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Highlights from our archives

A Gas Fire in Your Consulting Room

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It is not surprising that in 1915 the conduct of the "Great War" was dominating editorials and correspondence. Dr Henry Armit, the MJA's editor, wrote: "We regard it as our duty to call the attention of the medical profession to the necessity of exercising patriotism by sparing the country's funds and by refraining from turning the present crisis into a source of profit. We can all bear the pinch, if necessity arises, but not if we see some of our comrades fattening on the spoils."

Twelve months of war

The first year of the war has come and gone, and the prospects of an early termination of hostilities are as remote as ever. The whole world is the poorer by some five million men, according to a French estimate, while it can be stated on the same authority that no less than seven million soldiers have been wounded on the field.

The Australian Army Medical Corps has every reason to be satisfied with its year of work. Unfortunately this work is not devoid of danger, and there have been several casualties.

The first medical man to fall in the defence of our Empire was Dr Brian C Antill Pockley, who was killed on 12 September 1914. The loss to the profession of this valuable young life cannot be adequately expressed in words. From every point of view, Dr Pockley was a credit to the medical profession, to the University, to his relatives and to his country.

The spread of venereal disease

The Council for Civic and Moral Advancement has had under review the grave question of the spread of venereal disease. In order to arrive at a practical conclusion, it was thought that the opinions of the medical profession should be ascertained.

[The following questions were discussed.]

1. Is segregation of prostitutes advisable?
2. Are night clinics likely to be of practical value?
3. Can any methods of public propaganda of an educational nature be suggested with a reasonable prospect of effecting a diminution of infection, without carrying with it obvious moral objections?
4. What is the probable value of compulsory notification of venereal disease?
5. Is venereal disease spread as widely by amateur prostitutes as by professional ones?

A short, general discussion followed, but no resolutions were arrived at.

On 23 May 1915, Dr Gordon C M Mathison paid the full price. He had already achieved a high reputation in the scientific world, and we cannot find a better expression to illustrate the measure of our loss than the words written of him by Mr H W Allen: "He was wasted by the wickedness of war".

The third medical man who has died on active service is Dr Muir Smith. The story of his unflinching attention to duty and extraordinary keenness, as told by Dr Tebbutt, depicts him as he was, a staunch Australian, fearless, capable and full of determination.

In the last place, we must not fail to recall that many Australian Army Medical Officers have received promotion, and have been mentioned in the dispatches for gallantry in the field.

Editorial, 14 August 1915 (edited extract)