


## THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY IN CHINA.\*

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 THE famous burning of Chinese books, when the Emperor, in his mad ambition to wipe out the past and make history begin in his own person, ordered the destruction of all books and records, 213 B. C., exception was made in favor of medicinal works. A writer in a Chinese medical journal says he has learned from these that there has never been a scientific study of medicine in that empire.

A system of surgery, (if one may apply the term "system" to that wherein is *no* system,) is said to have had its beginnings in the dim distance of four thousand years ago.

It seems there was, then, some knowledge of the circulation of the blood. Six centuries before the Christian Era the human body was dissected, and in the fourth century B. C. a method of cure by massage was practiced. In the third century A. D. anasthesia was produced by the use of datura, acoriete root, hemp and certain fungi combined. Hashish and an unknown incense were also employed and incantations, probably similar to our hypnotism.

About this time the Cæsarean operation was performed successfully. Trepanning was accomplished, but death resulting, the surgeon was promptly beheaded, which had a discouraging effect upon further experiments of that kind.

By the sixth century further advances were made in abdominal Surgery.

With such beginnings, and such a record, and with ages in which to develope, surgery ought to have well nigh reached perfection, yet as a matter of fact there is scarcely a Chinaman to-day who would attempt to amputate a finger.

Operative surgery is, in the major sense of the term, utterly unknown among the Chinese, and even minor surgery of the simplest character is but rarely attempted. It is amazing that a nation with a civilization and a literature, reaching to such high antiquity should be so utterly helpless in the face of the surgical emergencies continually arising.

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Knowledge of relieving which, one would imagine to be almost intuitive.

Not even the simplest tumour is ever removed, and for gunshot wounds there is nothing but the application of plasters, intended to draw out the bullet.

Venesection was frequent in past times, but has been abandoned in favor of cupping and leeching, when blood letting is considered necessary. Dr. Thompson says if fluid comes to the surface and absolutely begs to be let out, an opening is occasionally made, but otherwise an abscess remains uninterfered with; and these are often met with, burrowing in all directions, among the muscles, that ought to have been the simplest, if the knife had been used, and sinuses are carefully closed up with plasters and wax.

The sick receive almost no attention in the way of skillful nursing. Chinese doctors do not profess to know anything of obstetrics or gynecology, as it would be considered the height of indecency to call upon them for such service. Ignorant midwives attend these calls. Women are plenty in China, and are not of much consequence, any way.

The successful operations, by foreign physicians, for ovariectomy and other abdominal surgery are considered miraculous, by the common people, who are extremely bigoted and superstitious.

No post-mortems are ever allowed, nor dissections permitted. They have no idea of the structure of the body, as anatomy is a sealed book to them. This ignorance is strange when we think of the opportunities for studying the anatomical structure of the lower animals. Accurate clinical observation is the only means a student may possess, and is, therefore, essential to any progress in medical studies.

While the Japanese are said to be the most cleanly people, the Chinese are quite the contrary, and all efforts to teach them the laws of health are entirely futile, as they have no idea of ventilation, of correct diet, exercise, or sanitary methods, of any kind. Thousands of children might, perhaps, be saved from a sightless and wretched life, if only they could be taught the value of personal cleanliness, and the use of simple remedies for the cure of ophthalmia and other diseases of the eye, which are very common in China, caused by the combined influence of bright sunlight, smoky dwellings, as they use charcoal fires, filthy habits, the use of

stimulants, and the contagious character of many of the diseases.

The usual operation for entropion is performed by them by clamping a portion of the eyelid between two bamboo sticks, so as to cause a fold of the skin to slough away, a contraction of the lid being the result. I said they do not attempt surgery, but occasionally it is tried after the most barbarous fashion, such as sticking needles into the cornea of children, who suffer from conjunctivitis.

Accupuncture was practiced six centuries B. C. and the moxa was then, and is still, a favorite remedy. Nipping the skin with the fingers, sharply and with a strong hand is common. Any day in the week persons may be seen in the outdoor room, in hospital or dispensary, with their bodies more or less black and blue from their having given this treatment a trial before resorting to the foreign doctor. Even very young children being subjected to this brutal usage.

Counter-irritation seems to be the standard mode of treatment for both surgical and non-surgical cases.

They are always very sparing in their ablutions, using only very hot water. Cold water either in the treatment of fevers, as a beverage, or for cleansing is held as an abomination.

There are no native schools of medicine, no instructors, or examining boards, nothing to prevent him who wishes to declare himself as physician, or surgeon, from going out to practice.

He will choose his specialty, buy a treatise upon the subject, and begin. In Shanghai a Chinese servant learned all he knew of diseases of the eye from having waited upon the surgeon in an eye hospital. He simply watched the treatment, abstracted enough remedies from them to last him a few years, and now has a large practice of his own, as a student from the hospital.

All are specialists, for the chest, for the skin, the eye, for leprosy, small pox and snake bites; there are bone setters, pain killers, cholera doctors, etc.

Lepers are frequently met with, are not thought to be contagious, and there is no segregation of such cases. I remember when living in San Francisco. the authorities had great difficulty in taking lepers to a suitable place prepared for them outside the city limits. and small pox cases were

carefully secreted by their friends. They submit to vaccination on compulsion and last year one hospital reports six thousand vaccinations.

Let me give you a prescription used by the native fraternity.

