

The Advertiser

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1896.

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL.

THE University Council apparently will not take no for an answer. They have appointed a committee to confer further with the Minister of Education on the subject of continuing the Government grant to the Medical School. The fate of that institution, it seems, trembles in the balance. Realising all that is said to be at stake, there are two aspects of the position that provoke some wonderment. The first is that such a trifle as £500—for the Council virtually undertook to make that amount do for the present year—should mean so much to the University as to represent all the difference between life and death to the school. The second is that the Government, if they have really no wish to see the school collapse, cannot spare such an insignificant sum. An outsider might suspect something like a game of bluff, one side playing as its best card an intimation that the school is likely to close unless the grant is maintained; the other disbelieving this, and taking its stand on the colony's financial position as a sufficient ground for resistance. But certainly the University can make out an exceedingly strong case. Its resources are undoubtedly cramped. Its investments do not command nearly as high a rate of interest as they formerly did, and its rents have also fallen off. The value of money has gone down, and in like manner, as the result of agricultural depression, the income-earning power of the original land endowment from the Crown has seriously diminished. The revenue from rents in 1885 amounted to £2,769; it was only £1,177 in 1894. But, it may be said, why not economise in the Medical School? The answer is that strict economy has already been practised, and no margin is left to work upon. The Government agreed to subsidise the school to the amount of £800 a year, and the University has been rubbing along with £200 per annum less than

that during the past two years. In 1894 the expenses of the school were £2,636, of which salaries absorbed £2,490. The fees received were only £1,176. Could there be no saving in salaries? It is replied that they have already been pared down to the quick, and it is unreasonable to expect the lecturers to submit to further reductions. "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work" is sound doctrine for University lecturers as for others; but they have already

Continued

allowed themselves to be unmercifully sweated, and a strike threatens if further cutting is attempted.

It might be suggested that the device of reorganisation should be tried. Let some of the lectureships be amalgamated, and £800 a year might be saved in that way. But to this plan of retrenchment there seems to be a fatal objection. The medical students must attend the prescribed courses of lectures, or the degrees of the school will not be recognised by the General Medical Council of Great Britain or the Registration Boards of the other colonies. Lectureships cannot be amalgamated, because the regulations of the Medical Council require subjects to be taken singly, and taught by competent specialists in each branch. It is obviously undesirable to economise in the school by lowering the standard of medical education. For the sake of our doctors we do not wish them to accept degrees which would be unrecognised in other countries; and still less, for the sake of their patients, can we tolerate the plan of producing them on the cheap and nasty principle. The school, therefore, had better be closed altogether, or the medical course stopped short of the degree-giving stage, than that the institution should be reduced to the level of a bogus American college. There remains the alternative of putting up the fees; but that, for more than one reason, is out of court. In many ways the University has been democratised. It would be entirely a reactionary policy to make the advantages of the Medical School less available than they are to young men and young ladies in moderate circumstances. This would surely be a step backward that a democratic Government could not view with favor. No doubt if the fees were higher there would be fewer to pay them; and either the elaborate machinery would still be stopped for want of income or it would pound away heavily in the manufacture of a ridiculous handful of graduates. Now what sort of reply have the Government to this armory of

arguments? On the financial ground, it appears to us, none at all. It is quite too absurd to think or say that £500, or, for that matter, the full subsidy of £800, is going to settle the question of a national deficit or surplus. Such a thought or such a statement is particularly inopportune just now, as the financial horizon has appreciably brightened since the year's budget was passed. The Government, it may be said, must be firm here, or they will sound the signal for inconvenient pressure on them from other quarters.