

**Observations by the Senatus Academicus of the University of Aberdeen, relative to the establishment of new examining boards, proposed to the General Medical Council by its Committee on Professional Education, 1869.**

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OBSERVATIONS  
BY THE  
SENATUS ACADEMICUS  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN,

RELATIVE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW EXAMINING BOARDS, PROPOSED  
TO THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL BY ITS COMMITTEE ON  
PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION, 1869.

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THE Senatus Academicus of this University having had under their consideration that part of the Report of the Committee of the General Medical Council on Professional Education (1869) which relates to the proposal to establish a new Examining Board for each division of the kingdom, have now, in compliance with the request of the Committee, to submit their observations on that proposal.

The proposed scheme, as contained in the 22nd clause of the Report, will at once sweep away, as licences, the whole of those qualifications to practise by the possession of which the members of the medical profession in the three kingdoms are now recognised by law, and by which they are known to the public to be members of that profession.

Before a scheme so sweeping and revolutionary can be considered as called for, it is necessary in the first place to be assured that it is required in order to remedy the deficiencies of the present system of admission into the profession. These are generally admitted to be the existence of incomplete, or half, qualifications; that the student, in order to obtain a complete qualification, is subjected to the inconvenience and expense of having to go before two separate Boards, one giving the Medical the other the Surgical half of the qualification which he requires in order to render him, in the eye of the law, fully qualified for practice; and that the Boards conferring the right to practise are too numerous.



But these objections to the present system, however much they apply to the state of matters in England, do not apply to Scotland. What is commonly known as the Double Qualification (more correctly, Half Qualification) clause (31) of the Medical Act of 1858, was not introduced at the instance of the Medical Bodies of Scotland, to whom its interpretation in that sense was a surprise, but in the interests of the London Corporations. The objections to such a system were so evident that the Medical and Surgical Corporations of Scotland lost no time in availing themselves of the combination clause (19) of the Medical Act to establish, with the sanction of the Medical Council, a joint examination by which the qualification given is complete; and for the past ten years in Scotland the complete qualification has been conferred by one series of examinations, either by the joint Board formed by the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons conferring the licence in Medicine and Surgery, or by the examination of the Universities conferring the degrees in Medicine and Surgery. But for the technicality of the 31st clause of the Medical Act requiring, legally considered, two half qualifications rather than one complete qualification, it is believed that the Universities would have preferred to give the one degree of Bachelor of Medicine, or Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, but it may be observed that neither degree is conferred without complete education and examination in all the branches both of Medicine and Surgery. The London University has since instituted also a degree in Surgery, in order to enable it, like other Universities, to confer a qualification in Surgery as well as in Medicine. Had the example of the Corporations of Scotland been in like manner followed by the corresponding Corporations in England, the evils now complained of in England would have been removed. The 19th clause of the Medical Act of 1858 provides that "Any  
 " two or more of the colleges and bodies in the United King-  
 " dom mentioned in Schedule (A) to this Act may, with the  
 " sanction and under the direction of the General Council,  
 " unite or co-operate in conducting the examinations required  
 " for qualifications to be registered under this Act." No new legislation, therefore, is necessary in order to carry out this consolidation, the sanction of the Medical Council being all that is



wanted, and no satisfactory reason has been given why the London Corporations should not thus combine to form a joint examination. In the event of these Corporations still declining to adopt this method of putting an end to the grievances complained of by the English student, the Medical Council would then be justified in asking the authority of Parliament to establish a Board in their place.

By thus combining the Bodies which can now give only incomplete qualifications, a Board would be formed in each division of the kingdom conferring a complete qualification, and the number of licensing Bodies would be considerably reduced. Thus the object may be attained through existing institutions, without disturbing the titles by which the members of the profession are recognised, and without new legislation, and if this is possible, it will be admitted that it is no light matter to be able so to accomplish it, even at the risk of some little delay. It might be well, in an amended Act, which may be required in order to deal with other matters than licensing, to insert a clause forbidding the registration of incomplete qualifications, but even this might be unnecessary were the licensing Bodies to agree, at the request of the Medical Council, to require that the first examination which the candidate undergoes shall be that for the complete qualification.

