

MEDICAL LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN 1860

FOR some years prior to 1860 considerable dissatisfaction had been felt with regard to the qualifications and instruction of members of the medical profession, not only in Scotland, but in other parts of Great Britain. In consequence, there had been much writing and lecturing in regard to suggested improvements in medical education.

Up to the year 1858, eight bodies in Scotland had had power to grant medical degrees or qualifications, *viz.*, the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Marischal College Aberdeen, King's College Aberdeen, and St. Andrews, as well as the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. In order to obtain a degree or licence to practise, the intending practitioner had to engage in a course of study lasting three years, and to pass an examination held by one or other of these bodies. Unless, however, he intended to practise either in or near Edinburgh or Glasgow, it was quite unnecessary for him to obtain any degree or qualification whatever. Almost up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the M.D. degree of Scottish Universities, other than Edinburgh, was not held in much favour. This was due to the practice, mentioned in previous chapters, of conferring this degree at some Universities, after an examination which was merely perfunctory, or even without any examination.

For practice in other parts of the country it was customary for a young man to indenture himself as apprentice to some person already in medical practice, and in this way to learn the practical side of medicine and surgery. Those, who desired to occupy a position of good standing in the profession and with the public, invariably took a degree or obtained a licence, although there was no compulsion on them to do so except for practice within the jurisdiction of one or other of the three Scottish Medical Corporations.

This state of affairs had the unfortunate effect of failing to establish a definite line between those who were worthy to enjoy the confidence of the public, and those who were quite incompetent, or who in some instances preyed upon the community to its detriment. Further, there was no form of control to regulate professional conduct.

In 1858, two important Acts of Parliament were passed. One was "An Act to Regulate the Qualifications of Practitioners in Medicine and Surgery," better known as "The Medical Act," which took effect from the 1st of October, 1858. This Act set up a General Council of Medical Education and Registration

for the United Kingdom, which was to be elected partly by the licensing bodies and partly by the Crown. One of the most important duties of this General Medical Council was to prepare a "Register" of medical practitioners, and to arrange for this to be correctly kept. Admission to the Register was in future to be obtained on presentation to the Registrar of a diploma of one or other of the recognised examining bodies, or a diploma granted by two or more of these bodies in combination. Powers were also given to the General Medical Council, after due enquiry, to remove from the Register the name of any practitioner in Scotland found guilty of any crime or offence or adjudged by the General Medical Council to have been guilty of infamous conduct in any professional respect. At the same time, every person registered under the Act was entitled to practice in any part of Her Majesty's dominions and to recover in any court of law reasonable charges for professional aid, advice and visits. The General Medical Council was also charged with the duty of publishing a book containing a list of medicines and compounds and the manner of preparing them, to be called the "British Pharmacopœia." An amending Medical Act, containing further provisions, was passed in 1886.

As a result of these regulations, in 1859 important arrangements were made by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh with the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and with the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Both the latter bodies had the right to license in surgery, and in combination with each of these bodies the College of Physicians granted a Double Qualification, conferring upon the holder the right to practise after registration all branches of the profession in every part of Her Majesty's dominions. At a later date, in 1884, the three bodies united to grant a Triple Qualification instead of the two Double Qualifications as previously.

In the year 1858, another Act of Parliament of great importance for Scotland was passed. This was "An Act to make provision for the better government and discipline of the Universities of Scotland, and improving and regulating the course of study therein; and for the union of the two Universities and Colleges of Aberdeen." This Act applied to the Universities of St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. At Aberdeen, King's College and Marischal College were to be united from a date to be specified by the Commissioners appointed under the Act as one University, under the style and title of the University of Aberdeen. The actual union took place in the year 1860.

The Senatus Academicus for each of the Universities was to consist of the Principal and Professors in each University, and was especially to regulate the teaching and discipline of the University. A General Council was set up in each University. A University Court was also established in each University for the purpose of reviewing the actions of the Senatus Academicus, effecting improvements in the University, requiring due attention on the part of the professors to

teaching and other duties imposed upon them, with power of suspending professors or depriving them of office, and for the purpose of controlling and reviewing administration of the property and revenues of each University.

The Commissioners appointed under this Act drew up ordinances for the management of the various Universities, which took effect in and after the year 1860. In regard to medicine, one of the principal ordinances instituted degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery to be conferred after successful examination at the end of four years of professional study, for which a definite course was laid down. The M.D. degree thereafter became a higher qualification. By subsequent ordinances of the Scottish Universities' Commissioners the medical course was extended, in 1893, to five years.



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