

## THE MEDICAL EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

MR. EDITOR, — An abstract from a letter recently received from a medical student at Zurich seems to indicate that, possibly, there may be some mistake about the remark in your editorial on admission of women to Harvard (June 5th), namely, that Zurich was about to give up her plan of educating women in medicine. If you are willing, I wish you would publish the extract, for it certainly indicates that one woman, at least, has gained the respect and confidence of her teachers:—

“Our cause gains friends every year, and perhaps nowhere is it more noticeable than here. Even Hermann, our professor of physiology, has a woman for his assistant this term. She is a Swiss, and had worked with him as student, so he knew what he was doing when he took her as assistant. And Professor Rose, the surgeon, has had a woman for his assistant for two years. I think I have not written to you since I accepted this position with him. I like the place very much, but have to work very hard to keep up with my work. [Here follows a description of the various surgical operations at which she has assisted, which includes nearly every operation ordinarily performed.] Professor Rose treats me splendidly. I could not ask any more from him or from the other doctors, so you may imagine I am happy and contented.”

Permit me also to make a few suggestions on the topic. It was with regret that I read your leader of last week. It has been evident to me for many years that, whether we male physicians liked it or not, women would enter the profession, as they have been rising into many other places of emolument and trust during the past quarter of a century. It has seemed to me absurd to try to keep our profession free from them, and the only questions with me have been by whom and in what manner they should be educated. I have always held that it is better for both sexes to have separate instruction, certainly in some departments. When I was professor I took the ground that upon some subjects the truth could be freely spoken to either sex *alone*, whereas a portion of truth might and probably would be lost to *both* parties if they were

joint listeners. I have therefore always opposed coeducation in medicine, however much it might be possible and profitable in other departments of learning.

The next question, namely, By whom should such instruction be given? I decided very speedily. I have too much respect for our venerable *alma mater* to admit for an instant that any institution but Harvard should give that instruction to Massachusetts women. Harvard stands first in Massachusetts, at least, and I mentally and most stoutly denied that it was morally right for her to send away any of her children to seek instruction elsewhere when she could give the best herself. I regretted that the university did not seize the opportunity which was offered when the Woman's Medical School, established by Mr. Gregory, was given up. By that failure the building and the school fell into the hands of others. I understand that many women are being imperfectly educated, and sent out into the community, which fact might have been prevented had the friends of female medical education and Harvard College then been able cordially to coöperate. Doubtless many of the professors of the Harvard school could have lectured at the new building, but, if necessary, others and adjunct professors could have been appointed to undertake the new task for the few who would have been unable to do so. Female medical education would thus have been established on an excellent foundation.

But what course should be pursued now by Harvard? I think she should offer to teach women in medicine, as she has begun to educate them in the collegiate departments. I believe that in consequence of the reputation that the medical school now has, and of its great advances towards a higher education in medicine, many women in this whole country who now feel forced to go to Europe for a medical education would flock to the new school, and that, within a few years, *large pecuniary results* would arise, as they have already arisen under the "new departure" taken for men. That so-called "new departure" is, I think, no longer on trial, but in full tide of successful work. Hence the argument used by the opponents of all medical education for females by Harvard at the present time, namely, "that the new course is still on trial, and must not be interfered with by any extraneous circumstances," falls to the ground.

In conclusion, let me make a prophecy. Having watched the "entering of the wedge," which began at least twenty years ago in the Massachusetts Medical Society, I feel assured that in a much shorter period Harvard will graduate women in medicine, with the *cheerful submission* of some, and the hearty "God speed" of all reasonable and reasoning men and women.

Yours truly,

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

113 BOYLSTON STREET, June 17, 1879.

[Our objections were directed against the coeducation of the sexes, not against the medical education of women, as Dr. Bowditch implies. There is a dissatisfaction with medical colleges for women among the patrons of female doctors which does not correspond with the accounts we receive of those institutions. One would think that women would take a pride in conquering failure without the aid of the other sex. By such a course they would gain the respect and sympathy of all. The experiment in medical education at Harvard is far from completed. A fourth-year course has not yet been added;

the examination for admission is still in a provisional stage; the new building, with many modifications in instruction which it would bring with it, is yet to be built. Harvard is still far behind the average European school, and cannot afford to give her attention to outside issues until she has completed her great task.

We find nothing in the letter from Zurich which contradicts the statement we borrowed from a German paper. We should be glad to see a history of the coeducation experiment prepared by the faculty of that university. — ED.]

## WOMEN AT ZURICH.

WE have received the following copy of a letter from Zurich, sent us by Dr. H. I. Bowditch:—

“I cannot imagine where you hear such remarkable stories about Zurich, when there is really not the shadow of a foundation for them. Let me say, then, once more, Zurich is now, and, for all anybody can see, always will be, open to women. So far the experiment has worked well. The women have steadily gained ground, and the opposition has steadily diminished. Even the students are not so bitterly opposed to us as formerly, and many of them treat us as their equals. This term Professor Hermann has a woman assistant, and I am with Professor Rose. The latter was bitterly opposed to us at first, but has been completely won over to our side. To prove this I will relate a little incident:—

“I had very much wanted this place, and in order to get it applied a year in advance. Toward the close of last term a student came to me, and said he very much wanted the place with Professor Rose, and the professor said he might ask me if I could wait one term longer. I went to see the professor, and told him I wanted the place very much, and must have it now or never, but if he preferred the student to me I would withdraw. He replied, “No;” I had applied first, and therefore had the best right, and he would never allow a woman to say again that she had not just as good a chance with him as a man. A little

while afterwards I heard the student was very angry, and proposed to make it unpleasant for me. In order to avoid any trouble, I went again to the professor, and told him it seemed best after all for me to withdraw. He insisted upon knowing my reason, and then told me to leave that to him; he would see whether any one would dare to interfere with me. I took his advice, and the result has been most satisfactory."

