

A letter to the provost of Oriel, on a scheme for making Oxford more accessible to medical students generally / from C.H. Pearson.

Contributors

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A LETTER

TO

THE PROVOST OF ORIEL,

ON A SCHEME

FOR MAKING OXFORD MORE ACCESSIBLE

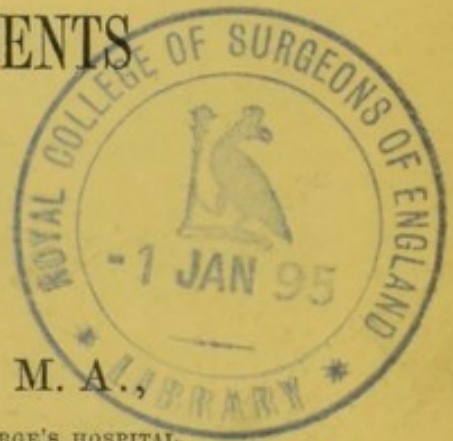
TO MEDICAL STUDENTS

GENERALLY.

FROM

C. H. PEARSON, M.A.,

FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE; AND LATE OF ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL.



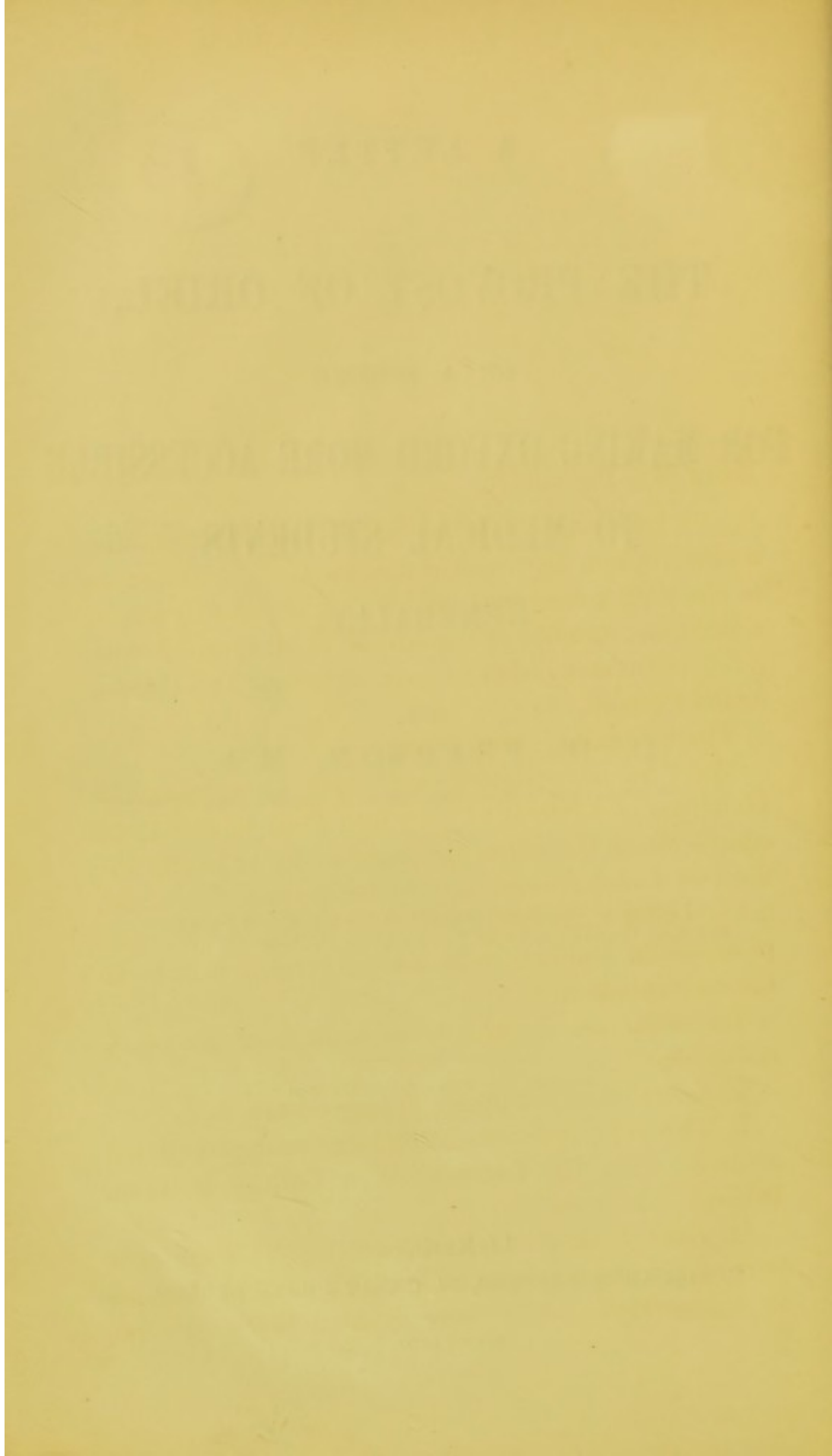
"The tide of intellectual ambition in our young men flows more
and more besouth the Tweed."—PROFESSOR BLACKIE.

