

those, whose fate it is to taste the bitter disappointment of rejection. It must, then, assuredly result, that remarks—howsoever superficial and impotent in themselves—thus dispassionately made in exposure of an undoubted error, will command the deliberations of the senate, and so far engage your sympathy as to induce you to grant them a place in the pages of *THE LANCET*.

I should premise, for the sake of adding perspicuity to my statements, that in order to obtain the degree of doctor in medicine, a candidate must attend lectures and hospital practice for a period of six, or in some cases, for one of five years; he has to submit to four examinations, which, when successfully encountered, occur at intervals of two years, and range over every science directly or indirectly associated with the more immediate object of his pursuits. Each of these examinations is conducted by means of printed papers and *vivâ voce* interrogations, so that it is impossible for a candidate who is not well prepared on all his subjects, to conceal his defects, and the test is thus rendered most searching in every conceivable detail. In determining on the claims of a candidate to pass such examinations, the practice is, that when he does not exhibit a competent knowledge of even a single subject comprised in the ordeal, he is declared deficient by the examiner or examiners, whose duty it is to pronounce upon his merits in respect of this subject; his title is adjudged unsatisfactory by the examining board, and, upon the strength of their report, the senate deny the certificate, or the degree. The effect of this decision is, that the candidate is sent back to undergo the next examination, which does not take place until the expiration of twelve months from the date of his reverse: he thus retrogrades an entire year. Now, I have to express, in the first place, my regret at, and repudiation of, the unreasonable delay thus occasioned; and, in the second place, I lament the power invested in each examiner to cause this enormous expenditure of time, on the ground of a mere isolated deficiency in his particular department. It is to me so surprising, that the great inconvenience and obvious injustice of this plan have not intruded upon the notice of the senate and examiners, that I must beg permission to adduce a brief exposition of the mischief inevitably resulting from its adoption, and to suggest a correction, which would appear to have been contemplated by the regulations at present in existence.

We may fairly conclude, from the methodic and rigorous nature of the exercise, from the fact of one-third of the gentlemen presenting themselves for the first examination for the M.B. degree being usually remitted to their studies, and from the circumstance of these gentlemen being the most distinguished men of their respective schools, that a candidate with moderate ability and respectable information is exposed to a very great risk of suffering rejection, that one less qualified is certain of meeting with such a fate, and that a third, gifted with acquirements greatly superior to those of the two preceding, cannot feel confident of arriving at a successful issue of his labours. This is no speculative inference; it is attested by past occurrences; for I can assert with truth that there is no school connected with the University which cannot supply instances of their best men, and men of no mean order, having been degraded for some alleged and perhaps far-fetched deficiency. I have already hinted at a circumstance that will assist us in explaining this anomaly, and shall refer to it again; but at present it will suffice for my purpose to receive it as a simple undeniable fact. It will be regarded, then, as an egregiously unfair procedure, to commit gentlemen of this or even of an inferior stamp to do penance throughout a full year, in expiation of what may very possibly be a trivial and comparatively an unimportant defect. It may be right on slight grounds to refuse them immediate acceptance; but I am utterly unable to conceive that candidates of this description can manifest imperfections so gross as to justify an atonement of the duration required; on the contrary, I believe it to be most iniquitous to doom them to sustain a stigma of rejection during twelve long, dreary, and hopeless months; it is cruel to break their spirits, to spoil the vigour of their application, to dishearten their friends, to retard their education, to cause a fearful loss of time in indifference, or, perchance, in disgust, and all this with the sole object of recurring but a few weeks before the same examination recommences to those studies on which they had previously made shipwreck. Such a punishment, under any circumstances, is extravagantly severe; but its outrageous excess becomes yet more glaring, when I assert that an event, so blighting in its results, may occur, by reason of a simple defect on a single subject, to one otherwise efficiently prepared; that it is the privilege of each examiner to brand a candidate for twelve months, without the least consideration of his proficiency in other respects than his own,

and thus to originate the remarkable inconsistency before adverted to; that (as in the case of the examination before named) a man may be an admirable anatomist, a good chemist, and yet—if he be defective in *materia medica*, or, being moderately endowed with information on this discursive subject, he fail in botanical matters—his progress in more important branches is to be arrested for no small portion of his whole life by an examiner, who may have had the self-complacency to imagine that his topic is worthy of such devotion and such sacrifice; that this is no hypothetical occurrence, but has happened to the best men of the best schools. When I reflect upon these and other inconveniences, injuries, and injustice that crowd too rapidly on my mind to admit of citation without confusion to my narrative, I am constrained to denounce the evil as lacking only the enormity of a crime in the possibility of its being unintentional. If I contrast these doings with those of the Apothecaries' Hall, I find the severity-mongers in the latter establishment appear in the comparison as patterns of charity, pinks of mercy and commiseration—for here some regard is had to the general proficiency—and a candidate failing to pass an examination, forming a complete test in itself, endures a defeat of only six months. At Edinburgh, one may stumble over several subjects, and yet proceed to the degree, after a quiet, inoffensive rejection of a few weeks. But in the University of London, where the exercises are comprised in three medical and one general examination, a candidate is liable to suffer, for defect in any one subject at any one examination, a rejection of an entire year, and thus to add (if he be unfortunate on each occasion) a series of four years to the six ordinarily required to obtain the degree. In committing myself to this assertion, I shall not be accused of contriving imaginary anticipations, when I add, that a gentleman, who eventually passed on the same occasion with myself, informed me that he had been twice unsuccessful at the first examination, so that the hope and patience of this individual must have been sufficiently elastic as to have expanded over two years previous to, and other two years subsequent to, his first reverse, before receiving a certificate of competency in anatomy, chemistry, *materia medica*, and botany.

I do not pretend, in the foregoing remarks, to have exhausted the subject; but I am bold enough to imagine that I have said enough to secure attention to the grievance. In conclusion, I would insist on the propriety and the policy of admitting unsuccessful candidates to a second examination within three, or at the most four, months from the period of their rejection; the evils on which I have descanted would thus be avoided, and the examiners themselves in a position to pronounce more freely upon the merits of the candidates.—Your obedient servant,

London, May, 1846.

JUSTITIA.

## BOSTOCK'S PHYSIOLOGY.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—In looking over a publisher's catalogue of medical books a few days ago, I was not a little surprised to observe announced the fourth edition of my "*Physiology*," said to be published in 1844, and to be "revised and corrected throughout." I procured this fourth edition; and, upon examining the volume and turning over the leaves, I found that it was really the third edition, published in 1836, and, as far as I could discover, with no other alteration than the new title which was attached to the old work. I consider it but justice to myself, as well as to the public, to make known this deception. I shall ever feel grateful for the favourable reception which my work obtained from the public, which I have always regarded as quite equal to its merits. But its merits, be they more or less, mainly depended upon its conveying a correct account of the state of the science at the period of its publication; and every one must be aware, that in a science so rapidly progressive as physiology, the lapse of eight years produces a most important change in this respect.

I conceive that you will not consider it necessary for me to offer any further apology for thus obtruding myself on the notice of the public, through the pages of your journal. I have stated the correct matter of fact, and your readers will judge of the propriety or prudence of the step which I have now taken.—I am, Sir, your most obedient,

Upper Bedford-place, July, 1846.

J. BOSTOCK.

DORSET COUNTY HOSPITAL, DORCHESTER.—WEEKLY REPORT, JUNE 9TH, 1846.—Out-patients treated, 118; in-patients treated, 39; total, 157.