THE FLANDERS POPPY
To the Editor:

In the issue of November 6, 1965, the article “The Flanders Poppy” by E. H. Bensley (Canad. Med. Ass. J., 93: 1036, 1965) reminded, I am sure, many of your readers of their school-boy days when they were required to memorize this poem as part of the ceremonies connected with the November 11 memorial service. For those who fought in Flanders and for those who have visited the military cemeteries there, it was a reminder of comrades and the sacrifices of so many Canadians.

Last year a large number of the members of No. 1 Field Ambulance, RCAMC, toured the battlefields of the First World War and particularly the battlefield at Ypres. During this tour Dr. Caenepeel, a Belgian historian and authority on the Ypres salient, was kind enough to conduct my men personally through the battlefields and the St. George’s Memorial Church at Ypres founded by Field Marshal Haig and Lord Plumer in 1927. My officers and men were impressed by the many memorials to corps and regiments that exist in this church and resolved that since no such memorial existed for the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, we would go back in 1965 and present a bronze wall plaque of the poem “In Flanders Fields” by Lieutenent-Colonel John McCrae. This project is now being developed to coincide with the sixty-second birthday of the RCAMC and the fifty-first anniversary of John McCrae’s memorable poem. It is our intention to present the plaque with a dedication to John McCrae and the Medical Corps in both English and French, during a suitable small military ceremony in July 1966.

The financial resources of my unit are not so great that we are likely to be able to bear the cost completely. Should any of the readers of The Canadian Medical Association Journal wish to contribute to this project they may do so to the undersigned.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL E. K. FITZGERALD,
M.D., D.P.H.
(U. of T. ’50).

Commanding Officer,
1 Field Ambulance, RCAMC,
Canadian Forces Post Office 5050.

THE CADUCEUS SYMBOL
To the Editor:

In a letter to the Journal published in the issue of May 8 a correspondent1 expressed uncertainty as to the proper symbol for the medical profession, and in the issue of July 3 another correspondent2 cited ancient Greece as the source of the medical emblem. However, if one examines the origins more deeply, one finds that the staff and serpent symbol occupied an important position in the thought of earlier civilizations.

In searching for a contact between the Mesopotamian and Greek cultures it is necessary to go all the way back to a time when the Japhetic race was first migrating to Europe and the Greek civilization had not yet crystallized. In the land of Ham we find Cush deified by the Egyptians who called him Hermes, a synonym for “son of Ham”.3,4 Now, in the Hebrew language “ham” conveyed the thought of “swarthy; in the Egyptian “ham”, “khem” and “her” meant “the burnt one” or “the hot or burning one”. According to the Chaldean etymology given in Bunsen,5 her, ham kem all meant “the burnt one” or “the hot or burning one”; her and horus are also shown to mean the sun; and mes or mesh are shown to be a contraction of mesheh—“to draw forth” or “to bring forth”.6 This “son of the burnt one” was represented by and identified with a snake, the emblem of the sun,7 and very appropriately the symbolism (snake) represents both the sun and the son. The snake is frequently pictured as being coiled around the stock of a tree to heal it,8 and beside this is a palm tree signifying renewed life. Many representations of the snake or of two snakes have in the upper half the black god Hermes.9

As men spread out from the Mesopotamian valley they retained early beliefs and traditions, somewhat modified by memory, time and usage. Names became changed according to language, but through it all the snake continued to be regarded as the personification of wisdom. By the time the Greek culture was taking on national form a whole mythology was already absorbed and had its own special flavour, though its origin was patently the same as Egypt’s (namely, Babylon). The transmission of the staff and serpent found its place in Greek culture as the symbol of Aesculapius, the child of the Sun,10 whose name signified “the instructing snake”. The meaning behind this name is revealed by the Chaldean etymology: AISIH-man, SHKUL—to instruct, APE—a serpent, which has been modified in the Greek and in the Egyptian to the “instructing snake”.

(Mrs.) Joyce Andersen
2150 E. 40th Avenue,
Vancouver 16, B.C.

REFERENCES

8. OVIDIUS NASO, P.: Metamorphoseas, lib. XV, 11, Ovidii Opera, Leyden, 1651, p. 786.

THE CADUCEUS SYMBOL

To the Editor:

In a letter to the Journal published in the issue of May 8 a correspondent1 expressed uncertainty as to the proper symbol for the medical profession, and in the issue of July 3 another correspondent2 cited ancient Greece as the source of the medical emblem. However, if one examines the origins more deeply, one finds that the staff and serpent symbol occupied an important position in the thought of earlier civilizations.

In searching for a contact between the Mesopotamian and Greek cultures it is necessary to go all the way back to a time when the Japhetic race was first migrating to Europe and the Greek civilization had not yet crystallized. In the land of Ham we find Cush deified by the Egyptians who called him Hermes, a synonym for “son of Ham”.3,4 Now, in the Hebrew language “ham” conveyed the thought of “swarthy;