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LONDON :

T. RICHARDS, PRINTER, 37, GREAT QUEEN STREET.

M.DCCC.LVIII.



DEAR MR. PROVOST,

I am anxious to lay before you at length the reasons, which have induced a few Oxford graduates to circulate a memorial, which it is hoped will obtain a sufficient number of signatures to be brought with a fair recommendation to success before the Hebdomadal Council.

The memorial is as follows:

We, the undersigned, beg leave to request the Hebdomadal Council to take into their most serious consideration the following proposal for reducing the term of College residence, under certain conditions, in the belief that Oxford will thus be opened to many professional students who are at present unable to take advantage of it.

The reduction we wish to see made is of one year's residence.

The conditions we desire to suggest are,

I. Two years previous attendance as matriculated students, upon the Lectures of a College in some British University.

II. Such Lectures to have been on the same or a part of the same subjects for which Oxford degrees in Literæ Humaniores were granted before the in-

troductio of the schools in Physical Science and Modern History.

III. The student to bring a certificate of good conduct.

IV. The student to pass the examination for responsions instead of or in addition to that usually given for matriculation, thus proceeding to moderations at the end of the first year, and passing the final examinations or one of them at the end of the second year.

V. That students who have resided two years, and passed the four statutable examinations, be permitted after the usual interval of three years, on passing the requisite examination, to obtain the degree of Bachelor of Medicine.

VI. That a delegacy be appointed to recommend for admission or admit the Colleges, which may apply for affiliation on these terms, and generally to carry the details of the scheme into effect.

In its present form, this scheme is less extensive than was at first proposed. It has been cut down, in order that only so much might be recommended as should involve the smallest possible change in our actual system, while it should yet benefit a numerous class of students. I wish therefore simply to explain, why we thought a measure that only affects the position of Medical students sufficiently important in itself to be brought before the University.

Of the three liberal professions which are devoted to the study of Theology, Law, or Medicine, the latter seems to be the one which is most imperfectly represented in Oxford. The number of

regular medical practitioners in England and Wales exceeds 10,000. The number of medical degrees conferred at Oxford has scarcely averaged more than two a year in the last five-and-twenty years. The number of medical men who graduate at Cambridge, is, I believe, larger than this, but not to such an extent as materially to affect the conclusion, that in no liberal department of life are the two universities less represented than in the medical profession. I must assume as the basis of my argument, that a liberal education in itself is an advantage rather than a drawback to a professional man. The question why medical students do not endeavour to obtain the undoubted social prestige of an Oxford degree seems to me, then, to demand examination under three heads: Is the education given at Oxford of such a kind as to benefit them? Or can they obtain one equally good at other places? Or is the expense of university residence the great obstacle to their profiting by it?

I. The mere fact that I am most anxious to send medical students to Oxford proves, I hope, that I consider the education given there in itself good for them. I believe, most medical men are on the whole of the same opinion. But accidental circumstances have seriously impaired among the medical profession the real value of an Oxford degree, as a test of merit. During the last ten years at least Oxford has never practically been a medical school. This arose partly from causes which have now been remedied; from the want of an organized system of scientific teaching, of a university museum and laboratory, and because anatomy, chemistry, and botany, were not recognized in the university class list, or

rewarded with fellowships in the colleges. It arose also partly from a cause which is not likely soon to be remedied; from the fact that a county hospital cannot compete with the large establishments of London in its opportunities for the study of disease. But it produced results of a curious kind. The Oxford degree of B.M. conveys in fact a license to practise as a physician in the country after three years medical study. This is one year less than is required for its degree of B.M. by the University of London, and two years less than qualify to become a member of the College of Physicians. That is to say, the Oxford diploma appears to recognize a low professional standard, while it yet conveys a great professional privilege. Of course the better class of students have not been affected by this: men like Dr. Mayo and Dr. Latham were sure to work conscientiously and successfully under any system. But our short term of probation is certainly believed to have encouraged a class of idle students to trade on the facilities offered for starting with the highest rank in the profession on the minimum of work. Of course strictness on the part of the examiners would have compensated for the short time by an increased scale of requirements. But when perhaps only two men in a year presented themselves, with all their prospects in life certain to be damaged almost irremediably by the stigma of being once rejected, it was perhaps not unnatural that the Oxford examiners should sometimes acquiesce in a low standard for a degree which by our statutes was not supposed to be final. Unhappily in the country our system of degrees is not understood: and hospital teachers were naturally scandalized at seeing their

idle and incapable pupils going out as physicians into the country through the privilege of a previous Oxford education. Mr. Paget's letter in the appendix speaks strongly to the unfavourable impression which some of our passmen produce in a London hospital. "The men who only take pass degrees at the universities," says another gentleman, in a letter advancing such minute proof of his assertions, that I do not dare to publish it, "are not much above the ordinary run of medical students, except in their more polished manners, and the greater facilities they possess for spending money."

