the earlier stages of the course and not interrelated, though quite a substantial amount of psychiatry is taught earlier on. In the other two—medicine and surgery—earlier assessments are also taken into account in arriving at a final grade. Students who obtain a pass mark (grade C or better) in each of the five subjects are not further examined, except for the purpose of distinction, and are considered to have qualified. Those who obtain D or E grades in any one or more of the five final-year subjects are re-examined in the subjects in which they have failed at the end of the year in the presence of external examiners who also see those selected for examination for distinction. Those who fail to satisfy the examiners at the end-of-year examination may be referred in one or more subjects for a further six months. The main disadvantage of this method is that poor students tend to collect more and more failures as time goes on and get progressively into deeper water.

Birmingham Assessment System

With some trepidation, not without some difficulty, and a degree of "paranoia" among the "guinea-pig" group of students, the school completed the first of its new final-year course assessments in June 1970. While admitting that further experience of the system should certainly improve it, it appeared to be a greater success than either staff or students (who were at one juncture gloomily convinced that failure was

inevitable for all) ever believed it would be. Of 96 students in the final year under the new regulations 77 passed in each of the five final-year subjects and were not re-examined for the purpose of passing, and of 19 who were referred for re-examination in one or more subjects 12 passed in the presence of external examiners. Seven did not satisfy the examiners in one or more subjects at re-examination. These were referred again until November next for a further examination in those subjects in which they failed—in two instances in psychiatry, two in obstetrics and gynaecology, two in surgery, three in medicine, and six in paediatrics. As this number of failures is quite large the standard may have been a little too severe, though perhaps erring on the right side. Of the 77 students who were deemed to have graduated without a further pass examination in June, 25 were thought good enough to be considered for a distinction in one or more subjects and were specially examined for this purpose in the presence of the external examiners. Ten of these gained 13 distinctions between them; two finally qualifying with honours, their overall progress throughout the course having also been taken into account.

Though there were some mildly dissenting voices among the teachers (some indeed are almost as capricious in their opinions as are students), most seemed reasonably happy with the way things turned out, especially with the abolition, in large part, of the Final M.B. ritual. More important still, the external examiners appear to have been well satisfied also.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Extract from a Report in the British Medical Journal, 15 October 1870

A SURGICAL VISIT TO THE SEAT OF WAR SEPTEMBER 1870.

I had to wait for a midnight train; the aspect of things outside the huts was singularly picturesque and characteristic. The store-waggons of the Johanniter were drawn up in a row, and the "red cross" attendants were getting a rough evening meal before they turned in to sleep in the waggons. Some peasants had set up stalls in the open air for the sale of bread, eggs, and beer outside the station: they were lighted by flaring torches; and the Belgian and Prussian soldiers, with many waggoners, and a crowd of marauding idlers were gathered round them drinking hard beer and poisonous "schnaps." I was hungry enough to make a good meal off black bread and eggs. I had given away three or four hundred cigars and a few pounds of chocolate among the slightly wounded in the carts, and I now walked down among them to have a chat. They had been waiting for hours in the carts, and were just being told off into the railway trains which were waiting for them, and where they would probably have to sleep all night; for some hours would probably pass before they could be got off. They were cold, stiff, hungry, and were in some doubt whether they would not have to sleep all night in the open carts where they lay; and yet not one of them murmured. The Anglican accent in which I got through my talk with them soon betrayed itself, and one or two of them spoke to me in very good English. There were two Englishmen among them; one was a young man of good family, speaking fluently English, French, and German; he was slightly wounded in the foot. They were all anxious to be cured as quickly as possible, in order to get back to their regi-

ments; and the Englishmen were as thoroughly Prussianised as their comrades. Presently they were told off to their railway waggons. These were not elaborately arranged, as were some that I subsequently saw, for the reception of the wounded, but were just large covered baggage-waggons, into each of which from fifteen to twenty men were packed lying on the straw, which was littered on the floor. Each man got a hunk of black bread, and a couple of bottles of wine were handed in to be shared among them. Then the doors were slid to, and they lay there in the dark. It was impossible not to be struck with pity for the poor fellows, who endured so much suffering and bad accommodation with imperturbable patience and resignation. They accepted all that was done courteously and thankfully, and amid all the hubbub and confusion at the crowded station, through all their sufferings and discomforts they alone never forgot their discipline or their manhood. I may observe, here, that although the carbolic oil dressings were generally applied at Libramont, they were not used after a fashion of which Mr. Lister would approve: charpie soaked into the oil was applied, and no other precautions were taken. Open wire splints were largely used, and we were asked for more, but were unable to supply them. Further on, we found plaster of Paris splints very largely and most usefully applied, but here I did not see any. Presently I started for Arlon, and, arriving there, I met Mr. Berkeley Hill and Mr. Attwood, a former student at St. Mary's Hospital, to whose hospitality I was indebted for a sofa on which to pass the night.

ERNEST HART.