Keyser (P. D.)

THE RELATION OF THE MEDICAL COLLEGES TO PRELIMINARY EDUCATION.

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(*An abstract of a paper read before, and published with the imprimatur of, the American Academy of Medicine, at its Annual Meeting, held in Baltimore, Maryland, October 28 and 29, 1884.*)

[*REPRINTED FROM THE PHILADELPHIA MEDICAL TIMES FOR DECEMBER 13, 1884.*]

THE principal objects of this Academy are to encourage preliminary education of a high standard before entering upon the study of medicine, as well as to elevate the profession,—that is, to raise the educational qualifications of the profession. In attempting to carry out these objects, it is the intention to persuade, if possible, the medical institutions of instruction to assist us in this laudable movement by raising their requirements for matriculation, instead of that of the payment of a fee only; and also to elevate the educational qualifications of the profession by enlarging the curriculum and lengthening the time of study to three and four years in graded courses, so that a more extended and thorough knowledge of medicine can be obtained before granting the degree and placing the graduates before the public as medical practitioners.

Two years after the organization of this Association, the Pennsylvania State Medical Society took up the subject at its meeting in May, 1878, and passed a law forbidding any of its members accepting students lacking the prescribed educational qualifications, to determine which every county medical society has been obliged to appoint annually a committee to examine every one desiring to study medicine, before being accepted by a preceptor.

The State Board of Health of Illinois, under the personal exertion and supervision of its able secretary, Dr. John H. Rauch, has made herculean efforts and accomplished very much in requiring the proper and efficient education of the physicians practising in that State. It has given the key-note to all the other States having a State Board of Health. From the action taken in Illinois, many of the schools throughout the country have changed the curriculum to a higher standard for both matriculation and graduation,—that is, have advertised such changes; but we will see later if they are honestly meant and will be carried out.

The great trouble and opposition come, unfortunately, from the older and leading schools, especially those in the larger cities, where quantity rather than quality is looked at, and thus the country is flooded with physicians, many of whom have the degree, with little if any qualifications to support it.

In looking over the Fifth Annual Report of the State Board of Health of Illinois, some very interesting facts in relation to the position taken by the various medical schools in the United States on the necessity of a preliminary education before admission to the study of medicine are to be learned.

According to the Report, the total number of medical schools in the country is ninety-one. The number now exacting an educational requirement as a condition of matriculation is sixty-one, where heretofore only thirty classed themselves in favor of an elevated standard.

The total number requiring attendance on three or more courses of lectures before graduation is sixteen, while forty-three

recommend, but do not compel, such attendance.

Fifty-six regular colleges and universities publish that certain preliminary requirements are necessary for matriculation. But in this list of schools there are some, perhaps many, which really should not be classed with those in favor of higher education for the student and practitioner of medicine. Some of these institutions have set their requirements at so low a pitch that it would have been fairer and more honorable to have said, "Requirements, none. We want students and money, and not a higher standard of education."

Let us see, from their own reports, what their requirements are:

"Evidences of at least a fair English education."

"Evidence of a good English education."

"If necessary, an examination by the dean or registrar."

"Evidence of a good English education."

"Preliminary education and training sufficient to enable him to profitably and properly engage in the study of medicine."

"A creditable English education."

"Sufficiently advanced in an English education to study medicine."

"Evidences of a fair preliminary education."

"A good English education."

"A good common-school education."

"At least a thorough English education."

"A certificate from a student's preceptor of his moral character, and that he is duly entered and properly qualified to study medicine. The responsibility of sufficient preliminary education rests, of necessity, with the private instructor."

"The responsibility of preliminary qualification must rest with the private instructor."

"Evidences of a good ordinary English education."

"An examination, if considered necessary."

All these requirements are very weak, and their enforcement improbable. In the schools where evidences of a good, fair, or thorough English or common-school education are mentioned as necessary for matriculation, nothing is said as to how these evidences are to be obtained; and "An examination, if considered necessary," is so far from the mark that nothing said would have been better. Still worse is the putting the responsibility of preliminary qualification on the private instructor. It is shoving the responsibility with a vengeance. And these schools are accepted by the State Board of Health of Illinois!

Now, can or should these institutions be classed with those who are brave enough to say to the world, "We purpose assisting in the higher preliminary education in the medical student in this country in perfect honesty and good faith"? I claim not; and therefore, making the deduction, there are but forty-one regular colleges in this country which are properly professing to raise the standard of education. Again, how many of these forty-one carry out to the letter that which they profess to do? I am sorry to say but few,—from what I learn directly, so few that it astonishes me that the State Board of Health of Illinois is so deceived by the mere declaration or announcement of many of these schools that they can accept their diplomas without a State examination. If all the schools should declare in their announcements, as a mere cover, that evidences of a good English education are required for matriculation, and continue the free and loose way of matriculating any one paying the fees, and still persist in pursuing the old course of delivering twice in two years the same lectures, the State Board of Health of Illinois and of the other States having the same rules and customs will be greatly deceived, and still permit some as poorly prepared and improperly educated physicians in their State as in former years. Only a short time ago I heard a high officer and professor of a medical school say, "We wish to do all this in relation to the preliminary qualifications; but what are we to do with the students who come to us? We must admit them." Let me say there is no "must" about it, if there is honesty in the intention of elevating the standard of the profession, and the schools will look at it in that light instead of from a monetary point of view.

At two of the meetings of the Pennsylvania State Medical Society since 1880, I heard reports from some of the county societies, in which it was stated that young men rejected by their committees on preliminary examination, and recommended to take a course of study in a good Eng-

lish and classical seminary previous to their entering upon the study of medicine, had been matriculated almost immediately after in medical schools which claim to require preliminary educational qualifications before matriculation.

I have been informed by many graduates, as well as by students, that when they matriculated no questions in relation to their educational qualifications were asked. The presentation of a letter from some physician, especially a former graduate of the school, acting as preceptor or friend, with the conventional fee, was all that was needed.

All this is not sustaining the effort of the State Medical Society to elevate the profession. Certainly higher education in the medical profession is as necessary as in the other learned professions, if not even more so, for the correct understanding and judgment of the complicated studies relating to it. A high conservative power is wielded by it for the well-being of the whole people, and every legitimate means should be used to foster and enforce it, especially by government laws; and the sooner every State has a Board of Health, with a committee of examiners of highly and thoroughly educated physicians to examine and license every one desiring to practise medicine, no matter from what institution the diploma is obtained, the better it will be for scientific knowledge, the standing of the profession, and the interests of the people.

There are thirty-six schools which have no preliminary requirements for matriculation, and which take all who come, educated or not, who are able to pay the five dollars matriculation and fees.

Of the number of matriculants of the different colleges, those advertising preliminary requirements of some kind had last year 4393, while the no-requirement institutions had 5808, as far as can be obtained. This shows the readiness with which constant overcrowding of the profession takes place, the colleges graduating many who, from the want of proper mental training, are entirely unfit to contend with others who have been so favored by the proper and necessary education to grasp the thoughts and requirements of the thorough study of medicine, as to be able to show to the world that they represent a learned and liberal profession, and claim to rank as peers among educated men.

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