THE EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,
AND THE TITLE OF DOCTOR.*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—In replying to the comments made by you on my letter of the 5th, in page 269, I have to say—

1st. That the “representations” made by the Edinburgh College of Physicians to its Licentiates are those (and those only) printed in your own and the other medical journals at the beginning of each Session.

2nd. That the College has neither law nor bye-law having the most remote reference to the title of “Doctor,” has never assumed the right to give that title, either by courtesy or as synonymous with M.D., and as a matter of fact has never done so. In this respect it differs from the London College, which has made inconsistent bye-laws, and therefore has very properly recently issued a resolution to correct these.

3rd. The Secretaries who have conducted the official correspondence of the Edinburgh College with the Licentiates, assure me that in their communications with them, after the Licence has been granted, they have invariably avoided using the title of Doctor; and that, in answer to inquiries, they have always written that that title belonged legally only to those who held the degree of M.D. from a University (in proof of which I enclose Dr. Wyllie’s letter).

4th. No College of Physicians is entitled to give any designation, except those of Licentiate, Member, and Fellow. Certainly the Edinburgh College has no such right—has never asserted or assumed it—and therefore has had nothing to modify or retract, nor any cause for explanation, except to rectify the wilful error of those Licentiates who have taken the false title—and this hitherto it has not seen fit to do—I say “wilful,” for the mode of address officially employed is too distinct to admit of doubt.

5th. The London College has found that it has not the power to prosecute such of its Licentiates as have adopted the title of Doctor. This, I doubt not, is also the case with the Edinburgh College. But, as I think, it is not the duty of either. That duty belongs to the body whose title is arrogated—viz., the Universities. In everyday business that party prosecutes whose rights are invaded. Why should it be otherwise in this instance?

6th. You say that “its licence has been procured on the most easy terms.” If that means that the examinations have been loosely conducted, and the demands on the knowledge and requirements of the candidates inadequate, I need only say that a pretty considerable proportion of those coming from the south could tell a different tale.

I omit all reference to the “year of grace.” The propriety and policy of that were and still are much questioned by many of the Fellows. I can, however, honestly avouch that it was conceived and gone through in perfect *bona fides*.

What the College may think proper to do “to put itself right with the profession and sister bodies,” it is not for me to say, my object being to prove that it has been unjustly, injuriously, and ignorantly attacked.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

Edinburgh, Feb. 1876.

WM. CUMMING, F.R.C.P.E.

The following is the letter of Dr. Wyllie referred to by Dr. Cumming:—

Royal College of Physicians,

Edinburgh, Feb. 12th, 1876.

DEAR DR. CUMMING,—In my correspondence with the Licentiates of the College, I do not address them as “Doctor,” unless they are also M.D.s. Of late I have had many inquiries from Licentiates as to whether they can properly call themselves “Dr.,” or put that title on their door-plates. I always tell them that they have no right to the title, as it legally belongs only to those who hold the degree of M.D. from an University.

Believe me, yours very truly,

Dr. Cumming.

JOHN WYLLIE.

* * We have much pleasure in inserting the above correspondence, and we cannot feel sorry that any words of ours have elicited such clear statements from, respectively, a Fellow and the Honorary Secretary of the Edinburgh College. They have, of course, all the force of authoritative statements. Judging the question from Dr. Cumming’s letter, we think that the College itself should feel somewhat indebted to us for eliciting such explanation. We shall at present not

enter into any further discussion about points of detail, unless they are controverted by those most deeply interested in the question discussed in these letters. Not the least satisfactory part of Dr. Cumming’s letter is his assertion that a pretty considerable proportion of those coming from the south could testify that the examination of the College is not easy. We must try to regard apparent proofs to the contrary which have come under the observation of most people as exceptions proving a rule.—ED. L.

THE NEW SYDENHAM SOCIETY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your correspondent “M.D.” may probably in part prove himself a prophet. At any rate, our Council has for some time had under its consideration the question of discontinuing the biennial retrospect, and of restricting our Skin Atlas to occasional fasciculi, and at the time his letter was written the notices were out convening a meeting, at which a final decision was to be come to. On former occasions we have twice submitted to the general vote of the members the different projects in hand, and we now contemplate again requesting a similar expression of opinion. As our circular will very shortly be in the hands of our members, and will give full information as to all that the Council proposes to undertake, and to desist from doing, I need not trouble you with any details now. It is right, however, that I should state that on former occasions the votes of our members were largely in favour of continuing the Year-book, and still more so in support of the Skin Atlas. The latter was indeed undertaken at the almost unanimous request of the members. It is easy to understand that a certain sense of monotony ensues when the issue of fasciculi is continued over sixteen years, but it must be borne in mind that it would have been very unfair to have prematurely cut short a work which depended for its value upon its approach to completeness. The reason that it has gone on so long and seemed so lengthy, is simply that it has been only a part of the Society’s undertakings, and has been issued necessarily in small instalments. It is not yet a large atlas; thus, as to number of plates, it does not compete with Hebra’s or with several French ones. As it is, however, now catalogued up to the last plate issued, the present offers a favourable opportunity for a temporary break if the members and the Council see fit. As regards the non-ornamental character of our portraits, I am astonished that “M.D.” should expect them otherwise; at the same time I am glad that he has nothing to allege against them as truthful delineations of the morbid appearances portrayed. In the latter respect I feel sure that they will bear comparison with any plates ever issued. It is not easy to find an artist who is equally good at figure drawing and at the painstaking delineation of diseased conditions, and of the two aims we have always held the latter to be paramount.

As regards our Biennial Retrospect I have the permission of the Council to state that it will submit to the members that it be either discontinued or modified in its scope and made annual again. There are, I know, strong differences of opinion respecting it; some regarding it as the most valuable of the Society’s undertakings, and threatening to resign if it is given up, and others thinking that the issue of the *Medical Record* has very much cut the ground from under our feet. In reference to its merits in point of execution I cannot allow our editors to submit to any censure unless assured that it comes from those who have carefully examined it. It is one of that class of books which is very apt to be despised by those who put it on their shelves and never read it. We have had on its staff of editors some of the best workers in the profession: Mr. Hulke, Dr. Handfield Jones, Mr. Power, Mr. Hinton, Mr. Windsor (of Manchester), Dr. Burdon-Sanderson, Dr. Anstie, Dr. Hilton Fagge, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Barnes, Mr. Brudenell Carter, Dr. Stevenson, Dr. Shephard, and Mr. Waren Tay. We have always paid liberally and got the very best men we could. To translate Canstatt as suggested by “M.D.” would simply take the whole income of the Society. The value of year-books and retrospects is, I suppose, a matter upon which there will always be much debate. Some men can use abstracts and short references, and to others they are of no service. I well remember that when we last asked an expression of opinion from our members, whilst most were strongly in its favour, one gentleman (perhaps “M.D.’s” brother, or, for anything I know, “M.D.” himself) begged us