I regard it as so certain, that the evil, which originated in an amiable inadvertence, will be checked by increased strictness in our examinations, that I think no one need be afraid, that students not of the highest attainments will ever again obtain medical degrees in Oxford. It was necessary to allude to the fact, in order to explain why a prejudice has arisen against the education given to passmen. For myself, I cannot believe that even an Oxford pass education in a diminished term of two years, can be anything but an immense advantage, when it is no longer attended with any unequal privilege in the facility of obtaining a medical license. It will be the substitution of general for technical culture in a class of men who at present too often commence their professional studies at seventeen or eighteen, working under country practitioners and in the dispensary before they actually go up to study at a hospital. Simply for such men to know that there are other departments of excellence besides their own, and to give them interests outside the professional pale, will I believe be doing a great service to

themselves and to the world. They will hardly be worse chemists for having a little logic, or worse practitioners for having studied the languages of Celsus and Hippocrates. Our boast is that we try to educate men rather than scholars. No profession is more distinctly human in its interests and sympathies than the medical. The charity, self-devotion, and courage, displayed by medical men, daily and unreflectingly, can hardly be increased. But the "more polished manners," for which the most unfavourable view of our education gives us credit, mean, I suppose, the expression or imitation of delicacy and refinement of feeling. These qualities are surely of the last importance to men who live by bedsides and in families, handling the quickest sensibilities, and sounding the most awful mysteries of our nature and our social life.

I have tried to meet at starting the objection which seemed most formidable, as it came from medical men, and I have dwelt upon it at some length, because it partly explains why so few students comparatively make an effort to go to Oxford. Oxford residents will easily perceive what amount of injustice is inadvertently mixed up with truth in the views here referred to; and they will also, I think, agree with me in believing that, with the attention at present paid to physical science, the reproach will soon be a matter of the past. As however, I believe, some think that few except our classmen are really fitted for any profession by the university, I will first point out (though I do not share their views) one or two considerations which seem to me of importance. The benefit derived from a place in the class list consists, not in the knowledge acquired, but in the faculties

that have been called into play, memory, attention, concentration, criticism, and combination. It is rightly argued, that, in a man of average abilities, these will not be developed except in reading for honours. But in the scheme of the memorial the increased difficulty of passing the University examinations in two-thirds of the time commonly required may surely be considered to compensate for the inferior quality of the amount of work taken up. It would, I believe, make no material difference, if moderations were excused, and the student required to go out in classical honours at the end of his second year. Again, it must not be forgotten, that no degree is required except for those students, who, in addition to the two years at Oxford, go through three years work at a hospital. The exact logic of chemistry, the conjectural logic of pathology, and the critical treatment of disease, are surely educational in the highest sense of the term, and success in them will baffle all but the energetic and sensible.

II. There are no data, I believe, for ascertaining at present how many medical practitioners had been actually receiving a liberal education, up to the moment when they commenced work at a hospital. Usually students are about twenty years of age when they come there, because they cannot practise till they are twenty-three, and the common course of study occupies three years. As far as I can learn, it seems usual for them to give up general education at about eighteen, and pick up professional knowledge as they best can, by doing the rough work of a country or a London practitioner. To rescue these two years for the regular training of any liberal system would be an unmixed benefit to the students themselves.

III. The only reason, then, to which I allow any real weight as a hindrance to medical students who would otherwise pass through Oxford or Cambridge, is the great expense of life at the Universities. The late discussions on this subject have probably gone far to correct the erroneous impressions, which have prevailed generally as to the necessary cost of college residence. Still, a student's average expenses will always be determined a great deal more by the tone of his companions than by the scale of College charges. A man who should reduce his rate of living to the minimum possible, be it £100 or £120, would at present find himself shut out from the practical education of the place; the society, that is, of his contemporaries. This, I think, is a great though certainly not a fatal objection to the system of cheap halls. But if by any means we can attract to Oxford a number of students with moderate incomes, and accustomed to moderate expenditure, they would create some counterpoise to the men of easy fortunes, who at present fix the standard by which all live. This, perhaps, would to a certain extent do away with the good effects of that practical democracy, by which men of opposite classes and characters are mingled for the only three years in their lives: it would make Oxford more like the world without. But does this community, so often assumed, actually exist to the extent that has been supposed? The same classes, even the same families, and the same schools, are practically represented pretty steadily at the same colleges; successful barristers or clergymen are probably thrown into wider circles in the world than

