

Editorials

MEDICAL EDUCATION

WE publish with this *Journal*, in the form of a Report from General Practice,¹ the written evidence submitted by the College to the Royal Commission on Medical Education. This document enlarges the themes already developed in the report of the College on Special Vocational Training. It accepts that it must be the aim of the medical schools to produce a basic medical practitioner; one well grounded in the sciences of anatomy, physiology and pathology, in the arts of diagnosis and the skills of therapeutics, but one who is still unprepared for the responsibilities inherent in the sole charge of the sick in whatsoever branch of his craft he may intend to practise. Never again will it be accepted that the doctor fresh from the schools is fit to shoulder these responsibilities. In the kind of medicine practised today this is manifestly impossible: we should not ask the impossible, but we still do, and men are still being taken into partnerships as assistants and principals without having been properly prepared for the work they will have to undertake. The shortage of medical manpower will inevitably cause this situation to continue. The implementation of the 'charter for general practice' offers inducements, but no more, to those who will take pains to prepare themselves for their life's work. Encouragement to prepare for practice by proper vocational training must be strengthened.

Experiments to find out the best syllabus for this training are being undertaken in several centres, notably at Winchester, Newcastle and Bristol. The final report on the Wessex experiment has recently been published.² In this experiment, which had the generous support of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, the trainee practitioners spent a year in hospital, partly in established posts and partly as supernumeraries. The second year was spent with specially invited trainers, and as the experiment progressed the periods of secondment to other practices and in related activities were considerably extended. Those organizing the experiment were left in no doubt that a planned period of preparation is now essential before a graduate engages in independent general practice and they accept the desirability of incentives.

Both the College of General Practitioners and The British Medical

Association stress the need of a wide general education in those embarking on the medical course proper. The College advocates the advantages to be gained in spending an extra year working for a degree in science. This, for selected students, is to be encouraged, but does it go far enough? Would not the student benefit more by a kind of sabbatical year divorced altogether from medicine and the related sciences and devoted to an entirely new course of study with a syllabus culled from the disciplines of the humanities and the philosophies? Such a course of study could be based on literature, history and philosophy; logic and ethics might be compulsory parts of it, but, however composed, its aims would be to teach the student how to think, how to marshal his learning, and how to present the results in writing. In a world in grave danger of being engulfed in technology, it is becoming increasingly necessary to make positive efforts to retain some pretence of culture. Sir William Osler³ wrote that the university had two main functions—teaching and thinking. By thinking he certainly did not mean the prosecution of routine research. So much of what is today termed research is merely the collection of facts which call for little in the way of interpretation; the ‘ what? ’ is revealed but the ‘ how? ’ and the ‘ why? ’ are ignored. Thinking is not an instinct but something which has to be acquired by conscious endeavour; once the habit is learnt it stays and it is worth the extra time spent in the gathering.

REFERENCES

1. The College of General Practitioners. Reports from General Practice No. V. 1966.
2. Final report on an experiment in training for general practice by the University of London Committee for Postgraduate Medical Education in the Wessex Hospital Region. 1966. London. British Postgraduate Medical Federation.
3. Osler, W., *Selected writings of Sir William Osler*. 1951. London. Oxford University Press. P. 196.

TRAINING FOR PARENTHOOD

THE number of attendants providing for the expectant mother grows year by year. There is her own general practitioner and perhaps a general-practitioner obstetrician, the district midwife and the health visitor. If she attends a clinic there will be other midwives and pupil midwives; there may be the hospital team of clinical assistants, house surgeons, registrars and specialists; physiotherapists teach antenatal exercises and relaxation; social workers and almoners may take a hand; even lay persons may be recruited to provide