

MR. ERICHSEN AND THE M.D. DEGREE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I desire, with your permission, to examine some of the statements and arguments advanced by Mr. Erichsen in his bid for the votes of the Edinburgh and St. Andrews Universities. They are, briefly, the stock arguments which everyone must have considered and rejected before giving his adhesion to the proposal that the united Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons should take power to confer degrees—i.e., the lowered value of the M.D. degree, and the injury to the Universities and their graduates, and to the members of the profession generally, which it is assumed would follow.

Let me take first the depreciation in the value of the M.D. degree and the injurious effects on the Universities. For the profession, as is well known, the letters M.D. in themselves have no value; the value depends entirely on the word which follows, indicating the source of the degree, and varies scarcely less than the algebraic \times . Reasoning which assumes, as does Mr. Erichsen's, the equality of different degrees contains a gross fallacy, and this assumption operates practically as a fraud. It is desirable that the public as well as the profession, should know that the M.D. represents one thing in one case, another in another, and among the advantages hoped for from the appearance of a new degree an important one is that this difference will be recognised. When such is the case, there is no fear that the Universities, whose degree really represents higher culture or more extensive knowledge, will suffer injury; at present they both suffer and do harm by lending unmerited prestige to degrees which imply neither. But, says Mr. Erichsen, "the general diffusion of the title of M.D., by lowering its value, would also inflict a serious injustice upon those members of the profession who, at considerable expenditure of time and money, have obtained their degrees at the Universities as evidences of higher professional qualifications." The whole force of the demand for the power of conferring a degree by the Colleges lies in the negation of the premises contained in this sentence. It is not the case that the title of M.D. necessarily implies a higher qualification than the diploma of the Colleges, whether tested by the length and completeness of the preparation or by the severity of the examinations, or that it has required a greater expenditure of time and money. Sometimes it does, sometimes it does not; and to speak of all in terms which apply only to a part is a transparent fallacy, and the case stands thus. There are already identical titles which have a widely different meaning. If, then, it is unjust to those medical men whose degrees have been costly in effort, time, and money, that others should possess an identical title obtained at a cheaper rate, this injustice already exists; and there is the further injustice that on the strength of this cheaper title a factitious superiority is assumed by those possessing it over men of equal education and attainment who happen to hold the diplomas of the two Colleges. The M.D. degree is no longer a guarantee of superior training or qualification, and the title is in danger of becoming little better than a false pretence. It cannot well undergo a greater degradation.

But there is another aspect of the question. The more general enjoyment of the title of M.D. by those fitted to hold it may, and will, as we believe, instead of lowering the value of the degree, raise the status of the profession, especially as represented by the great body of general practitioners; and we look at the men, and not at the degree—at the advantage of the profession, and not of any particular University. Mr. Erichsen appears to suppose that the question has been raised by the London teachers, but it has been forced upon their attention and upon the attention of the Colleges by those who have suffered from the injustice complained of.

The Colleges are bound to find a remedy if possible, and, it may be added, to consult their own dignity by rendering unnecessary the hideous inscription, "Physician and Surgeon," which appears on the door-plates of their licentiates. The London University, to which Mr. Erichsen affects to look, cannot so far modify the terms of admission to its degrees as to satisfy the demand, and the Teaching University is a thing of the dim and distant future, unless, indeed, it comes into existence by a slight process of evolution from the combined Colleges.—Your obedient servant,

W. H. BROADBENT.

Seymour-street, Portman-square, Nov. 11th, 1885.

