

THE NEW BAILEY K. ASHFORD MEDAL*

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Several years ago, when a commercial company discontinued sponsorship of the original Bailey K. Ashford Medal, the Society asked me to design a new medal. Among other faults the original medal lacked a portrait, and it was felt that the new medal should carry a likeness of the man it honored. For low-relief sculpture a profile is usually preferred, but none could be found. A search of the Army Archives and of the National Library of Medicine yielded three photographs of Ashford, but they looked like three different men. The two busts in existence (one in the Medical School in San Juan, P.R.) and the photographs in his autobiography were of no help. The portrait that appears on the medal is a somewhat idealized likeness based on the two photographs in Figure 1. As an added accent, the Seal of the Society, remodeled in miniature for the purpose, appears below (Fig. 2).

The problem of what to put on the back gave trouble and delayed the completion of the medal by several years. I wanted an ornate back to contrast with and to complement the simplicity of the front. But the usual symbols of science, scholarship, and medicine (the hand and torch, the open book, the Roman lamp, etc.) are so overworked and betray such poverty of imagination that I would have been embarrassed to use them. And in any case, after reading Ashford's *A Soldier in Science*, I became convinced that he was a bit of a poet and deserved something better. Finally, after 2 years of rumination, I came up with a solution.

Ashford's contribution lay in his recognition of hookworm anemia as a serious medical and economic problem in the Western Hemisphere. (The disease was already known in Europe, mainly as an affliction of miners and tunnel diggers, but its widespread economic significance had not been recognized.) This work Ashford did while a Medical Officer in the U. S. Army during and after the Spanish-American War. His pioneer discoveries led to the establishment of

the International Health Board of The Rockefeller Foundation.

However, the life history of the hookworm was worked out in Egypt by Arthur Looss, who recorded his findings in a series of monographs published in the "Records of the School of Medicine," in Cairo, around the turn of the century. Furthermore, ancylostomiasis was one of the four or five helminthic infections recognized by the ancient Egyptians, and described in the George Ebers Papyrus, about 1600 B.C. This was sufficient excuse for choosing an Egyptian motif for the reverse of the medal. Moreover, Egyptian art abounds in many beautiful motifs and decorative symbols appropriate to our purpose.

Since the angle of the sun's rays to the surface of the earth determines the tropical latitudes, it is fitting that the sun or "Aten Disk," the giver of all life, should appear at the top (Fig. 2). Its rays serve to tie together the top and bottom of the design, separated by the band for the recipient's name. As represented in ancient Egypt, the sun was usually bracketed by a pair of cobras, as shown, and since venomous snakes are a serious problem in tropical medicine, their inclusion is not only decorative but meaningful. In Egyptian art, the sun's rays were represented as terminating in little hands, presumably so it could do its vital work of nurturing the crops and bestowing blessings on mankind. Four such little hands appear on the medal.

The "Ankh," or "Key of Life," a sacred emblem symbolizing life, prosperity, etc., is familiar to anyone who has delved into Egyptology. It was frequently represented as being bestowed on mortals by the hands of the sun. As a symbol of health and well-being, as opposed to sickness and want, it coincides with the values and purposes of our Society, and as such has been given a place in the design.

The eyes at the top are the "Sacred Eye" or the Eyes of Horus. According to legend, Horus had lost his vision as a result of an encounter with the demon Seth. "The mother of Horus,

* The original medal was discontinued in 1964.



FIGURE 1. Two portraits of Bailey K. Ashford, courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland 20014.

Isis, hurriedly called Thoth, scribe and sage, to the rescue. Thoth, with his wisdom, promptly restored the eye and its powers. This led the Egyptians to revere the Eye of Horus as a sym-

bol of godly protection and recovery."⁽¹⁾ The symbol took many forms, and in the Middle Ages doctors and alchemists scribbled it or a modification on their prescriptions, and it has come



FIGURE 2. Obverse and reverse of the new Bailey K. Ashford Medal. The medal, 3 inches in diameter, is cast in bronze.

down to us as the familiar "Rx," which still today adorns the prescription blank.

"Thoth of Hermopolis was a moon god who had created the divisions of time and the order of the cosmos; he was also counted the inventor of hieroglyphic writing, the 'lord of divine words,' and the god of learning."⁽²⁾ He was represented either as a human form having an ibis's head, or as a baboon. He appears on the medal in the latter form. Thus the Eye of Horus represents the clinical or compassionate side of medicine, while Thoth represents the scientific or academic side, in both of which our society is presumably interested. The baboon may also do double duty as standing for the use of the primates and other experimental animals in medical research.

The Sacred Scarab at the bottom was also a solar symbol, representing immortality and resurrection. More importantly, it is a dung beetle, and as such symbolizes a widespread problem of tropical hygiene, the fecal-borne or soil-transmitted diseases, of which hookworm disease is perhaps the most important example. But as an insect, it also represents the field of medical

entomology, which is of such great importance in tropical health.

The symbolism of the medal is such that while relevant, it is also sufficiently vague and inclusive so that no aspect of our subject need feel unduly emphasized or neglected. All of the motifs have been copied from authentic Egyptian sources.*

REFERENCES

1. Bettmann, O. L., 1956. *A Pictorial History of Medicine*. Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Illinois.
2. Steindorff, C., and Seele, K. C., 1963. *When Egypt Ruled the East*. Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.

* The Eye, or Eyes, of Horus, the Aten Disk, the Ankh, and Scarab, in their various modifications, are ubiquitous in Egyptian art. The Aten Disk, flanked by cobras, with rays ending in little hands, appears on the back of one of Tutankhamen's thrones. Thoth, the baboon, is adapted from a painting on a papyrus of the 21st dynasty in the British Museum, London (*vide*: *Graphis*, No. 100, "The Sun," vol. 18, March/April 1962, Zurich, Switzerland, p. 115). The Scarab is based on Egyptian amulets and actual specimens.