they have moved in at Oxford: it is only, therefore, men with no element of success about them except the spirit of good-fellowship and the capacity of spending money, who are really benefited by the present system. These are not the men who will lose the doubtful advantage of their social opportunities, under any change. But there is another class, who would gladly avoid the vulgarity of furniture and entertainments beyond their means, if they could do it without the affectation of singularity. What these men will lose will not be the real culture of intimate associations or friendships: they will simply no longer think it necessary to give a wine party once a term to the college, or appear at the wine-parties of others. And levelling institutions, like the boat-club, the cricket-club, and the Union, will only gain in importance from any increase in numbers generally.

Even, however, if the scale of expense remains exactly what it has been before, the medical student who goes up under the plan proposed, will save one-third, be it £150 or £200. Nor does this represent the total gain. He will be able to begin professional life at the earliest possible moment, instead of being kept back from it a year. I question whether the time at present required for general education is not in itself too long in the special instance of a profession like the medical. Men are practically fitted for other departments of life more or less by entering on them: there are no schools for the special duties of members of parliament, diplomats, or country squires: only a small portion of the clergy study more than a year before ordination: even at the bar, the idle and incompetent are called

equally with the hard-working. But a surgeon or physician must have attended lectures and worked in the laboratory, the dissecting room, and the wards of the hospital, during three years at least before he obtains his diploma. It is not proposed, and there is no desire, to abridge this period by the measures at present suggested. Now it is but a small number who have the patience to work steadily forward to a distant prospect. The difference between six and five years of study appears perhaps even greater than it is to a man who is working solely with a view to practical life. Probably we owe some of our ablest tutors and literary men to the reaction against excessive work, which has deterred those who were the highest classmen and prizemen in the university from recommencing as beginners in a new sphere of study. If there is any truth in this, it will be a double advantage to the majority of medical students, that their term of work should be a little shorter, and that practically they should have no occasion to think of reading for honours.

The last question to be examined is one that concerns not so much the students as ourselves. It may fairly be asked, whether Oxford will gain by admitting a new, and in some respects a different element into the colleges. Some to whom I have spoken or written have expressed their fear that the privilege of diminished residence, if granted to a few, will be claimed by all. This I quite admit would be an enormous evil. But the restrictions proposed, in the present instance, at least, seem to me to remove all danger. The class to be benefitted is distinguished clearly and sharply from all other professional students: it is connected with

the old faculty of medicine, and works with a view to a professional degree conferring privileges which have no parallel in the departments of theology, law, or arts. Practically a college in the other British universities is frequented by precisely those poor students whom we are anxious to attract. Practically, too, the education given at places like King's and University Colleges, London, differs in kind from that of our public schools; it is more various and practical; less critical and elegant; it occupies itself with the modern languages, with English history, and literature; it is meant for men whose occupations will preclude them from anything like systematic study, when they have once entered upon life. Generally speaking, they have more than the requisite mathematics and at least sufficient scholarship for a pass degree: but they are deficient in the niceties of Latin verse and philology. Besides, the rigid discipline of a public school is unknown: the students live mostly with their families, see their teachers only during lecture time, and are left in fact to govern themselves by their own sense of honour. A system of this sort, if at all well administered, is not a bad preparation for the self-reliance and self-control which Oxford life demands, especially from those who go up upon moderate incomes. These considerations, I hope, shew that the line of demarcation between a college and a school is not purely fictitious. But, assuming that Eton and Harrow should obtain incorporation with the London university, in order to profit by the new system, the only men on their lists who would be benefited would be the few who look forward to becoming surgeons and physicians. If, on the other

hand, Eton and Harrow should claim for lawyers and clergymen, what is asked for the medical profession, it will rest with the petitioner, to prove, that the grounds of pecuniary circumstances and the character of the education received before or after Oxford, are precisely similar. The resemblance is not at first sight great; but any-how English institutions are generally formed not by logic but by common sense. The two checks of the council and convocation will surely be found sufficient in practice to prevent any great innovation from being suddenly carried.

On the other hand the advantage to Oxford of receiving a new class of students will be great. We have at present, or are in the way to have, everything that is wanted for the proper teaching of physical science, but the class of regular learners has still to be called into existence. Of course, some acquaintance with chemistry and anatomy will be an invaluable element in a liberal education. But the number of those who can, or will, combine scientific studies with their other work must always be small. On the other hand, men who look forward to a B.M. degree, will naturally go out in the school of physical science as their second school; they will furnish pupils to the professors, and will themselves gain a more liberal acquaintance with science, than the technical teaching of a London hospital can give them: Oxford cannot be substituted for a hospital any more than the hospital can replace Oxford, but each will supplement the other admirably. The new Museum, and the new or augmented professorships, will lose half their value, if there are no working men to take advantage of them.

