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THE RÔLE OF RESEARCH IN MEDICINE¹

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In the old-fashioned, proprietary type of medical school which flourished in this country during the nineteenth century scientific research was neglected. Even where nominally associated with a university, the medical school was usually dominated by a rather narrow professional purpose, in which investigation was largely ignored. Though incidental research might be tolerated as a harmless diversion, it was more often discouraged as a mere waste of time and of no practical value. Contributions to the medical literature were usually superficial in character. As a rule, the highest ambition of the professor was to publish a text-book, which might establish or extend his fame, even though it represented no advancement of the subject through original research.

The revolution in medical education at the close of the past century brought many radical changes. The proprietary type of organization has been abandoned. We now recognize that the medical school must necessarily be an integral part of a strong university. In the reorganization of medical schools, the university ideal has become dominant. This ideal involves the search for the unknown, as well as the dissemination of the known. The modern medical schools have accepted this responsibility, and have made systematic efforts to provide for research as well as for teaching. They have recognized their duty to advance the science of medicine, in addition to the training of practitioners. Vast expenditures of money have been made to provide the personnel and facilities necessary for this purpose.

But revolutions tend to be followed by counter-revolutions. Especially in this restless, post-war period of discontentment, when all our social institutions are being challenged, it is not surprising that our medical schools are again subjected to criticism. Their efficiency has been questioned and their methods closely scrutinized. Among other things, doubts have been expressed concerning their present policies in the promotion of research. A reconsideration of the whole question of medical research and its relation to medical education therefore appears desirable.

Scientific research in general may be considered in two different aspects. Its first purpose is the increase of knowledge. With all our boasted progress, how little as yet we really know of the physical universe. Recent developments have shattered our former ideas

¹ An address at the commencement exercises of the Medical Department, University of Georgia, Augusta, June 2, 1924.