DR. COLLIE AND THE EASTERN HOSPITALS INQUIRY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have been nearly fifteen years the principal medical officer of the Homerton Fever Hospital. My duties have been performed to the best of such ability as I possess. My work has been the subject of continuous observation by the Hospitals Committee and the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and has been supervised by the inspectors of the Local Government Board. But I found myself, eight months ago, suspended from office, and now I hear from the Local Government Board that they decline to remove the suspension. How has this come to pass? I have the word of the Local Government Board for my complete integrity, and for the efficiency with which all my medical duties were performed; but during a time of great pressure the Metropolitan Asylums Board was under the strain of a small-pox epidemic, and the supervision, not of one, but of three hospitals had been put on my too-willing shoulders. While this was the state of matters London came to be under serious apprehension of cholera. The Metropolitan Asylums Board and the Local Government Board in consultation agreed that the best way of meeting the demands for hospital accommodation, in the event of cholera, would be that the business should be undertaken, not by the sanitary authorities of London, but chiefly by the Metropolitan Asylums Board. That Board, accepting this duty, required me, in addition to the three hospitals, to look after possible sites for temporary cholera hospitals over the whole east-end of London. Under these circumstances I did not properly supervise certain diet-sheets or keep certain case-books. This is construed by the Local Government Board as a reason for acquiescing in my suspension and for now declining to remove it. I, to whom was assigned the function of managing three hospitals at once, and of providing London with forty or fifty more, have shown a want of administrative capacity, evidenced by the discovery of some books not being kept! That much importance did not attach to the keeping of these books in the minds of others who were responsible for the good management of the hospitals is shown by the fact that these books had never been called for by any Local Government Board inspector, or auditor, or by the committee, since the hospital was opened, fifteen years ago. No matter, in this monstrous imbroglio of business heaped on me, books were not kept. Verdict, "Administrative inability"; sentence, "Decline to remove suspension." As regards the most important part of my clerical work, I reported to the committee in February, 1876, that it could not be properly done with the staff at my disposal. But, apart from such justification as this, it is surely not sufficient to warrant removal from my office after fifteen years' service, during which, until March of this year, I had the entire confidence of the managers, and had heaped upon me an amount of work which did not properly belong to me, but which I, anxious to serve the managers and the metropolis to the utmost, did not object to.

I would ask leave to state in more detail what my duties have included during different periods of time, and to cite one or two instances of the kind of work which was required of me. In December, 1876, I was suddenly required to prepare the fever hospital for small-pox. It was ready in twenty-four hours. Upwards of 100 small-pox cases were admitted in a few days, and for about ten days we had over 100 cases of small-pox and 100 cases of fever in the same hospital. The responsibility of this was great, the anxiety was extreme; but the organisation was so good, the supervision so complete, that not a single case of small-pox occurred among the fever cases, nor a single case of "fever" among the small-pox cases. I was required to meet a similar emergency in 1881, and with a similar result; but the strain upon the whole staff was very great. The constant supervision which was necessary to prevent the spread of small-pox to fever and of the latter to small-pox made accurate clerical work impossible. In addition to this, I was at the same time directed to organise the ship *Atlas*, moored at Greenwich; so that at this time I had three hospitals under my care, and for a very short period the Darent camp also! I had also from time to time much work of another kind. To mention but one instance: I was required to investigate and report upon the incidence of small-pox in the neighbourhood of Homerton Hospital, a work which (as only they who have done it can

know) involved great labour, and which for a long period occupied almost the whole of my time. But last year the work was simply overwhelming. During three months, with about thirty beds at my command, I admitted about 1500 cases of small-pox, and during the same period transferred about 1300 to the ships. In one week about 350 were admitted, and in one day 97. All this required the most assiduous supervision, and, I would submit, some administrative ability. I was, in particular, very anxious about the transfer of the acute cases, and was frequently at Potter's Ferry to see the patients embark, so that nothing should go wrong in this novel and, as I thought, risky proceeding; and nothing did go wrong. But this is not all. Immediately the ambulance service was organised it was found necessary to open the Plaistow Hospital. I was then required to supervise this hospital. Under these circumstances certain clerical work could not be properly performed; but London was saved from a great epidemic, and although other persons had a great share in saving the metropolis of London from the most troublesome of diseases, the chief responsibility rested with me.

Under all these circumstances, and having performed such service, I am threatened with the loss of my office! Owing to the pressure of work for seven years I have had no proper holiday. The want of this and the worry of the last eight months have injured my health. For eight months I have received no salary, during which time I have not been able to do any other work. This, surely, is "hard measure," because, being too willing to serve the managers and to save the metropolis from infectious disease, I found it impossible to perform efficiently certain details of clerical work.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

ALEX. COLLIE.

South Hill Park Gardens, Hampstead, Nov. 16th, 1885.

UNIVERSITY REFORM IN LONDON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—It appears from Mr. Magnus's letter to you that, having obtained his majority, he hardly knows what to do with it. He is learning the old lesson that it is easier to mar than to mend, easier to reject a scheme of reform than to amend its defects or to offer something better in its stead. The majority which threw out Lord Justice Fry's scheme are bound to submit an alternative plan of reform or to accept the position of mere obstructives. Having had the advantage of Mr. Magnus's help in a former attempt to move towards the same objects as those which the late committee was instructed to promote, I cannot doubt that he is loyally anxious to help on the same object, and I cordially welcome his belief "that the cause of University reform in London need not eventually suffer by the rejection by Convocation of the alternative amendment." Let us hope that Mr. Magnus will produce a better scheme, for the movement cannot end here.