But there are some more general and more important considerations. Oxford, as a corporation of educated men, has no need to attract students; its resources and its wealth are sufficient for itself. But Oxford, as a place of education, which the nation has now decided it shall be, cannot afford to be either local or sectional: it is of the last importance that it should attract to itself a fair representation, at least, out of one of the most learned and laborious professions. It is not a mere matter of prestige or connexion; it is the question, how far the thinking and the practical classes of the nation are to be united. Ever since the middle ages, when it was the great grammar and logic school of the nation, the tendency of the University has been more and more to become the property of a fluctuating and elastic aristocracy, in which birth and wealth and talent were by turns represented, but which was still an oligarchy, exclusive, favoured, and in some sort separate from the nation. Every generation of English history bears witness to this divorce between the speculative and practical minds. Anglicanism and Toryism have been constantly the doctrines of the Oxford gentry and clergy, while Dissent and Whiggism have been recruited among the classes immediately below. Never, Selden tells us, was there a more learned clergy, than that which in spite of Andrews, Taylor, Sanderson, and such laymen as Browne and Walton, was overthrown by a nameless company of preachers, whose great merit was that they understood the national history. Whether England or Oxford were right in that quarrel, is a matter which does not concern the pre-

sent question; it is only important to remember that in a great popular contest the scholar, the divine, and the country gentleman, were mostly ranged upon one side, and the thoughtful, practical, God-fearing citizen on the other. Or take another instance in the puerile outcry that was raised, some years ago, against the study of mental science. The depreciation of logic and mental philosophy as means of education could hardly have achieved a temporary success, if there had not been a large public in existence, which read and thought for itself, and was conscious of having worked out its education without the aid of Aristotle or Kant. It may be right that differences should exist; but differences of opinion such as those I have indicated surely argue a divorce in habits of thought, which must tell fatally upon the sympathies and distract the political action of all our separate classes.

The late institution of middle class examinations will, I believe, if well worked, do much toward centralizing the education of the country, and placing Oxford at its head. Our peculiar systems and habits of thought, even our text-books, will become familiar to classes, who have practically grown up hitherto unacquainted with them, or despising them. It is scarcely possible, but that the teacher and the taught should gain from such an interchange of ideas; the one in practical application, and the other in largeness of view. Yet, with all its advantages, an extension of a system of instruction is scarcely to be looked upon as an extension of education. If it were possible for those who will now obtain the certificate of Associate in Arts, to qualify for it in

every instance by two years, or even one year's, residence in our colleges, it would surely be thought an advantage. A scheme which proposes in a special instance to insure this, and to add to it the additional guarantee of three years education afterwards, is surely only the complement of our existing institutions, and completes them only in the most conservative sense. We shall virtually be restoring the Faculty of Medicine to efficiency.

I have written at some length, from the wish to answer those objections which I have commonly heard urged against the views supported in the Memorial. The letters which I publish will, I believe, amply supply any deficiencies in my text. In conclusion, I have only to thank you for the permission you have kindly given me to address my letter to you. The interest you have always shown in supporting the claims of poverty, induces me to hope, that you will lend the weight of your advocacy to the present Memorial.

I remain,

Dear Mr. Provost,

Very sincerely yours,

CHARLES H. PEARSON.

APPENDIX.

It was thought useless to trouble the council and congregation of Oxford with any memorial, until evidence should have been received to show that a change would be taken advantage of. The following letters have been received in answer to a circular that has been issued.

Five of these letters—those of Dr. Ogle, Dr. Chambers, Dr. Kirkes, Dr. Beale, and Dr. Shapter, more or less countenance the idea that a change would be productive of the benefits desired. Two of these gentlemen are Oxford graduates, and a third is well acquainted with the university from his labours at the Christ Church Museum: as physicians they represent the class which is most likely to derive immediate benefit. Dr. Bence Jones thinks the obstacle of expense fatal; but that the degree is desired, and that “many would go in to the strictest possible examination” in order to obtain it. Mr. Skey is still less hopeful as to the prospect of many going up, until the scale of requirements in the medical schools is raised; should that however be done, he thinks that the “increased facilities” would “be thankfully accepted by many.” Mr. Paget doubts the desirability of a change. His valuable letter gives his reasons at length. From it no less than from the others it is hoped that a fair view of the position of the medical profession in this question to Oxford may be obtained.

The titles and positions of the contributors have been added.

It only remains for us to return our sincere thanks for the great courtesy and kindness with which our inquiries have been met at every step. Much very valuable assistance has come from friends whom in deference to their own wishes we are unable to thank with any mention of their names.

J. S. BREWER.

C. H. PEARSON.

[CIRCULAR.]

King's College, Strand, London, W.

