

Register August 30th 1886.

THE UNIVERSITY.

The proceedings at the meeting of the Council of the University on Friday are of more than ordinary interest. A letter was read from the Minister of Education, in which the Council was informed that "after the award of the next South Australian Scholarship the funds annually appropriated for that scholarship shall, as each one lapses, be devoted to the purposes of the Medical School." This is a very important change, and we doubt whether it has obtained the consideration which it deserves. The Government on its own authority has promised to divert moneys from the encouragement of general education to the endowment of a particular school in the University. Now this is not altogether a departmental matter, and we would strongly urge the necessity of bringing it before Parliament. The regulations concerning the scholarship are founded on a certain clause in the Act of 1875, which authorizes the Minister "to make and prescribe regulations for (amongst other things) the establishment of scholarships open to be competed for by scholars at public or other schools." Here there is nothing to warrant the diversion of funds from scholarships to the maintenance of a particular department of the University. It appears to us that the Minister of Education would have proceeded more regularly if he had obtained the consent of Parliament to the increase of the grant to the University, and to the abolition of this particular scholarship. There are many members of Parliament who take a very keen interest in educational matters, and who may think that the £800 a year which it is now proposed to give to the University Medical School would be better employed in other directions. At all events they may be inclined to resent a mode of proceeding which, if not absolutely illegal, is decidedly open to objections.

When, some months ago, we discussed the advisability of abolishing these

scholarships, we came to the conclusion that to continue them was to depreciate the value of our University, and we fortified our position by reminding readers that there were no similar institutions in other British countries which have Universities. We pointed out then that there were two ways in which the money, supposing it to be still devoted to purposes of higher education, might be used—either in the payment of lecturers, or the establishment of scholarships in the Medical School, or in the extension of the exhibition system whereby poor students may obtain the benefit of a University education. Of course we never supposed that either step, and more particularly the first, would be taken without Parliamentary authority. The first proposition is open to very serious objections. With the £800 a year the University cannot attract men of high standing to fill their chairs. The disposition of the money is as yet unknown, but we presume that if the grant is to have the effect of providing everything necessary for the education of medical men it will have to be divided amongst several chairs. There is nothing to prevent resident medical practitioners from occupying chairs, but it is easy to imagine that their duties outside will clash with their duties in the school if they are high in their profession. If they are not the University would be

much better off without its medical school. Sir Thomas Elder, with his customary liberality, comes to the aid of the University with a promise of £1,000. But even this donation will not do everything that is wanted, and it certainly will not so supplement the new grant as to make the professorships to be established worth holding. There are many things which make it desirable that the matter should be referred to Parliament. Perhaps the result would be a considerable augmentation of the funds of the University for the express purposes of the Medical School, and perhaps again it might seem good to Parliament, when the advisability of abolishing the scholarships had been proved, to annex the money for purposes of general revenue. For one thing it has not been distinctly proved that the medical school is an absolute necessity just at present; rather it is reasonable to suppose that we could get on fairly well for a few years even if our medical students—of whom there are not very many—had to complete their studies elsewhere. At any rate it is worth considering whether it would not be better to devote this £800 a year to the establishment of more exhibitions. This would be a boon to the many, whereas the other has much of the appearance of a gift to the very few.

Another item of interest in the Council's proceedings was Sir Henry Ayers' resignation of the office of Treasurer and the abolition of that office. Sir Henry Ayers has occupied the position of Treasurer for nearly twelve years, and he has devoted much time to the discharge of its duties. These are gradually becoming more onerous, and Sir Henry himself proposed that they should be undertaken by a Finance Committee, and no longer by a Treasurer. This plan will recommend itself to everybody. It is not likely that the University will always be able to enlist the services of one of the most experienced financiers of the colony, and it is more graceful to abolish the office at the suggestion of the present tenant than to wait until he retired from the Council. And, further, the responsibility

is too great. It is more than even Sir Henry Ayers could undertake with constant credit to himself, and perhaps, now that the University is to have the benefit of the proverbial wisdom of a multitude of counsellors, the financial matters of the University will improve. Both the income and expenditure of such an institution ought to be under the control of a committee who will not only receive the revenue and disburse the funds as directed by the Council but will also be prepared to keep an eye upon the outlay and to make suggestions as to the way in which the funds may be used to the greatest advantage of the University.
