

THE HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AND WOMEN.

THE question of admitting women to the medical department of the first university of America has been of late the subject of much discussion; and now that the affair appears to be reaching a crisis it is proper that we should lay before our readers some account of what has been done, and express in no uncertain language what we believe is the sentiment of the majority of the profession.

Mr. George O. Hovey, who died rather less than two years ago, left a large sum of money to be employed for benevolent purposes according to the discretion of the trustees. One of these, Miss Hovey, the daughter of the testator, wrote to President Eliot on March 21, 1878, offering to give the Harvard Medical School the sum of ten thousand dollars, on condition that women should be admitted to its advantages "on equal terms with men." About the same time there was a good deal of bustle among prominent sympathizers in the woman movement; several members of the faculty were "interviewed," and it soon became an open secret that if the proposal should be accepted a much larger sum than that offered by Miss Hovey could be obtained in addition to it,—that is, if this additional sum should be insisted on. In due time the matter came before the overseers of the university, and the following gentlemen were appointed a committee to report upon it: Alexander Agassiz, chairman; Dr. Morrill Wyman, President Eliot, J. Elliot Cabot, and Dr. LeBaron Russell. After a year's consideration the committee has presented two reports, that of the minority being signed by Dr. Russell alone. We understand that these reports have been discussed by the overseers, but final action has not yet been taken. The report of the majority favors the admission of women under certain conditions, which we will mention later. We feel not a little diffidence in speaking our mind on a report signed by such distinguished men, but it is, we believe, our duty to assert that the report does not do justice to the difficulties of the case, and that the premises in no way warrant the conclusion. We will follow the line of argument with all possible brevity, making our comments as we go along.

The majority begin by stating that they have studied the results of experiments made in this direction in America, England, and on the continent of Europe, and that they find the evidence inconclusive. One reason of this, they say, is that the social conditions in Europe are so different from these in America that the experience of the former does not apply to the latter. We must object to the second of these statements, at least. The question at issue is largely one of principle. There is a radical distinction to be drawn between morals and manners. What is objectionable in its very essence is as much to be condemned in one country as in another.

The report shows conclusively that the number of women in Europe who avail themselves of their opportunities is insignificant, and that the extent of the "woman movement" has been greatly exaggerated. The majority believe that we must discard precedents, and consider the question "on its own merits." They assume that the demand for female physicians is increasing, and likely to increase still more. Their reasons for this opinion strike us as open to a contrary interpretation. The report continues:—

"The problem is a serious one for the university. Thus far it has educated men, and men alone, and has always found its resources inadequate for this work. The governing boards might properly decline to enlarge the university's sphere of action, even for ends of approved utility; and it is emphatically their duty to refuse to try experiments which might impair the execution of the trusts they have already assumed."

Here is a strictly logical conclusion. We cannot understand why, when they had reached it, the majority did not feel that they had done their whole duty. They, however, thought otherwise, and next take up the question of establishing a completely separate school for women, which they put aside as too serious an undertaking. "It is even stated," says the report, "by a considerable number of the most highly cultivated women physicians of the country that the same intellectual standard cannot be maintained in a medical school devoted to women alone as in a school for men; and they further assert that the intellectual stimulus obtained by the female students from their association with men is an all-important element of success." We confess we are surprised at so frank an admission of inferiority. Yet a few lines further on the majority tell us that "under these circumstances" they think it desirable that the experiment of admitting women to the Medical School should be tried. More surprising still, they assure us that "their opinion is based not only on carefully weighed statements of views favorable and unfavorable to the movement, but upon consultation with the professors and teachers of the Medical School, and upon individual expressions of opinion from the members of the Massachusetts Medical Society." Let us see what the basis of this statement may be.

The committee sent the following questions to about thirteen hundred members of the State Medical Society:—

"(1.) Are you in favor of admitting women to the Medical School?"

"(2.) Are you in favor of admitting women on equal terms with men?"

"(3.) Are you in favor of a separate school for women?"

"(4.) If in favor of medical coeducation, specify the subjects which, in your opinion, can be taught in common, and those in which men and women should receive separate instruction."

The report states that seven hundred and twelve answers were received and gives a very good classified list of the answers to questions 1, 2, and 3. When, however, the majority came to interpret the answers, they chose to employ those to question 4. It is well known that statistics may be made to prove pretty nearly anything, and the majority find that about five hundred and fifty "are in favor of the admission of women, or in favor of some form of recognition." We have not space to go into the matter thoroughly, but we must beg leave to point out that the majority do not present the following facts: Five of the seven hundred and twelve who answered gave no definite reply to 1, 2, and 3. Question 1 was answered in the negative by three hundred and fifty-six, more than half, and question 2 by three hundred and sixty-seven.