SIR,—It is proposed to bring before the council and congregation of Oxford a measure by which, under certain limitations, students may obtain a degree in the university with a year's less residence than at present, at an earlier age, and less expensively. Will you kindly tell us, whether in your opinion such facilities, supposing them to be granted, would be taken advantage of to any great extent by students of the medical profession.

We shall be much obliged if you will grant us permission to publish your answer.

We remain, Sir,

Your obedient servants,

J. S. BREWER, *Prof. of Eng. Lit.*

C. H. PEARSON, *Prof. of Mod. Hist.*

November 4th, 1857.

GENTLEMEN,—If a degree in medicine could be attained at Oxford with a very small expenditure of time and money I believe it would be desired by many; but to attract many students, the expenditure must be very small, although the examination may be made the strictest possible. If, for example, the minimum expenditure of time and money were required at Oxford as at St. Andrews, many would go in to the strictest possible examination in the hopes of obtaining an "Oxford degree." I have great doubts whether a small reduction of time and money would have any effect on medical students; they must be induced to come to Oxford instead of going to Scotch and foreign universities. Without this can be done there will be no more than at present applying for Oxford medical degrees.

I am

Your obedient Servant,

H. BENCE JONES, M.D., F.R.S.

Fellow of the College of Physicians.

Physician to St. George's Hospital.

MY DEAR PEARSON,—I have much pleasure in answering your question with regard to the supposed extent to which students would seek a university degree, provided they could obtain it with

a year's less residence than at present, at an earlier age, and less expensively.

I cannot, however, reply to your question satisfactorily without, in some degree, diverging from the immediate point, although for this purpose I will strive to be as concise as possible.

As far as my experience goes, I certainly think that if such facilities as you allude to were granted, a much larger number than at present would be induced to obtain a university education and degree. And with partial exception to one of those facilities to which you advert, I should be glad to see them held out as allurements. The exception which I would make is to the diminished time of residence at our universities.* I much question the desirability of this proposal, saving as regards one possible section of academies, namely, the majority of those who are destined for my own profession, that of medicine (including surgery). I have often thought that in the case of this class of students it would be highly beneficial were two years of residence only required (those who wished, as at present, to prolong their preliminary studies could of course do so) and that year which is now the third, allowed to be spent at some other place of instruction, as London. After this year, of which an account should be given, the student should return to Oxford and testify his competency by examination in sciences cognate and immediately preparatory to medicine for the designation of student in that faculty. This would be to give to the gown of a student of medicine a real signification, which, as in the case of law is at present entirely wanting, and it would moreover lead the medical student to get over a large amount of necessary ground before he commenced the clinical and more practical portion of his studies in London or elsewhere for which he would be all the less trammelled. Without venturing more closely into the consideration of details, I conceive that some plan of this kind would tend to bring numbers to the university who are about to enter the medical profession, but who at present have no inducements to enter them; and it would keep up good classes of professional students for the medical and physiological professors, inasmuch as the medical student so drawn to the university would be one who, as a rule, had made choice of his future profession before admission at the university, and would be desirous, without neglecting general education, to pay attention also from the first

* Dr. Ogle here refers to a portion of the scheme, which has now been abandoned.

to such subjects as are collateral to medicine. This of course is said under the supposition that university professorships *bonâ fide* well appointed to and remunerated (of which in connection with all pertaining to the faculty of medicine there seems a probability) are established. As regards those whom it is wished to see in possession of the possibility of a university education, but who under existing circumstances are debarred therefrom by necessary circumstances, I believe that, in by far the majority of instances, the hindrance to their enjoying it arises from the matter of expense. The chief question asked by themselves or friends is, "What will it cost a year?" This I conceive to be a far greater impediment than the protracted time of residence at present demanded. When a diminished residence is clamoured for, it is mainly because a diminished financial outlay is involved, and if this financial difficulty were solved to aspirants, few of them would grudge the whole period of three years. If this be so, indeed, I am also of opinion, that, excepting the class of students in medicine to which I have before alluded, it would be most hurtful to curtail any time of residence, especially now that the curriculum is more varied and comprehensive, and this for reason which time precludes me from dwelling upon. I will not occupy time by conjecturing how expense might wisely be diminished. I suppose, however, the only efficient method would be to return more or less fully to the ancient system of Halls, Hotels, or Convictoria, under the control of regents, such as existed in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, as of course it is the private (and if I may so say, for I should be sorry to lend a hand to the abolition of colleges,) the parasitic collegial as opposed to the university system proper, which now proves, with but few exceptions, so expensive, that but few, comparatively speaking, can take advantage of it. With reference to undergraduates being allowed to enter the university at an earlier age than is now customary, I believe, that any measure contemplating this change would on the whole be beneficial, although I am of this not so sure as I am of the good to be anticipated from a diminished expense and establishment of halls in the old acceptance of the term. The difficulty would be to avoid converting the university into a mere school; yet I think that the most objectionable evils which might be supposed in this way likely to present themselves might be avoided: if students went up one year younger than they now do, and lived in less expensive halls and with less expensive and luxurious habits, a corps large enough to be proof

