Celebrating 1500 issues: preface to the first Journal

September 1887

In bringing the NEW ZEALAND MEDICAL JOURNAL before the Profession, it is necessary to explain how it came into existence, its aims, and its prospects.

In the Medical Profession a man must either go on gaining knowledge, or he must go back. There is no standing still. Left to himself, he must get into contracted habits of thought, and routine ways of practice. It is only by keeping himself in touch with his brethren throughout the world that he can avoid the perils of stagnation. There are two chief ways of doing this: one is by a diligent study of the current literature of his profession, which is, fortunately, good and abundant; and the other is by personal work at societies, and by contact with his Fellow Practitioners. In all the large centres of New Zealand there are now active and flourishing medical associations. Every one who has taken advantage of these societies has felt the benefit of them in increased knowledge, wider range of experience, and greater zeal for his profession. The union of these various societies, by the formation of the New Zealand Medical Association, for which we have to thank the energy of the Auckland Society, promises to bring the whole Medical Profession in New Zealand into closer relationship than has been hitherto.

But valuable as the work may be which is before the Association, it has been felt in Dunedin and elsewhere that there is a want of any means of communication between Medical Men in the Colony, and that there is absolutely no means of recording the local work done. Every country has its own special experience of disease. We have special advantages—and perhaps some disadvantages—in our climate and surroundings, which differ widely from those of our neighbours in Australia, and also from those of Europe and America; and we are more effectively separated from Australia than America is from England.

It is an undertaking of some moment to send cases to Australian or Home journals; and although a great deal of good work in Medicine and Surgery is being done throughout New Zealand, comparatively few records of our experience are ever sent to Australian journals, and fewer still to the Home papers. If some record can be kept of New Zealand practice, it will not only be useful to those who contribute to it, and who read it, as it is published, but it will in time be a valuable storehouse of information for Practitioners. Believing this, the Otago Branch of the New Zealand Medical Association last year communicated with other Branches throughout the Colony, asking their co-operation in the establishment of a New Zealand Medical Journal. None of them at the time saw their way to this, and, after some consideration, it was decided to try the experiment of issuing the Journal from Dunedin, with such material as could be collected locally. This will sufficiently explain why the present number is almost wholly taken up with contributions from Dunedin. This will not be the case, we trust, in future issues. In our next number—which we hope to publish early in December—preference will be given to contributions from other districts. It is the hope of the Otago Society to establish a New Zealand Medical Journal; and we think that the contents of this number—furnished as they have been at very short notice by a few Medical Men in one part of the Colony—are sufficient proof that with the whole Profession of New Zealand to rely on, we may safely count in the future on sufficient material to produce at least four good numbers yearly.
We shall be glad to receive from Medical Men, to whom this journal is sent, papers on subjects of Professional interest. We hope not only to receive and publish particulars of interesting or unusual cases of disease, but also to get special information from Medical Men in various parts of the Colony as to the climate and tendencies to disease in their own immediate locality. There are wide differences throughout this Colony, in climate and surroundings, which greatly modify disease. It is obviously of great importance to every practitioner to know where he can send patients with pulmonary or other affections, with the best chance of doing good. There are many problems in medicine which we may help to solve. We might instance the origin of typhoid fever, about which a good deal of discussion is now going on elsewhere—What is its relation to Colonial fever? A valuable paper was contributed some years ago to one of the Australian journals, with reference to typhoid fever on the West Coast, from which it appears that a fever with lesions identical with infectious typhoid, appeared among the miners there—apparently without any means of infection from without. This would agree with the experience of physicians in India, at the Cape of Good Hope, and other places; but we want the experience of many men to establish the fact, or to disprove it, in New Zealand.

We may say, then, that our aim is to open a field for discussion of whatever subjects may be of interest to the Medical Profession in the Colony. It has also been decided, after some consideration, not to make the journal the medium of any personal discussions or disputes, but to keep its pages wholly for matters of general interest.

We have explained the origin of the journal, and its aims. We have now to speak of its prospects. There are in round numbers about four hundred Medical Men in this Colony. With a smaller consistuency than this, the Australian Medical Journal was begun in Melbourne twenty years ago, and has had a successful and useful career ever since. We can see no reason why our venture should be less successful; and now leave the matter in the hands of our Fellow Practitioners throughout the Colony.