

THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE.

To the Editor of "The Northern Times."

Dornoch.

Sir,—As one who strongly recommended to my professional brethren the adoption of Mr Lloyd George's terms offered to those doctors willing to work the new Insurance Act, believing that it would be found to provide a decent remuneration for the medical services at that time available, I now desire to say a few words about the future of medicine.

No one who has followed the progress of medical science for the last 50 years, as I have done, can doubt the great and beneficent discoveries that have been made and the salvage of human life that has taken place. Tuberculosis is now rapidly being got rid of, and within another 100 years will become in this country as extinct as the dodo.

Medical students hardly ever see a case of enteric fever or smallpox; the former was at one time prevalent in the autumn, when flies were about.

Pneumonia and cancer are still very fatal maladies, but I have little doubt it is only a matter of time when they and all infectious diseases will be annihilated. The noose is gradually being tightened round the neck of cancer, as chemical bodies have recently been discovered that actually produce cancer in mice, and so the mystery of its origin is being slowly but surely mastered. And here it may be mentioned that a deficiency of hydrochloric acid in the stomach and iron in the blood would seem to be the cause, or one of the deciding factors, in producing cancer in the throat and gullet of women. This surely can be prevented by timely treatment.

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Neither radium nor X-rays have as yet superseded the valuable services of a skilled surgeon. Both are valuable remedies, but the science of their use is not yet thoroughly worked out. To do so will require medical men with mathematical brains.

The ordinary family practitioner cannot hope, even though he studied for 50 years, to have a comprehensive knowledge of so vast and complicated a study as medicine.

The time has definitely arrived for the various units of the medical profession to be organised and co-ordinated.

This, in my opinion, can only satisfactorily be done by the adoption of a State medical service, in which the family doctor, the various specialists, and the various hospitals are all linked together, and a patient with a difficult or obscure non-infectious disease could be passed on without the loss of valuable time to the specialist and to the hospital, just as a case of scarlet fever would be removed from a private house to the hospital within an hour or two.

The difficult question of freedom of choice of doctor will arise; but I think medical men have made it a sort of bogey. What is wanted is the prompt and scientific work for the relief and cure of the patient; and no amount of bedside manner or goodfellowship can take its place.

In the various hospitals patients do not worry about the bedside manner of the distinguished physicians and surgeons available.

Medical men, as State servants, would qualify for pensions and sickness benefit, which to my mind, is the most urgent problem for doctors to deal with.

I have little doubt that medical men, freed from financial worry about their future, and with shorter hours of labour, would render to the public a still higher and better service than they, with long hours, bad debts, etc., are able to do at present.—I am, etc.,

J. T. MACLACHLAN.