against expensive habits of imitation or the dangers of isolation from the general body of residents, a thing so much to be avoided, would be created. I am inclined to think that by lowering the age of entrance much more of the community at large would fall under the direct influence of our universities, which would thus more completely claim the character of national educators. This is the more likely to occur now that the new statute (as regards Oxford) has been promulgated "concerning the examinations of those who are not members of the university," which statute will doubtless be the means of bringing into prominence up and down the country numbers who will prove able to adorn the universities should they gain exhibitions public or private, or should such reductions of expense be established, as before premised in a university residence. Apologising for continuing this communication to a length greater than I at first anticipated,

I remain,

Yours as ever,

JOHN W. OGLE, M.D., Oxford.

Assistant Physician to St. George's Hospital.

13, Upper Brook Street, Nov. 25th.

1, Hill Street, Nov. 11th, 1857.

DEAR SIR,—The class of students of whom I have most experience, are those who are acquiring a knowledge of the medical profession at the Metropolitan hospitals. As a lecturer at one of these schools, I have felt it my duty to take every opportunity of conversing with my pupils, confidentially, about their educational life, past and future. With scarcely an exception, I have found all the most intelligent and industrious regret, that they had come straight from school to professional studies, without the social and intellectual advantages of an university life. Some, even, who have already passed through their professional course and are members of the College of Surgeons, have expressed a desire to begin life, as it were, anew at Oxford, but are deterred by the expenditure of time and money thereby entailed. I feel sure, that such a scheme as you propose, if "the limitations" are not such as to nullify its design, would be taken advantage of in a few years, very extensively by medical students, who are mainly derived from the middle classes and poorer portion of the upper classes of society. At present, only a few physicians in easy circumstances receive an university education; it would, surely, be of

great value to England, if the advantages of it were extended to the great mass of rural surgeons scattered over the land. They would be better practitioners, and, moreover, would then be in a position to join with the clergy in diffusing through remote districts that influence of gentlemanly feeling which, taking its root at our universities, is spread by its sons throughout our country.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

THOS. K. CHAMBERS,

*Lecturer on the Practice of Medicine at St. Mary's
Medical School, and Physician to the Hospital.*

2, Lower Seymour Street, Nov. 18th, 1857.

MY DEAR — I scarcely feel in a position to give a correct and suitable reply to the two questions suggested by the circular you have forwarded to me. I think there can be little doubt, however, in regard to Quest. I., that the adoption of the plan proposed in the circular would "benefit the medical student;" and with regard to Quest. II, I think it very probable, that medical students would avail themselves of it, especially after it has been established a few years and become generally known.

Yours very sincerely,

W. S. KIRKES,

*Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Assistant
Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

13, Grosvenor Street, Nov. 18th, 1857.

DEAR — Having considered the subject of your letter, relative to the proposition to reduce the period, and to limit the expense of residence at Oxford University for medical students and others, I am of opinion that advantage would not, at present, be taken on any large scale, of the change proposed by the junior members of our profession. There exists so wide a chasm between the acquirements and educational level of the large majority of medical students and those professedly university students, on commencing their career of study at college, that I doubt whether more than a very limited number would avail themselves of the privilege contemplated; and, moreover, I apprehend that the class of young men who represent the body of general practitioners throughout

England, are not in possession of sufficient pecuniary means to enable them to do so.

These two obstacles appear to me fatal. But should we succeed in enforcing on the student the necessity of a higher classed education; if we can show that the superstructure of medicine is sufficiently exalted to demand a more elaborate and substantial base than it at present obtains; then, I think the increased facilities proposed for the acquisition of academic rank will be thankfully accepted by many junior members of our profession.

Believe me,

Dear ———,

Yours very affectionately,

FREDERICK C. SKEY,

*F.R.S., Surgeon and Professor of Anatomy
in St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

24, Henrietta Street, Cavendish Square,
November 6th, 1857.

MY DEAR ——— I think the proposed plan would not be generally beneficial to medical students, or generally adopted by them. Education in Oxford, or Cambridge, has not appeared to me to confer peculiar advantages on those destined for the medical profession, unless they have submitted themselves to the thorough mental discipline required for the higher honours of the University. The majority of those who have taken common degrees in Arts, or who have taken the L.M., or M.B., without any arts degree, have seemed to me not more fit for the study of medicine in our hospital schools, than they who have gone from the better class of public or private schools to apprenticeships with surgeons to provincial hospitals, or with other intelligent and active practitioners. When the advantages of an university education for medical students are being considered, it seems to me that the clearest line must be drawn between those who take university honours, and those who do not even try for them. The former gain, by the necessary intellectual exercise, a very great advantage over the general body of students, and they learn the medical sciences more easily, more exactly, and more fully; but for the latter, speaking generally, I believe that the University system of education supplies little or nothing that is so useful in their medical studies as is the elementary knowledge of medicine obtained in a well directed apprenticeship of two or three years.