Let us now turn to the views of the faculty of the Medical School. We will quote from the report:—

"Of twenty-one members of the medical faculty, who expressed their views in writing, six are in favor of admitting women to the school with restrictions. Three are in favor of making the experiment, but have strong doubts of its expediency or success. Seven are strongly opposed to the plan. Five are opposed, but willing to try the experiment under certain conditions.

"Of the six in favor, only one is in favor of admission without restrictions.

"Of the nine more or less in favor, four require a guarantee fund of \$200,000.

"Of the twelve more or less opposed, five consider \$200,000 as the sum necessary to warrant the trial of the experiment, if it is to be tried at all."

It is thus evident that the largest number who thoroughly agree with one another is seven, who are strongly opposed to the plan, and that a majority (twelve) are more or less opposed to it. We fail to make out how many are strongly in favor of the plan, but it is clear that it is a small minority.

It is in the face of these facts that the majority of the committee affirm that their opinion is based "upon consultation with the professors and teachers of the Medical School, and upon individual expressions of opinion from the members of the Massachusetts Medical Society." It seems to us that they are acting in defiance of both.

The majority recommend the acceptance of Miss Hovey's offer on the following conditions:—

"That, after the completion of a new building, women be admitted to the Medical School as an experiment for a period of ten years. That they be not less than twenty-two years of age. That the requisitions for admission and the course of study be the same as for men. That the examinations for women and men shall be identical. That nothing shall be countenanced which will in any way lower the standard of the school, or affect the execution of the plans laid out for its development. That the courses of lectures in which students take no active part be open to both men and women; that for personal instruction in laboratories and for recitations the two sexes be separated; and that a complete separation be made in such subjects as obstetrics, the diseases of women, certain portions of anatomy and physiology, and the like."

They believe that sixty or sixty-five thousand dollars would be sufficient to meet the expense caused by the experiment, but that a considerable endowment would be necessary should the plan be permanently adopted.

Dr. Russell's report is a truly admirable one. It shows the omissions and inconsistencies to which we have alluded in the majority report. It points out that, much as the school has done for medical education, the faculty are not yet satisfied with its course, and desire still further advances.

"It is urged that the present is an unfavorable time for the trial of a new experiment which may interfere seriously with those now in progress, and postpone indefinitely some of the important improvements proposed. It is held that the permanent interests of the school, and of the large classes of male students, for whom it was originally established, and to whom it must always look for its chief support, ought not to incur any additional risk at this critical period of its history."

Dr. Russell calls attention to one practical point which we are surprised the majority should have overlooked:—

"It is estimated that the time required for the studies which, by the plan of the majority of the committee, would be pursued separately by women amounts to about four fifths of the time occupied by the whole course. A school for men, which, while in terms admitting women, excludes them from attendance upon so large a number of exercises, and requires separate instruction in so many branches, would be less advantageous to women than a school established exclusively for their own sex."

He recommends the establishment of a distinct school for women.

We trust the overseers will take speedy and decisive action. We are anxious to know whether Harvard intends to remain true to her boasted policy of steadily improving medical education by methods of acknowledged worth, or whether for a "consideration" she will experiment with whatever theory may be the fashion of the day.

THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN TO HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

WE called attention two weeks ago to the fact that the board of overseers had under discussion the question of accepting a bequest of ten thousand dollars, offered in case women were admitted to the medical department. Since that time the final meeting has been held, but previous to this it was thought expedient to call the medical faculty together for a formal expression of opinion. At this meeting of the faculty it was evident that there was a decided change of opinion since its previous vote, taken one year before. The debate terminated with the following resolution, carried by a vote of thirteen to five: "Whereas the medical faculty are now engaged in radically changing the plan of study in the school, an undertaking which will require several years for its completion, and will demand all the time and ability of the teachers which are available for the purpose, we deem it detrimental to the interests of the school to enter upon the experiment of admitting female students." It was also "Resolved that it is not advisable to open the course of study at the medical school to women" by a vote of fourteen to four. One member who was obliged to leave during the discussion would have voted with the majority in each case. Under these circumstances it was but natural that the overseers at their meeting, held a few days subsequently, resolved "That the overseers find themselves unable to advise the president and Fellows to accept the generous proposal of Miss Hovey" by a vote of seventeen to seven. In view of this it is somewhat surprising that the president, who, it will be remembered, was one of those who signed the majority report of the committee favoring the admission of women, quietly introduced the following proposition at the end of the meeting, after a long discussion on the main question and without previous notice: "That in the opinion of the board of overseers it is expedient that under suitable restrictions women be instructed in medicine by Harvard University in its medical school." This question was put without previous debate, and passed by a vote of sixteen to ten, several members, not having, we are informed, appreciated its inconsistency or its attitude of opposition to the very clearly expressed views of the faculty. If the second resolution is to be considered a fair expression of opinion of the board of overseers, which we do not think to be the case, Harvard is so far on record as favoring the coeducation of the sexes.