The proposed new Board, besides being uncalled for, is open to objection when the effect which it would have on existing institutions is considered. The consequences would probably be different in the different divisions of the kingdom. It is doubtful whether the establishment of the new Board in England, instead of diminishing the number of examinations, would not rather in most cases be found to have added another to their number. It might be found that the long established custom of recognising the members of the profession by titles derived from their connection with certain Corporations, was too strong to be resisted, and that the possessors of the new and nameless licence were under so strong an inducement to take the diplomas of the Corporations, that all who could afford the money would do so.

The effect on the Corporations of Physicians and Surgeons



of Scotland and of Ireland would, on the contrary, in all probability, from the circumstances of these countries, be very injurious. It cannot be considered desirable to destroy or discourage institutions which have proved so beneficial, and in the event of their being, as alleged in the name of the public interest, deprived of the privilege of licensing, it is not unreasonable to expect that Government will be prepared to undertake the support of the Museums and Libraries which these Bodies have maintained, when it has withdrawn the funds by which they are now supported.

The connection of the English Universities with the medical profession, in so far as medical education and licensing are concerned, is so slender that the proposed scheme could inflict but little if any injury on them. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge give medical education to few, and to these few only in part, while to those who graduate in Medicine at these Universities, the necessity of taking a previous qualification would scarcely be a change from the present custom. The University of London, being only an Examining Board, has no educational interests to suffer injury, and any diminution in the number of its candidates for medical graduation, consequent on their having to incur the expense of taking the diploma of the new Board, could scarcely be regarded as serious by an institution which is maintained by Government.

It is very different with the Universities of Scotland. They are important medical schools as well as licensing institutions, and educate not only the bulk of the profession in Scotland, but have educated a considerable number of the practitioners of England, and of the medical officers in the public services. Our students have the honourable ambition of endeavouring to enter the profession by a higher qualification than the mere licence to practise, and of obtaining not only a University degree, but the degree of the University at which they obtained their education and with which their associations are connected; and the combined result of our system of education and examination is such that our graduates not only pass but distinguish themselves highly at the public competitions for the various services, while a large number of those who have already



obtained the licences of the Corporations are rejected as unfit to enter the public services.

But if our students are compelled to take the licence of the Board under the proposed scheme, the effect will be to discourage University graduation, both by the additional expenses, which would be felt in a country where money is not so rife as it is in England, and by the inconveniences of having to pass at two different Boards. The result would be, that, with such a prospect before them, many would have to remain content with the mere licence to practise, with its lower preliminary examination in general education, its more limited education in the sciences on which medicine is founded, and its less careful professional examinations.\* Thus, in so far as it would affect the medical

\* The following are the Examinations for the Medical Degrees of this University.

(A) *Preliminary Examination in General Education*.—In English, Latin, Arithmetic, the Elements of Mathematics, the Elements of Mechanics, and in at least two of the following subjects—Greek, French, German, Higher Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Natural History, Logic, Moral Philosophy. This is for the Degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Master in Surgery. Those who proceed to the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, which cannot be till two years after taking the Degree of Bachelor of Medicine, and until the candidate is 24 years of age, must have passed in three of the above optional subjects, two of which must be Greek and either Logic or Moral Philosophy.

(B) *Professional Examinations*—1. The *First* Professional Examination, at the end of the second year of professional study—on Chemistry, Botany, Elementary Anatomy, and Materia Medica.

2. The *Second* Professional Examination, at the end of the third year, on Advanced Anatomy, Zoology with Comparative Anatomy, Physiology, and Surgery.

3. The *Third* Professional Examination, at the end of the fourth year, on Practice of Medicine, Clinical Medicine, Clinical Surgery, Midwifery, General Pathology, and Medical Jurisprudence.

There is a written and an oral examination in each subject of each Examination. There are eleven days of written examination, occupying from three to four hours each day. The oral examinations, extending over three days, are conducted as far as possible by demonstrations of objects exhibited to the candidates; and the Clinical Examinations are conducted in the Royal Infirmary. A Thesis is also required to be given in, on a subject selected by the candidate. The Examinations are held twice a-year, viz.—at the end of the Winter and Summer Sessions.



profession in Scotland, and others sent out by the Scottish Universities, the result of the proposed scheme would be either to lower, instead of raising, the standard of general and professional education, or merely that another examination and a new burden had been imposed.

