

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

"THE TEACHING OF ANATOMY."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I have read the interesting letter of Mr. T. Cooke on the above subject in THE LANCET of Nov. 4th with much pleasure. Would you allow me as an old teacher and examiner to say a few words on the teaching of anatomy in particular, and generally on our present system of examining—and therefore of teaching? I say "therefore" because I suppose no one denies that the teaching, say in the London schools, follows the standard of the examinations, say at the Royal College of Surgeons. I assume, to begin with, that no one will differ from Mr. Cooke in asserting that the teaching of anatomy should be by dissection—i.e., by making the students themselves dissect—and not by demonstration, which consists in showing them other people's dissections, or dissecting for them. The examinations, however, follow of necessity the other course. At the Royal College of Surgeons the students cannot be set down to dissect, because it is impossible to find subjects enough. They are shown other people's dissections, chiefly the exquisite dissected preparations from the college museum, which correspond very closely with published anatomical plates. Demonstrations, then, of good dissections, and a careful study of plates, enable many a student to pass a brilliant anatomical examination, whose performance with the scalpel and forceps would be ludicrous, because he has rarely dissected, and that in the most perfunctory manner. If we would make the anatomical examination really practical (and this is, I apprehend, the only way to introduce really practical teaching) some way must be found to examine the student in dissecting. This can only be done at the school, and doubtless the details would present difficulty; but I do not see that it is impossible. Frozen sections are, I daresay, very valuable, but, as Mr. Cooke says, they are of recent introduction, and consequently were unknown to many of the best anatomists of even our own day. The essential point in our anatomical teaching should be to make sure that the student has worked at it with his own hands and his own brains. But is not this equally true of all the other subjects of examination? And does not our present system of examination tend, more or less, to substitute demonstration, or cramming, for study in all subjects? Less, of course, in medicine and surgery, where the students' practical knowledge can be to some extent tested by living cases than in the first-mentioned subjects. Yet even here the test is not a very perfect one. Examinations, in fact, can never be a perfect test of knowledge. Teaching, as Mr. Cooke says, should be the *vis a fronte*, and therefore everything in our examination system is to be deprecated which discourages learning by encouraging cramming. Now this seems undeniably the effect of the present system of an examination broken into subjects independent of each other. A man "grinds up" one subject, passes in it, drops it, and is never again asked a question in that subject. Then he takes up another subject, which he treats in a similar way; so that of the men who come up for final examination only a very minute percentage could, I believe, pass in the preliminary stages. Yet if these preliminary subjects are not necessary, to insist on the student learning them is only to put needless obstacles in the way of his obtaining a diploma; and if they are necessary, an examining body is not doing its duty to the public in increasing the number of candidates notoriously ignorant of them. The commencement of this vicious course was taken when the old single examination was divided into two—one on anatomy and physiology, the second on pathology and surgery—and when the second was made quite independent of the first. I have not a word to say against the separation—that was a great improvement—but to make it total was to induce, almost to compel, the student to forego all further study of anatomy and physiology, the bases of all rational practice. A slight knowledge of anatomy (surgical anatomy) was, it is true, still expected; but physiology, the very life-blood of rational practice—that by which alone it is differentiated from empiricism—was henceforth entirely banished from the education of the advanced student. Still more disastrous, in my opinion, was the step taken by the Council when I was

myself chairman of the Board of Examiners in Anatomy and Physiology. These two subjects were separated altogether and allotted to separate examiners, in spite of the admitted fact that anatomy is only a part of physiology, and is as dead when severed from physiology as the body is when deprived of the spirit. Having resisted this change as long as I could in the Council, I felt compelled to resign a post which I could no longer conscientiously fill, and I did this not as presuming to set up my own opinion against that of the much more distinguished surgeons under whose advice the change was made, but in order to emphasise the principle—which I think should never be lost sight of—that the diploma examination is a unity; and that though it has been found convenient to divide it into parts, those parts should not be treated as independent, but as vitally connected with each other, and no subject which is worthy of a place in the examination should ever be dropped out of it. A corollary from this is that no one should be appointed an examiner in any part of the diploma examination who is not qualified to examine in all of them. I know that it is sometimes said that some of the subjects—notably physiology—have become so specialised that none but a specialist is fit to examine in them. But is not the contention absurd as applied to an examination which is not academic and competitive, but practical and qualifying? Who would expect a student to have the whole of anatomy or the whole of surgery at his fingers' ends? If the examiner is not able to set practical questions in physiology which a student may be expected to answer, he is unfit to examine; and I submit that a practical surgeon is more likely to select such questions than a specialist. At any rate, while we specialise our examinations and break them up into separate bits we shall look in vain for practical teaching. Is it too late to take a different course? We have a great opportunity now that the fifth year, so long desired by practical teachers, has been added to the curriculum. Cannot it be devoted to the acquisition of practical knowledge instead of grinding up bits of the "ologies"? Not that I would condemn morphology and embryology, as Mr. Cooke seems to do; they throw a great light on the facts of anatomy, and if properly used may make those facts more interesting and more attractive to the learner; but I join heartily with him in deploring the tendency to "cramming," which is so conspicuous in our present system, and which has, I believe, been produced, or at any rate encouraged, by the total separation between the various parts of the Conjoint Examination. Meanwhile let us thank Mr. Cooke for a valuable contribution to the discussion of this important subject.

I am, Sirs, yours obedient servant,

Nov. 7th, 1893.

T. HOLMES.

"PROPOSED NEW MIDWIFERY PRACTITIONERS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—As several medical practitioners have asked me, "Is it a fact that the proposed new midwifery practitioners are to be absolutely independent of medical practitioners, and a separate and distinct class of practitioners?" I feel I cannot do better than quote the words of the supporters of this new order. Thus the late Dr. J. A. Aveling, when giving evidence before the Select Committee on Midwives' Registration, said: "Nurses and midwives are two separate bodies; *the midwife acts by herself on her own responsibility*, the nurse is the handmaid of the physician and does what he tells her." Next, in the prospectus issued by the Midwives' Institute, a body which collected no less than £985 to push the Midwives' Bills through Parliament, the following occurs: "As some confusion exists in the public mind as to the difference between midwives and monthly nurses, it may be well to state that a midwife, according to the Obstetrical Society's diploma," is qualified to attend all cases of natural labour—"that is, she undertakes the cases herself *without a doctor*, and is, in fact, engaged instead of one." This is sufficiently plain. Again, if reference is made to the "Hospital Annual," 1891, the following will be found: "It behoves all midwives just now to be sure of obtaining a good certificate, for the day of registration is at hand. The midwife stands almost halfway between the nurse and the doctor; she takes on herself a great responsibility, and she requires most thorough and careful training in her duties. The nurse acts under the doctor's orders, *but the midwife is answerable to no one, and has to use her own judgment*. Every reason which