

## MEDICAL EDUCATION

In the last number of *The Leech*, extracts from an article by Chalmers Watson entitled "Away with the lumber in the Medical Curriculum," and from the Interim Report of the British Medical Association Committee on Medical Education, were given for the consideration of our readers. Since the publication of the latter report, the most noteworthy contribution to that controversy which of late years has been raging around the subject of medical education, has been a discussion promoted by the Students' Representative Council of Edinburgh University. We have before us a recent issue of the *Medical Press and Circular*, in which are published in detail the more important of the addresses delivered on this occasion. Although no new views of any startling nature appear to have been propounded on the matter—indeed, none which have not at some time or other been considered in this journal—nevertheless the very unanimity of the speakers not only as to the necessity for change in teaching methods, but as regards the direction which such a change should broadly take, would seem a sufficient reason for briefly recapitulating here the main points raised.

The argument of each and every contribution to the discussion is based upon the fact that the aim of a Medical School should be to turn out general practitioners; and that the curriculum, as it stands, does not take sufficient account of this fact. Of the changes necessary to make the syllabus conform to such an aim, the one most stressed is that the student should be given more time to himself—more time for reflection; more time to make his own observations of, and to form his own opinions on, disease; more time to come into contact with patients, and so learn about human nature, and about that part of medicine which is an Art, and not a Science. Dr. Alexander Brown brings forward, in addition, a reason not usually considered: he would have the budding physician read the writings of the older masters—Sydenham, Hippocrates, Paget; and by similar additional studies so widen his sphere of knowledge that he may "take his stand among men educated in the

other branches of thought, and have his opinion respected as that of a man of authority." In order to allow the student such time, it is suggested that he should no longer be expected to absorb masses of highly-specialised and useless facts; in the words of Dr. Elliot Dickson, Member of the Special B.M.A. Committee on Education: "It must be borne in on the student that he is not at the University to learn all that is known about disease, but to learn how to study disease, and how to treat patients. Principles rather than details should be the text in teaching." The present examination system is denounced by nearly all the speakers, as being mainly responsible for this pernicious system of over-cramming. Dr. C. M. Wilson, Dean of St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, London, is reported as saying of examinations that they are held over the student as a threat if he failed to memorise the mass of facts placed before him; and that a reform of the examination system would remove many of the evils for which the curriculum is now blamed; while Dr. Wilkie Millan urges that as little should depend on them as possible, more importance being attached to the report of the teachers under whom the student has worked.

But the changes proposed at the meeting do not only lie in the direction of curtailing an unnecessarily detailed curriculum. It is a matter of general agreement that the present-day student receives an inadequate training in practical medicine, largely due to the subordination of clinical medicine to earlier scientific subjects and to the specialities. The usual complaints that the average student does not know how to stop toothache, or treat headache, are made; while the point about his customary inability to give an accurate prognosis is raised. No number of lectures in Diseases of the Ear, Nose, and Throat, or in Urology, can obviously give him such knowledge: it is only by continual attendance in the Hospital Wards, unharassed by a multiplicity of classes, that the student will come to acquire that art which will enable him, in the words of Dr. Elliot Dickson, "to recognise

when a patient is seriously ill, and much more frequently to be able to reassure the patient when he is not seriously ill, as most think they are." It is advocated as well that more preventive medicine be taught.

Finally, the interim report of the B.M.A. Committee is praised by all, and its practical bearing on the question of medical education is stated as follows by Dr. Dagleish: "The solution of the problem is to hand. The B.M.A. Committee report, though it is called an 'interim report,' is only so in name, for to my mind it is as complete as any such report could be. It remains for the individual medical schools to put it into practice without departing from it any further than is necessary owing to their own characteristics and peculiar circumstances. Reform must come. Why delay? Opinion all over the country, not only in Edinburgh or in Scotland, but generally, is behind this movement. Why should not something be done?"

The following resolution was unanimously adopted at the end of the meeting: "That

this House places on record its opinion that the present system of medical education in this country is unsatisfactory. In its opinion, important changes in the curriculum are essential, whereby more facilities for instruction in practical medicine are available, and more assistance given in the principles and practices of preventive medicine. The time required for this additional teaching can, in its opinion, be obtained by a judicious modification of the teaching in the earlier scientific subjects, with some revision of the time and attention devoted to the teaching in the 'specials' department of medicine and surgery.

"And, further," resolves to express its general approval of the findings and recommendations of the British Medical Association's Committee report on this subject, and to bring this as a matter of urgency to the notice of the University Authorities, and that of other bodies concerned with medical education."

