

PART IV.

MEDICAL MISCELLANY.

Reports, Transactions, and Scientific Intelligence.

Presidential Address.^a By JOHN LENTAIGNE, P.R.C.S.I. ; Surgeon
to the Mater Misericordiæ Hospital.

BEFORE distributing the prizes, I wish to express our profound sorrow at the terrible loss that we have sustained by the death of our late Professor in Anatomy, Dr. Alexander Fraser, a man of brilliant talents and exceptional administrative ability, whose incessant and untiring industry have been a marvel to all who knew him. By his death each of us has lost a dear and valued friend, while to our School and College the loss, especially at this most grave crisis in their affairs, is absolutely incalculable. If such a thing were possible our sorrow is increased by the knowledge that it was to his constant and unsparing industry in their service, and his recklessly unselfish devotion to his work, that his untimely death was due.

I desire to congratulate the successful students who have been awarded prizes, and to express for myself and for the Council of the College our deep regret that the pecuniary rewards which it was possible for us to give for such excellent work as has been done should be so utterly inadequate, especially when compared with the rich prizes which are given by the State-endowed rival medical schools. We are now beginning a period of the gravest difficulty and danger for our school. If these difficulties were merely the result of fair competition—that is, of greater industry and successful work on the part of our rivals—we would not, we could not, complain; any such difficulties could be met in the future, as they had been met in the past, by equal or greater industry and effort on our part. Unhappily, our troubles are due to a very different cause. The danger arises from the fact[†] that, as a result of a long existing political agitation, the Government

^a Delivered at the Opening of the Winter Session of the Schools of Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, on Friday, October 15th, 1909.

has carried an Act of Parliament which completes the endowment by the State of every other medical school in Ireland except our own, which has been carefully excluded from Government favours and left absolutely out in the cold. The Royal College of Surgeons have never found fault with the endowment of the other schools ; medical education has grown with the vast progress of science to be such a difficult and financially unprofitable business, that it is right and proper that it should be assisted by the State when necessary. What we protest against is the unfairness and injustice of endowing one or more schools while absolutely ignoring the claims of another, which has done at least as good work, and against which no fault has been or could have been found in the past. These rival schools will now be free from all possibility of pecuniary embarrassment, they will be provided with abundant funds for the equipment of laboratories and class rooms, the salaries of their professors and lecturers will be paid for them, innumerable rich prizes will be offered as bribes to entice students, and, worst of all, they can outbid and undersell the School of the Royal College of Surgeons by lowering the fees for lectures, degrees and diplomas to such a point as must speedily starve and destroy our School. It is a matter of common knowledge that all these things are actually being done, and this with funds supplied by the State, which should protect the interests of all alike, and to which all who paid taxes were compelled to contribute.

The scandalous injustice and unfairness of the scheme were so patent that when the Bill for the formation and endowment of the new Universities, which were to take over and absorb the four existing medical schools in Ireland outside Trinity College, was being introduced, the President and Council of the Royal College of Surgeons approached the Government with the fullest confidence that we should only have to state our case in order to have our grievance remedied. We asked for such an endowment as would enable us to continue our work in the face of the new and increased competition, and the sum we applied for was absolutely insignificant compared with the huge grants which were being voted for educational purposes for the new Universities. In approaching the Government we felt all the more confident of success as the institution which we represented was one which we thought should surely have had the entire approval and support of the great English Liberal Party, an educational institution

with a continuous record for a hundred years of good work done, absolutely non-sectarian and non-political, a common meeting ground for men of every religion and every shade of political thought with equal privileges for all. Such an institution, in Ireland of all places in the world, must surely be maintained, and could not be allowed to perish, strangled by the competition of State-endowed rival schools, whose character in these respects was, to say the least of it, still to be revealed in the unknown future. The Royal College of Surgeons did not spare trouble, work, or expense in making our position clear to the Government. We sent several deputations to London, who spent endless weary hours in the Lobbies of the House of Commons interviewing innumerable members of Parliament, including the heads of both political Parties and the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and finally obtained an audience of the Prime Minister. Mr. Asquith paid in words a high and glowing tribute to the good work which had been done by the College and the School, but indeed he paid a very poor tribute to our intelligence, for he then proceeded to assure us that he did not think our School or College would suffer by the new competition, but that if it were proved later on that they were really damaged, as was feared, then the Government might possibly, though he would not promise it, reconsider the question. The result may be summed up in one word—failure. For all our trouble, loss of time and expense, the net result was only a number of high-flown complimentary phrases for the good work we had done. We must confess that we have utterly failed so far, and the reasons for that failure are not very clear to us. Perhaps it is because of our ignorance of politics and political measures. We are a non-political body and know little of such things. We have no solid religious or political party with votes in Parliament to push our cause. In our ignorance of politics we relied solely on the evident justice of our claim, but apparently that alone was of no use. In politics we really did not know where we were. We had thought we were approaching a Free Trade Government, but as far as the School of the Royal College of Surgeons was concerned, we might as well be under the narrowest adverse protectionist regime. For what was this scheme of State endowment of all the medical schools in Ireland but one but a protectionist job of the most extreme kind applied to a class of institutions for the teaching of a scientific profession ?