Of course, I can only say generally in regard to these things. There are some, who, without reading for honours, acquire at Oxford and Cambridge such knowledge, or such mental skill, as is of great avail in the medical life; but, speaking generally, and putting my opinion in another form, if I am asked whether a lad of seventeen or eighteen, destined for our profession, should go to Oxford or Cambridge, without any intention of taking the best honours he could attain, or should go for the same number of years to a good practitioner, or hospital surgeon, in the provinces; I should recommend the latter.

Of course, if I would do this in the present state of the University regulations, I would do it the more, if the University degree was attainable with even less effort and less knowledge than it now requires.

It is not for me to say what part in the improvement of medical education Oxford and Cambridge should take; but I may express my belief that they can render the best service, not by lowering their standard for degrees and entering into competition with inferior institutions, that can do small or common things as well as they can, but rather, by raising their standard for degrees, and by guiding as far as possible the courses of study in the public and private schools. The general principles of the plan for school examinations, promoted by Mr. Acland, seemed to me capable of very valuable application for the preliminary education of medical students; and if this plan could be well carried out by the universities, it would, I believe, very largely increase their utility and influence. And this it would do without at all interfering with that from which Oxford and Cambridge have justly derived their power and reputation in our profession,—the education, namely, of a certain number of physicians who, by their thorough mental training and large classical or scientific acquirements, have commanded success and influence. If the influence of the universities in our profession is, as I believe, decreasing, it is not because the number of their medical graduates is diminished, but because so small a proportion of them engage in the higher studies and severe discipline of the universities. I shall regard it, therefore, as a calamity to our profession if the degrees of Oxford and Cambridge were made more easy of attainment (easy, I mean, in respect of mental effort); their value, I believe, is and always will be in direct proportion to the difficulty of obtaining them; and I cannot see any real or singular advantage which

would accrue to students, intended for medicine, from two or three years residence at Cambridge or Oxford, unless the time were spent in thorough hard work for some really honourable degree.

If it be said that the advantages of social position that may be derived from university training, would by the proposed plan be conferred on a larger number of medical students, it may, on the other hand, be objected that there are even now circumstances which greatly alloy these advantages, and that their value would be so diminished by lowering the expense and difficulty of an university degree, that it may be doubted whether, if the proposed plan was carried out, they would have any value at all. In thus answering the King's College printed question, I have availed myself of your division of it into two; and have given my opinion whether "such a plan would benefit the medical student." My answer to "whether many medical students would avail themselves of such a plan?" must certainly be, "I think not;" and, unless I have misunderstood the plan, I must add, "I hope not."

Always sincerely yours,

JAMES PAGET,

*F.R.S., Assistant Surgeon and Lecturer on Physiology,
at St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

GENTLEMEN,—It seems to me, that the proposed measure would be productive of great good; and I believe that many students about to enter the medical profession would endeavour to obtain degrees at Oxford or Cambridge, if the expenses were reduced, and the period of residence limited to two years.

I remain

Gentlemen,

Yours very truly,

LIONEL S. BEALE,

*F.R.S., Professor of Physiology, and Physician
to King's College Hospital.*

Exeter, 16th November, 1857.

GENTLEMEN,—In reply to your inquiry as to whether "students of the middle classes, or the poorer of the upper classes would, if the university of Oxford were to grant a degree with a year's less residence than at present, and at an earlier age, and less expensively, probably avail themselves of such degree to any great

extent?" I would say, that if the degree so to be obtained tend to any substantive advantage, *i. e.*, if it be the passport whereby the student can the easier advance and establish himself in life, whether in the church, law, or physic, that such degrees will be largely taken advantage of.

But that if it be an honorary degree only, it will be little, or not at all, sought after, by either of the above classes of students.

The question then, resolves itself into this: will students of the middle classes, or the poorer of the upper classes, to whom, *now*, a degree is difficult, seek, if means are offered, so to educate and qualify themselves as to promote their advancement in life in the paths of the several learned professions.

Undoubtedly they will; for with the latter, professional life has long been deemed a legitimate sphere, and poverty has often interfered with the desire to educate so as to fulfil it; while, with the former, the sphere of professional life is esteemed to be a marked and decided advancement, and if, by lowering the expense of qualifying for this, the middle classes can achieve this meritorious aim they will, undoubtedly, avail themselves of it.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

T. SHAPTER,

Physician to the Devon and Exeter Hospital.