It is easy to speak of the proposed scheme as aiming at a high and uniform examination. But, as the examination is one which it is proposed that all shall pass, it could not well be termed a high examination, nor indeed could it come up to the level even of an average, or to a higher level than that which the least educated members of the profession had been able to pass. By whatever name it might be called, it would, therefore, be undeniably a minimum examination, and when it must be so, little would remain to be said for the uniformity, except that, in so far at least as it concerns Scotland, the uniformity would be attained by levelling downwards.

The discouragement to University graduation thus caused would react injuriously on our Universities. The attendance of students looking forward to the degree is such as to induce Professors to devote themselves entirely or largely to the work of the School; this has its natural influence on the character of the education; and the Libraries, Museums, and various means of practical training which our students enjoy, are maintained by the revenue which the Universities derive from being licensing institutions. Thus the prosperity and usefulness of the Scotch Universities—the attendance of students, the character of the teaching, the position of the Professors, the maintenance of the Libraries and Museums, all depend largely on their being licensing as well as teaching institutions. The system is one not to be overturned lightly, and if there must be assimilation, it is maintained that the Scottish system of medical education and examination is in advance of the English, and, of the two, the more deserving of being selected as the model.

It is reasonable, therefore, whatever arrangement may be made for rendering complete, in each division of the kingdom, the mere licence to practise, that those who prefer to enter the profession by passing through the higher education and examination of the Universities, should be allowed, and in-



deed encouraged, to do so, and ought not to be subjected to the expense and inconvenience of having to take a minimum qualification in addition to their University degrees.

As the effect of the proposed scheme in its relation to University graduation generally, would be either to lay an additional burden on the University graduate, or to discourage graduation, it is hoped that a system which would be attended by such results is not likely to meet with the approval of the Medical Council, or to be looked on with favour by Government. On referring to the third Appendix attached to the Report of the Committee, containing an account of the systems followed in France and in Germany, it will be seen that in these countries the recognition of the Universities is very different from that which the scheme proposes for this country—that in France there are no other examinations than those of the University, conducted by the medical professors in Paris, Montpellier, and Strasburg, the state merely issuing the diploma on the recommendation of the professors; while in Germany, before admission to the Staat's Examen, every candidate is required to bring up his University degree—the Universities, through their professors, being in either case the institutions employed by the state, which thus takes up a position of support, not of antagonism, to the Universities.

It has been objected to the Scottish University examinations that they are conducted by the professors. The examinations are not now conducted by the professors only, but also by examiners who are not professors, three of whom were added to the Examining Board of each University by the Commission under the Scottish Universities Act of 1858. No Examining Board, it may be observed, from which teachers are excluded, will be efficient, experience showing that such Boards, as might be expected, fall behind the Schools. But in the event of its being considered that the number of non-professorial examiners should be increased, the professors in this University will welcome the addition, provided that the expense be borne by Government, the University having no funds for the purpose, and that the remuneration be such as to induce men of ability and scientific distinction to undertake the duty. This might be done either by increasing the number in each University, or by the present non-professorial



examinerships being made common to the Scotch Universities, and at the same time more remunerative, on account of the increased work. It may be well to mention that the professors in the Scotch Universities receive no remuneration as examiners for degrees, the work being regarded as part of their duty; and that the non-professorial examiners are remunerated by Government by a salary which is fixed, not depending on the number of candidates examined, or on the number passed or rejected.

The system of occasional visitation of the various Examinations by members of the Medical Council, has to a certain extent proved beneficial in some instances, but little can be expected from it so long as funds are not provided for the remuneration of the visitors. This is understood to be the reason why the Council has not yet, although it has authority to do so by the 18th clause of the Medical Act, appointed persons not of its own number to discharge that important duty. It is strongly urged on the Council to apply to Government for funds to accomplish this object. The remuneration would require to be such as to induce men of proved ability and attainment to undertake the duty. The Inspectors should be present at every examination which confers the licence to practise, and should report annually, or more frequently if they saw fit, to the Medical Council. From such a system of inspection, and from the publication of the reports, very satisfactory results may be expected; abuses, if they exist, would disappear, many improvements would be introduced, and it would be known which of the Licensing Boards are most worthy of public confidence and support.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN,

*February 15, 1870.*