The professors in our School have to live by the results of their

work in the School. How could they live if their classes were lured away from their School by rich bribes in the shape of prizes, by superior equipment of laboratories and class rooms, and by the lowering of fees for lectures, examinations, and degrees to a starvation point? You will, perhaps, understand my meaning better if I give you a picture of a similar state of affairs in commerce. There are half a dozen large drapery firms in Dublin. It is difficult to imagine it, but I would ask you to suppose that as a result of a politico-religious agitation the Government passed a Bill endowing all these firms except one, granting them money from the public funds, in which, in justice, all were entitled to share, to pay the salaries of the employees, the purchase of new and expensive materials, shop fittings, buildings, &c. Would not this be grossly unjust and unfair to the one firm which was excluded from the scheme? I have no doubt but that the employees of this firm would protest vigorously, and I scarcely think they could be expected to accept the Prime Minister's statement if he assured them that he did not believe they would be injured. They would be right to protest, for would it not be an intolerable outrage? The thing was so monstrous as to be actually incredible. Yet a thing which was so bad in commerce was worse when applied to an institution for the teaching of science; the employees in the ruined drapery firm might easily get employment again with the rival prosperous firms, but professors and teachers in a ruined medical school, when they have reached a certain age, can never hope to get employment in another school, least of all in a rival school which has grown great as a result of a politico-religious agitation. Well, this scandalous and almost incredible thing is actually being effected now, and so far there is no prospect of relief.

Our minds are clear, however, as to what should be our course of action. The Royal College of Surgeons are determined to spare no effort to maintain the highest possible standard of efficiency in our school. During the past two months we have expended large sums out of our scanty funded capital in improving the school, and we will do everything in our power to maintain the unequal struggle as long as it will be possible. Also we will agitate to the best of our limited ability, spreading the story of the wrong which has been done far and wide, and on every possible occasion, in the hope that for justice sake, or if not for justice, for common decency and for shame sake, the Government may be induced to take action to save our school before they have utterly

destroyed it, or if the present Government will do nothing, the next Government may be induced to remedy the evil done by their predecessors, and do justice to an old, honourable, and most useful institution. The President and Council have no private axe to grind in this matter ; we are not the professors or examiners in the school, and we get no pecuniary benefit or advantage of any kind out of it or out of the College. We are therefore all the better fitted to defend it in this matter, and we promise that we will do so to the very utmost of our ability. My term of office as President will end in May next, but another will succeed me, and after him another again, and my successor and the Council will all continue the agitation until we get redress. Owing to the peculiar conditions of professional life in Ireland the interests of the Royal College of Surgeons are bound up in the school ; indeed, its continued existence is dependent on it. Every one of its four hundred Fellows and every one of its three thousand Licentiates took oath when receiving his diploma always to uphold the honour and dignity of the College to the utmost of his ability. Well, we will abide by that oath.

THE " APENTA WATER " SPRINGS.

IN connection with the Sixteenth International Medical Congress, held at Budapest, August 29th to September 4th of the present year, visits were paid to the " Apenta " springs, where the process of raising the bitter waters was shown, together with the ingenious machinery employed. In making wooden boxes the nails are driven in by an American machine. Then straw envelopes for placing round the bottles so as to prevent their breaking are also made by machinery. This is an English machine. A German machine pastes the labels on, and the machine for putting on the capsules is home-made. The visitors were especially shown the scrupulous cleanliness that prevails throughout and how the water does not come into contact with the hands of the workers. Nevertheless, medical surveillance is exercised over the employees, so that there shall be only healthy persons on the premises. During three or four days parties consisting of several hundred members of the Congress went to see these wells.—*The Lancet*, September 25th, 1909.