- ℞ The gall of a wild swine, dissolved in vinegar;  
 The ashes of a wolf's skull, mingled with the fat of a viper;  
 A stone taken from the head of an eel, caught at the full of the moon;  
 Powdered scorpion's legs, mixed with some unpronounceable fluid.

But let us turn to a brighter side of the picture, for a wonderful revolution has taken place in that benighted land, thanks to the humanity of Christians in this and other countries, and the self-sacrificing devotion of men and women physicians. I read in a newspaper recently, that, at a medical congress in China lately, more than four hundred and fifty men and women physicians attended, while many in remote districts were unable to be present owing to difficulties of travel and other causes. Almost all foreign physicians are there in connection with hospitals or dispensaries, which are supported mainly by funds, either contributed by the churches of England or the United States.

There are only a few physicians in private practice, in the port cities, who are well educated, and who are there generally for their own health rather than for remuneration, which is small.

Chinese pay often by presents—sometimes in money. Many physicians do not charge for their services, just leave to the discretion of the family how much they shall give. Chinese superstition coming in here to the aid of the doctor. The family is afraid to be ungrateful lest a worse disease befall them. For this reason a friend writes she has received on a certain feast day, year after year, quite a generous remuneration.

The Chinese are observant people, and they are learning the advantage to be derived from admittance to hospitals, where they receive such kind and skillful medical attention that there is often trouble to induce them to leave when cured.

In smaller towns, where hospitals have been established and where thousands are successfully treated every year, they contribute little to their support. However, where patients are able to pay it is thought wiser to make some

charge. It is true that Li Hung Chang and a large number of other enlightened Chinamen realize that their people can never reach a high standard, as physicians, unless more thoroughly educated in the elementary principles of science.

In Hong Kong the college of medicine and surgery for Chinese, after a five years course, graduate yearly a class of young men and women, who have the finest advantages of instruction, access to one of the best hospitals, the aid and encouragement of the Viceroy, the approval of the Emperor, and the financial support of the London Missionary Society. Li Hung Chang said publicly concerning this, and other schools, that he hoped anatomy, physiology, chemistry and kindred subjects would be thoroughly studied, that science should be taught, rather than wonderful cures performed. He said if China shall ever be accorded a place among modern cultured nations it must come through the influence of physicians.

With near 500,000,000 inhabitants, and a country intersected with many streams, lakes and swamps, there must be a great mass of suffering humanity, and the door is open to the medical fraternity when it is closed to others, for the desire for the relief of pain is not confined to enlightened peoples.

Dr. Parker opened the first hospital, in Canton, for the treatment of diseases of the eye, about the time Queen Victoria ascended the throne. His reputation as a surgeon became so widespread that it was no unusual thing to see a thousand people awaiting their turn for treatment.

The larger cities and towns are fairly supplied with hospitals, both for men, women and children. Some of the finest surgeons and physicians, men and women, to be found anywhere, are devoting their lives to the relief of that nation.

Dr. Kerr who has long been in Canton, is said to have no living peer as a surgeon.

In Moukdew, the capitol of Manchuria, whence came the the present imperial dynasty, a city abounding in wealth, with a population of four hundred thousand, there is a hospital, perfectly equipped, which rivals, in ability of officers, any of our own hospitals, and has secured the approval and even admiration of the uncle of the Emperor, the governor-general, and the mandarins, who all contribute liberally to its support.

I asked Dr. Corbett lately, who has lived in China for thirty years, his opinion of the medical work there. He said "Physicians, hospitals and nurses are keeping up to date in every improved method, and new discovery". He also said the number of cures were surprising, and this view is corroborated by a medical missionary journal which I receive from China.

He told me of a Chinaman who brought his old mother 1000 miles in a wheelbarrow, to have an operation for double cataract performed. Hu King Eng a young Chinese doctor who studied medicine in this country and is now in charge of the hospital at Foo Chow performed the operation successfully and she sent home a happy son and mother. The aged are venerated in China as in no other country. America might well learn from them in this respect.

Chinese women are bound hand and foot by conservatism, ignorance and superstition, and the peculiar seclusion of the higher classes of women, renders educated women physicians a great blessing to those who have had, without their aid, only empirical attention. Therefore women physicians are doubly welcome. Li Hung Chang's visit around the world seems to have given him increased respect for them, as he has appointed a mandarin's daughter, Dr. Benu, as physician to his household. Two women, both daughters of mandarins, have been chosen as delegates to the woman's Congress in London, in 1898. They each took a four years' collegiate course in this country. I think at the University in Delaware, Ohio, and afterward spent four years in the Woman's College at Philadelphia.

There are about two hundred women graduates in medicine, scattered throughout the cities and towns of China. The greatest difficulty in the medical colleges, with the students, is, that they commit to memory like parrots, not only pages, but whole medical works; for cultivation of the memory has always been the main education of the celestial, and it is difficult for them to learn to grasp an idea, or a fact, unconnected with a formula of words.

They only need to see a thing done once to be able to do it themselves, and there is not a more skillful nation than they, when they have gold, silver, ivory, wood, etc., to deal with, but either cowardice, superstition or fear of failure makes them timid where skill is needed in surgery. It will probably be a long time before the hospitals can be entrusted to native physicians and surgeons, as it is difficult to overcome the mental habits of a people, especially when for ages, they have lived in abject submission to the state and priesthood, and have been taught with an egotism born of ignorance that all other people except their own countrymen are foreign devils.