MEDICAL PRACTICE IN CHINA.[1]

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The pitiably backward condition of the practice of medicine in China to-day not only fully explains and justifies all that has been and is being done in the way of medical missions in that country, but would seem to constitute a very serious call to the profession in this country to urge those of talent who are about to enter their ranks to seek a sphere for their abilities not in the congested districts of America, but rather in a land where, though the pecuniary rewards are small, there are unparalleled opportunities not only of rendering a philanthropic service to the countless needy but of molding the nascent medical profession of a mighty nation, and of contributing directly to the advance of science by original studies in little known if not utterly unfamiliar diseases and the conditions which produce them.

Manifestly, an exhaustive treatment of my theme would be quite out of place here, and I shall instead try to sketch it in a somewhat popular way, which though necessarily fragmentary and incomplete will yet be, I trust, perfectly fair.

We westerners are struck first of all with the amazing ignorance of anatomy and physiology which pervades not only the laity but the profession as well. Dissection, even of the lower animals, is unheard of, and the results are only what one might expect. The heart is supposed to be the center of the physical system and the actual seat of the affections if not of thought as well. It is directly connected with the other important viscera and in such an intimate way that by taking the pulse at six different points—three on each wrist—it is possible to diagnose the most "hidden" of their internal or "hidden" diseases. Tuberculosis, pneumonia, indigestion, tumors, pelvic disorders, and even the kind of poison swallowed in an attempt at suicide, all may be told by a simple touch at the wrist. And so universal is this practice among Chinese physicians that whenever I have

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had occasion to take the pulse, invariably the patient has held out to me the other wrist for me to take it there as well.

Again, we are reminded of an old error of our fathers preserved to our memories in the word "artery" or "air vessel," by the Chinese theory that there is in the human body a great system of air channels, the contents of which may under certain conditions give rise to various forms of disease, and they are thus enabled to explain bloatings from liquid or gases, the swellings from phlebitis or elephantiasis, and also those curious metastases with which we are all so familiar, but which to the western mind are sometimes difficult to explain. And in accordance with this theory, acupuncture (with unsterilized needle of course), at one or more points where such vessels join, is a common practice to let out the offending vapor.

As to digestion, I am told by a well known scholar in our city, though not himself a physician, that the Chinese teach that in the process the spleen gets into active motion and by beating against the stomach helps to churn the contents, forming as it were the pestle for which the stomach is the mortar.

The germ theory of disease with all that this implies is absolutely unknown. That certain diseases are contagious is of course recognized, but except in the case of a severe epidemic no prophylaxis, by segregation or otherwise, is even attempted. To this statement there is one exception, which is the nearest approach to scientific treatment by the Chinese that I know. This is the inoculation of infants with the virus of small-pox which has been dried and preserved for the purpose, and it is practised to such an extent that in our section of the country at least it is literally true that almost no one over two years of age has not had the disease. But even here there is a curious intermixture of error, as it is held to be essential that boys should be inoculated (which is done by insufflation) in the left nostril and girls in the right. Of course, the protection afforded by this practice is practically perfect, and small-pox is less feared by the Chinese than a common cold is by some of us; but disfigurement is frequent and fatalities by no means unknown, not to mention

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blindness and other sequelae, so that at the present time, especially along the coast where the proper virus is more readily obtained, vaccination at the hands of foreign (that is, western) physicians as well as by the Chinese themselves is enjoying relatively wide and increasing favor.

But as to other contagious or infectious diseases, such as cholera, diphtheria, measles, scarlet fever, absolutely nothing is done to protect either the individual or the community. In the case of the plague, the course of which some of us, in the past few months, have been watching with such keen interest, the Government, recognizing the futility of native methods, appealed at once for aid to the western physicians, both missionaries and others, and to these alone must be given the credit for staying the scourge. Indeed, my only wonder was that the lower officials and populace generally were ready to co-operate sufficiently to make the fight anything but the most forlorn of hopes. In this connection it may be of interest to quote a prescription for the plague which appeared in an *official* proclamation which was posted in one of the chief cities of Shantung at the very time when at least one village in the vicinity had been entirely destroyed by this disease, and was lying unburied. Several prescriptions were given in the proclamation, but a single one may suffice for the purpose of this paper. It reads: "On July 1st (!) gather spinach; dry in the sun and lay it away till New Year's morning. Then boil till done, and pickle in brine and vinegar for one year. Partaking of this will prevent the current malady." Nearly two years to prepare a remedy for a disease that kills in two days, and was at that hour furiously raging! Although protected (unwittingly) against water-borne diseases by their practice of taking almost no water except what has been boiled to make tea, the Chinese are nevertheless very generally infested with some form of intestinal parasite, the common round worm, according to the best statistics available, being almost universal. Other common varieties are the pin worm, the tape worm, and the hook worm. Some four years ago, thinking I had a case of this last named, I was surprised to recover from the stools first the eggs

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of a rather rare fluke, and afterwards the thing itself—now named *Fasciolopsis Buskii.* Later a still rarer species, Rathouisi, came to light, of which until then but a single specimen, and that much mutilated, had been observed. And finally a third species, hitherto quite unknown, is added to the list. Investigation brought to light the fact that the infection is quite common in our district and not infrequently leads to the death of the host. How widely distributed this disease is remains to be shown, but at least the incident may serve to remind us of the opportunity as well as the need for original research which is presented to all practitioners in these tropical or sub-tropical countries.

If the status of internal medicine in China is so backward, what shall we say of surgery? Indeed, though there are many Chinese who think their physicians can instruct us in the use of drugs, especially for the treatment of their own countrymen, surgery as we know it is universally admitted to be a new thing, and the surgeon is conceded an undisputed field. How could it be otherwise when splints are not used for fractures, when the dislocated head of a bone may be treated as a tumor of new formation, when hemostasis by means of forceps is unknown, anesthesia local or general is unheard of, and the extraction of a tooth without cocain is hailed by the patient with delight? Nor is this because the number of surgical diseases is relatively small. On the contrary, not only are these in good proportion, but as a result of neglect the severer types of every disease are very frequently met with. The late Dr. Kerr, of Canton, held a world record for removal of vesical stone, and I have known of tumors so large that it might be a fair question whether the tumor was removed from the patient, or the patient from the tumor.

Time fails me to speak of the work that may be done in educating the many in matters of public hygiene, of the opportunity and need for medical directors in the gymnasia of the higher schools which are everywhere springing into existence, the urgent need for sanatoria, especially for the treatment of tuberculosis and of leprosy, and indeed the whole matter of medical education generally. But I trust these questions may all be

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fully investigated by the profession in our land, and if we are inclined to philanthropy, where can we find one more worth while than to bring forth and guide to maturity in a great and growing country like China a medical profession that shall be worthy of its name?

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