Dr. Moxon and Dr. Gowers think that the Medical Faculty of London can do without the University of which they are ornaments. Some of the professors of University College think that they can do without the Senate and Convocation and obtain the privileges and endowments of a German University all to themselves. Certain members of Convocation think they can do without either the medical schools, or University and King's Colleges, by refusing all reforms, and waiting until new secessions like that of the Victoria University leave them a mere "rump," separated from all the higher education of London, and consoled by the empty title of an examining board "for the world, or rather for the universe," and by the actual superintendence of the elementary studies of boys in Mauritius.

If our great medical colleges, instead of aiming at the public good by giving our students in London the real advantages of university life, common to Leipsic, to Oxford and to Edinburgh, aim at merely the guinea-stamp of a degree, they will probably fail even of this, and will spoil the University which they might help to form. If University College, instead of taking the eminent position offered it in a real University, spend its strength in attempting to obtain exclusive privileges, it will fail, as it failed in 1835. If Convocation should be so ill-advised as to refuse all reform, and cling obstinately to its present position, it will lose this also, for what statesman would give power to appoint the members of a committee of examination to those who

happen to have received its certificate, or to bestow a Parliamentary franchise on members of the Civil Service? I believe better of our profession, of London teachers, and of London graduates.

That Lord Justice Fry's scheme may be improved I do not doubt. Some of us tried to introduce amendments in committee, though our failure did not lead us to pull to pieces what we could not have exactly to our mind. We shall cordially welcome any scheme which attains by better means the objects we have at heart.

One word in reply to Dr. Sansom's interesting letter. The movement for University reform was not, as he supposes, "initiated by two cries." It had begun long before the legitimate attempt began to put London students on a fair footing with those who enjoy the university culture of Newcastle, or Glasgow, or Brussels—long before an Association was founded to promote a Teaching University in London. If Dr. Sansom will refer to the report of the Annual Committee to Convocation in May, 1878, he will find a memorandum on the subject of University reform, with recommendations as to Boards of Studies and University Chairs, and a closer union between teaching and examining; these recommendations were afterwards adopted by Convocation.

The present movement began in the University itself. It has since been helped by outside sympathy, and it greatly depend on the support of the medical teachers of London. If sectional interests prevail, each one can spoil what it cannot replace. If we are all willing to yield something for the common good, there never was so fair a chance of making the University worthy of this great city, and its medical faculty the foremost in Europe.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Harley-street, Nov. 16th, 1885.

P. H. PYE-SMITH.

REFORM AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I would beg your forbearance while I draw attention to one or two points in the communication of Mr. Godlee. In the first place, it is much to be regretted that Mr. Godlee had not, on the 29th ult., the courage of his opinions, and did not herald his adverse vote by raising his voice to protest against the two important resolutions proposed at the general meeting of the College of Surgeons. The matter at issue had long been before the medical public, but though at that meeting a direct challenge was thrown down to the party opposed to reform, not a single argument was advanced against those resolutions, not one faithful friend could be found by the Council to take up the cudgels in its defence, and to speak for it while it suffered from its pitiable attack of aphonia. No, Sir, the pleading was all on one side, and judgment went by default. It is a pity that the large number of Fellows not in agreement with the vote could only send half a score of their body to represent them on that occasion. Secondly, Mr. Gamgee is credited with advancing a "false analogy" in his "simile of taxation and representation"; to what the simile is falsely analogous Mr. Godlee does not state, nor even attempt to prove his accusation; he is content with an *ipse dixit*. Thirdly, he is unaware of any other corporation that recognises the principle for which we are striving. He will find the sought-for analogy in the charters of the Pharmaceutical Society, to go no further. In the last place, I wish to offer a personal explanation with regard to the following sentence in Mr. Godlee's letter:—"The result must inevitably be the handing over of the power now exercised by the Fellows to meetings called together by a few active spirits and guided by the inspiration of *anonymous* and *irresponsible* writers." Unless endowed with the gift of prophecy it may be presumed that Mr. Godlee argues from experience of the past. Now, I have searched through all the published "writings" bearing on the subject of enfranchisement of the Members, and with the exception of leading articles in the medical papers and a leader in the *Morning Post*, which writings, being editorial, can scarcely fall under the category quoted, I can only find one piece of anonymous correspondence, and that is a letter signed "A Member" and appearing in THE LANCET, *Medical Times*, and *British Medical Journal* of Oct. 23rd, and with regard to that, Mr. Godlee must be fully aware that no editor of a high-class paper will publish any