AN ADDRESS ON MEDICAL EDUCATION.

DELIVERED AT THE

Dublin University Medico-Chirurgical Society.

BY

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THE duty of moving that the address of the Auditor be printed has devolved upon me; and I rise to perform it most willingly, most gratefully, and, judging from the past, with the best anticipations for the future usefulness of this Society.

At the inaugural meeting of the University Medico-Chirurgical Society, Dr. Jellett spoke eloquently, because earnestly and with a full knowledge of the subject, on the advantages which the institution of such a Society as ours must afford, not to the University School alone, but to the cause of Medicine at large—a means the more of advancing the great desideratum of the self-instruction and the mutual instruction of the students. He spoke that which he knew, and therefore his words remain engraven in our memories.

The address of the Auditor is properly held not to be made the subject of debate; and I pray of him, and of you, to believe that what I am about to say is not conceived in that spirit of criticism so unwholesome, and yet so facile, which consists only in taking exceptions and pointing out shortcomings. This, as I have said, is a ready method; for, when the pseudo-critic has nothing else to say, he may always avail himself of Goldsmith's formula, "The work might have been better, if the artist had taken more pains."

But this address, putting aside its philosophical and temperate tone, and the marks of judgment based on experience and reflection, has this peculiar value, that it expresses, and for the first time, the views of one who is still a medical student (I use the term in its ordinary sense); and his views as to professional training, which correspond with those of some of the best thinkers of the day, are to be received with all respect and consideration.

In speaking of school-training, he eloquently said that "it is not the mere actual amount of knowledge acquired during these early years of ours, neither the number of books read, nor even the information derived from them, that will alone be conducive to success; far more the habits which our studies imperceptibly lead us into, the new powers with which we thence are gifted, the moral discipline which results in the production of those virtues and mental qualities which mark the true gentleman,—these rather shall lead us to higher eminence and esteem among our fellow-men."

Yet that these views will apply to professional as well as to what has been called preliminary education, we may believe that the orator will admit. This term—preliminary education—is no favourite of mine. At least, I have heard so much of it in the Medical Council as to make me rather sick of it. It is one of late growth, and, I think, born North of the Tweed. What does it imply? Why this: that, at the time of its adoption by the Medical Council, Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians were in the habit of admitting to their licence men who, as far as they knew, might have received no literary education at all. And that, in many cases, they were strangely illiterate, is undeniable. It will so continue, as long as these Colleges take upon themselves the duty of testing the general knowledge of the student.

But what, in most cases, notwithstanding the debates and the rules of the Medical Council, what, I ask, is the meaning of the so-called preliminary education, as tested by bodies who have an interest in the admission of the candidate? It means the possession of such a minimum amount of knowledge, crammed into the mind of a previously uncultivated boy, as will enable him to pass the preliminary examination of some of our multiplied licensing bodies. So far as letters are concerned, the preliminary is to him the final examination. He has then

done with letters, and takes to bones; and the system is but a fallacy, a delusion, and a snare.

Yet that the habits, deportment, and attainments, of the medical students—at least, in this country—have remarkably advanced, must be admitted. Much of this may be attributed to the large and increasing infusion of University men in the general class; and it may be partly due to an improvement in our school training; but I have yet to learn that, in any great measure, the so-called preliminary examinations have had much to do with it.

The defective system of education in many of our schools has been touched on by our learned Auditor, who suggests that there should be more or less special school training for boys destined for the profession; so that, when they come to medicine, they should have been instructed in mathematics, mechanics, natural philosophy, and natural history. No doubt such additional instruction—at least, in an elementary way—would be desirable for all the boys. Yet are our schools commonly in a position to effect it? And there is the danger which attends all special curricula, that, having been gone through, we hear no more of them or of their subjects. This is easily understood; they have served their purpose, and too often are dropped by the student when he obtains his license. No question our school education might be modified with advantage; but there is a fitness in things, and we should be careful not to overload the mind of a boy with studies that require the faculties of the man. It is like the system of giving scientific toys and science-made-easy books to children, when they would be better employed in playing at ball, or hide-and-go-seek, or reading some such wholesome books, as *Jack the Giant-Killer*, *Puss in Boots*, or the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*.

I think the world has gone astray on the subject of education, whether for a boy at school or a student in the theatre. What a boy wants in school, what the young man wants in his after-studies, has been well indicated by our Auditor: association with his fellows; the friction of mind against mind; the feeling of honourable rivalry; the study of that most valuable book to him, which I do not see in any curriculum—namely, himself. Education has been well described as good "if it teaches us what manner of men we are; next, where we are going; and, lastly, what it is that is best for us to do under the circumstances."

The auditor has alluded to the Teacher's Association. I am very imperfectly acquainted with the views of that body and, so far as professional education is concerned, some of their opinions may be correct, but I fear that their deliberations are more directed to the special than the general education; and, therefore, while I to some extent agree in their views as to the freedom of the student, the giving him the power and the opportunity of teaching himself, I fear that, if their measures tend to develope the special in preference to the general culture of the mind, they will but perpetuate the inferior status of the profession.

I have now been a clinical teacher of large annual classes for many years, and I can form a judgment on the comparative merits of those young men who have had a complete or even a partial university training, and those who have not had that great advantage; and I can affirm, that by far the greatest proportion of our distinguished students, men who are examples to their fellows, men of whom a six months' experience in hospital would enable me to predicate their success in life, and that they would occupy an honourable place in their profession, were of the former class. The public believe that instruction in anatomy and chemistry, in surgery and medicine, will make a surgeon or a physician. Instruction is not education. We might as well believe that the possession of a case of instruments would make a surgeon.

Instruction succeeds in making a qualified man in the legal sense, but in a larger sense he may be, and too often is, an utterly unqualified man—unqualified in medicine, unqualified in surgery, and deficient in the tastes, the mental culture, and the habits which would enable him to take a proper place in society. So strongly do I feel in this matter—and I have long since publicly spoken of it—that it appears to me that, with a proper basis of general mental culture, at least equal to that of the educated classes at large, the public safety would not only be ensured but increased, by simply affording to students full opportunity for every branch of medical study and observation coupled with tutorial teaching, while, in many cases at least, the terminal examination might profitably be dispensed with.

Sir, I must conclude; but, before doing so, I may be allowed to congratulate the Members of this young but already noble Society, on the success of their first session, heralded by the profoundly philosophical address of Mr. Collins, and again to offer the expressions of our gratitude to the heads of the University for the encouragement they have given us, and for the steady continuance of those enlightened measures which, while they have made this School of Medicine and Surgery second to none, have been so largely the means of maintaining the social status of the profession at large, and more especially in Ireland.