## THE EXPERIMENT AT ZURICH.

WE print in another column a letter from Prof. Edmund Rose, of Zurich giving in a brief but succinct manner the present standing of the educational problem in that university. It has been obtained in answer to numerous communications we have received this summer upon this subject, and can be regarded as a fair statement of the case from a source which we have been told inclines favorably towards the aspirations of female students. Accompanying this communication are a number of graduation theses, of very excellent quality, and catalogues of the university for 1878 and 1879. In the former of these we find a list of eighty-eight female students, eighty of whom are Russians; in the latter there are but nine ladies' names, five of them being from this neighborhood, and one only of the remaining four being a native of Switzerland.

Although the statement made by the *Koelnische Zeitung* proves to have been incorrect, it reflects the impression received by the European press in consequence of recent action of the university, rendered necessary by complications arising from this attempt at coeducation. One could hardly ask for more satisfactory proof of the impropriety of such experiments than the experience of this school. Except in Russia, where other than professional influences appear to be at work, there is evidently no demand in Europe for female physicians. Taking the list of the present year as a sample, it is evident that the question is connected, not with professional wants, but with the present movement favoring the general advancement of the female sex, that country most intimately connected with the cause representing the majority of students. As six years ago it was the nihilists, so at the present time the "advanced thinkers" have their delegation; at still another period it was the "German noblemen."

In view of these experiences we can scarcely believe that Harvard will be persuaded to make a similar experiment. We have already attempted to show that opportunities for all earnest young women who wish to gain their living by the practice of medicine are amply provided. The opening of a school at Harvard would of necessity be followed by a collapse of one or more of the schools for women; and in fact we have been informed that this is precisely what has been contemplated,—that the New York school would close its doors on the day that permission is given to women to study at Harvard. It is not, then, to "supply a want" that this university is asked to admit the other sex. Indeed, unless some such arrangement as the one suggested were made, the facilities for study would become as dangerously great as they are now for men.

Let the ladies by all means stick to their own schools; let them show a capacity for teaching as well as learning, for building up a medical community

by their own exertions without unusual or extraneous support. In any such effort we should have an experiment of reliable and permanent value which would settle the question definitely, and one which would win the cordial approval of even the most skeptical.

## WOMEN AT ZURICH.

MR. EDITOR, — Those of your readers who have been looking with much interest for an authoritative statement from Zurich, hoping that it would prove, as it does, confirmatory of those published by Dr. Bowditch and others, must have felt strangely surprised at your editorial comments upon Professor Rose's recent letter.

The *Koelnische Zeitung* turns out to have been mistaken; the experiment has not been "abandoned as a failure," but, instead, we learn that after twelve years, with its varied and remarkable experiences, the women are working earnestly and industriously, that their presence no longer causes excitement, that their graduation theses are excellent; in short, though there is but little except a reputation for liberality to be gained and adverse prejudices still to be met, that the "experiment" is thought worthy, under very reasonable and proper precautions, to be continued. Yet you say: "One would hardly ask for more satisfactory proof of the impropriety of such experiments than the experience of this school." Searching for the details of this proof, we find nothing but the unsupported *petitio principii* that the women study at Zurich, not to meet a professional want, but as representatives of some ephemeral sect. "As six years ago it was the nihilists, so at the present time the 'advanced thinkers' have their delegation; at still another period it was the 'German noblemen.'" If the fact of receiving, in considerable and increasing numbers, lucrative employment and responsible positions, both public and private, is an indication of being wanted, — and I cannot imagine what other kind of proof is possible, — then such a statement, so far as American women are concerned, is, surely, an anachronism.

You say that if Harvard should open the doors of its medical college to women a number of the existing smaller colleges would be obliged to close theirs. It is certainly to be hoped that this would be the case. Has Harvard ever hesitated before to enlarge the sphere of its usefulness for fear of cutting out smaller and less efficient institutions, or has any one ever wished it to do so? With regard to the New York college, I think your statement is, though technically correct, really erroneous. I was recently told by a prominent teacher of that school that they should consider this step on the part of Harvard as the key to increased usefulness on their part, inasmuch as they have long desired to devote themselves entirely to the clinical teaching of advanced students, for which they claim to have excellent facilities. "Let the ladies stick to their own schools," by all means, if they can find no better, but not otherwise, and let us not fall into the fallacy of maintaining that the standard insisted on by Harvard, with so much labor, is applicable to men alone, the second best being good enough for the women. The community have liberally supported Harvard in upholding certain important educational principles, and wish to see their application made as universal as possible. It is not desired that innovations should be made through which the success of the medical school might be endangered, but only that the university should cooperate cordially in seeking some plan, not open to this objection, for securing the same high standard of medical education for women physicians as has been secured for men.

The favorable experience of Zurich permits the hope that such a scheme will eventually be found. Persistent opposition to all schemes would imply, not merely a wise and laudable conservatism, but an unwillingness to admit that women have actually gained a definite position in the medical community, and that it is therefore as important, though less feasible, to make first-rate practitioners of them as of their male colleagues.

Yours very truly,

JAMES J. PUTNAM.