The main argument upon which the little band of persistent and energetic ladies relied who favor the education of women at the university, and under whose influence its present head seems to have become an advocate of the cause, was the total lack of means to obtain a proper medical education in this country. This was their strong point, and so far as the majority report shows we find no evidence that such opportunities exist. A glance, however, at the catalogues of medical schools for women in this country, and some of the opinions of prominent men in the principal cities upon the advantages of such schools, gives quite a different picture from that presented to the overseers.

The Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for 1878-79 shows a prosperous condition of that school. A

graduated course of three years' study is provided, to which preliminary examinations or diplomas are required for admission. Yearly and final examinations for a degree are held by the faculty, after which candidates are required to go before a board of examiners, consisting of some of the most eminent professors of the medical schools of New York. The best clinical facilities are within reach. The medical class for 1877-78 contained forty-seven students. Among the names on the list are those of six students from Massachusetts. At the commencement, May 22, 1879, ten graduates were examined and pronounced well qualified by the board of examiners. Members of the board regard the standard of excellence at the examinations as good as that at the best colleges.

The Twenty-Ninth Annual Announcement of the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania for 1878-79 gives a favorable account of the condition of that institution. This school is established on a permanent basis, having an endowment fund. It has a progressive course of three years' study, and careful examinations for a degree. It has excellent clinical advantages, particularly at the Women's Hospital, where over four thousand patients are treated annually, and instruction is given daily by the resident physician, Dr. Anna E. Broomall. The class for 1879 has ninety students. Twenty graduates received their degrees this year, and the quality of the students is represented as better every year.

The Ninth Annual Announcement of the Woman's Hospital Medical College, of Chicago, represents the faculty of that school as "desirous to give every possible encouragement to the growing tendency toward a higher medical education." It requires a preliminary examination or diploma for admission, a course of three years' study, and a final examination for a degree. It has a "new college building admirably adapted to its wants." It has extensive clinical advantages and abundant material for the study of practical anatomy in the dissecting-room. The medical class for 1877-78 consisted of thirty-two students. The number of graduates of the class of 1878 is seven.

Incidental replies to letters of inquiry from leading physicians in New York and Philadelphia develop the fact that while the schools for women there are looked upon with great favor, the universal opinion of the profession, so far as it has been expressed, is decidedly and strongly against the coeducation of the sexes in medicine.

From this testimony it is evident that abundant opportunity for a good medical education of women does exist in this country.

We are informed that in a recent number of the *Coelnische Zeitung* it is stated that the university at Zurich has decided no longer to admit women, because the experiment had proved a failure, and had led to evil moral results. Syracuse University has, we understand, also had a somewhat similar experience.

It can hardly be possible that such evidence as this has been wholly overlooked. How are we to interpret, then, the unwillingness of the female sympathizers to found a separate school, which, with one half the energy now displayed, and the moneyed interest to back it, could easily have been accom-

plished? Clearly this movement is intended as the thin end of the wedge which is to open the entire university to women. The vigorous rally of the faculty at the eleventh hour was not sufficient to counteract the influences which in plausible disguise were quietly exerting their full strength. Had this body from the outset given in a decided manner the weight of its opinion against the question, and presented an impenetrable front, no weak point of attack would have presented itself. But some of its members chose at first, for reasons best known to themselves, to assume an ambiguous attitude. Into this crevice the wedge was dexterously inserted, and the woman party, well satisfied with their success, will drive it home at the first favorable opportunity.

We trust there will be a vigorous protest from the alumni at their annual meeting against this "new departure," and that they will make their influence felt in the coming election of overseers.
