”

The Editorial Board

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Foreword

The idea of starting a Journal of the Medical Society of this University is not a new one. It had been suggested some years ago rather timidly, but it was not until quite recently that it gained much practical support. The time is however ripe for the formation of such an organ, and the old excuse that the Society was too young and poor to bear the burden of publishing a journal that was really worthy of the name can no longer be advanced at the present time, when the Society is not only prosperous and self-supporting but includes among its members many who are spreading the knowledge of scientific healing among the vast populations of China and the Caduceus, one has only to cast one's eyes into the future, and dwell upon the incalculable good such a journal, in conjunction with the excellent journals at present existing in China, is bound to exert in the field of research in this great country. It is not too much to say that in proportion as the Caduceus becomes wider known and its aims better appreciated, so will the influence of the Medical Society become more widespread and the University of Hongkong more a centre of medical education and scholarship for South China and the Far East. In other words, we do not intend merely to make this journal a record of the activities of the Medical Society of the University.

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We aim to make it one of the leading scientific journals in Asia. How far our aim will bear fruit depends a great deal on the support not only of the undergraduates and graduates of the Faculty but also of medical men and scientific workers throughout China. **We aim high but that is because our watchword is, “Excelsior.”**

The “Caduceus”

It will perhaps interest our readers if we give a brief account of the origin and meaning of the word “Caduceus,” which we have adopted as a name for this journal. Personally we think the name a particularly happy one, although a few critics object to it on the ground of its being too fanciful for a scientific organ such as this. They would prefer to take a deep breath and speak of it as the “Hongkong University Medical Society Journal.”

Caduceus is the Latin adaptation of the Greek for a herald’s wand. It is supposed to be the staff used by the messengers of the gods and especially Hermes to conduct the souls of the dead to the world below. We fear the layman might seize upon this explanation as a confirmation of the true function of the doctor! But Hermes’ caduceus which was given him by Apollo in exchange for a lyre was a magic wand which exercised influence over the living as well as the dead, bestowed wealth and prosperity, and turned everything it touched into gold. It originally consisted of a rod ending in two serpents with heads meeting at the top, and became the symbol of the settlement of quarrels. The very excellent cover design is the work of Mr. Basto de Castro to whom our best thanks are due.

The Medical Society, of which the Caduceus is the organ, was founded on January 12th, 1914, two years after the opening of the University itself, through the initiative of Professor K. H. Digby and Dr. G. H. Thomas who may claim to be the “fathers” of the Society.

History of the Society

These gentlemen have always shown a great interest — we may almost say, affection — for the Society. Dr. Francis Clark was elected the first President, Professor Digby Chairman of Committee, and Dr. Thomas the first Secretary. Since then the Society has flourished, but even greater progress is anticipated

in the future. No fewer than fifty meetings have been held, of which the great majority consisted of reading of papers by students, graduates and local practitioners. Some of the papers are of high merit and it is hoped that in the future members of the Society will be encouraged to read the results of their research before the Society, and have them subsequently published in this journal. Seven annual dinners and one concert have taken place since 1914, and their value in bringing together members cannot be overestimated. It would be an excellent idea if the date of the Annual Dinner could be fixed several months ahead, and members all over the world informed in time for those who could do so to attend. It could also be made the occasion to hold a conference at which members were invited to read papers and give demonstrations. Thus the University would be the meeting place for its medical graduates every year, where ideas could be interchanged and friendships formed or renewed. Prominent scientific men from China and elsewhere could be invited to this conference to give the younger generation the benefit of their experience and the fruits of their research. The University would then be able to boast a Medical Faculty which was up-to-date and alive to the needs of young China and the twentieth century.

The Place of Women in the Profession

It is a pleasing fact that the University has now thrown open its doors to women. In conjunction with the Faculty of Arts, the Medical Faculty has been invaded; and although the number of women students is not large at the present time there is no doubt that within the next few years it will be a factor to be reckoned with. Whatever other advantages there may be, it is certain that the attendance at lectures has of late been exemplary! It is difficult to exaggerate the important role medical women will play in China. To those who are acquainted with the susceptibilities of the average Chinese woman it is not strange that there should be such a widespread belief in the mission of the woman doctor in carrying the knowledge of scientific healing into the Chinese home. We therefore heartily welcome women into our Society, and trust that the time will not be far distant when they will give evidence of their presence in these columns.