THE REVISION OF THE "BRITISH PHARMACOPŒIA."

The near approach of the period at which it will be reasonable to expect the issue of a revised *Pharmacopœia* gives increasing interest to the report which is now presented annually to the Committee of the General Medical Council charged with the work of revision. The report for this year, which has just been presented by Professor Attfield, differs from the reports of previous years in dealing less with the details of pharmaceutical progress than has hitherto been usual, and in directing attention mainly to certain general principles which, in the opinion of the reporter, are of fundamental importance in regard to the reconstruction of the *Pharmacopœia*. From that point of view, three subjects are referred to in the report:

1. The extent to which the definition of manufacturing processes should be included in, or excluded from, the next *British Pharmacopœia*.

2. The further recognition of the metric system of weights and measures as one that may be adopted in practice.

3. The particular atomic weights which should be adopted officially.

In connection with the first of these subjects, reference is made to the opinion expressed in the *Pharmacopœia* of 1867, that in the case of certain medicinal agents, the exact composition of which is but imperfectly understood, the necessity of following some peculiar process in their preparation rendered an official statement of the processes to be adopted, indispensable. Since that time the progress of knowledge, as well as the advance of manufacturing industries, have done away with the necessity of adhering to this practice in the case of many chemical products employed in medicine. Some of the processes for preparing chemical products were omitted from the *Pharmacopœia* of 1885, and Professor Attfield suggests that the time may now have arrived for the omission of the remainder, since the possibility of defining the character of the chemical products used in medicine and of ascertaining it by analysis is in most instances sufficient for all practical purposes. In regard to Galenical preparations, however, he considers that the statement of the processes to be adopted in making them is essential, because adherence to a particular procedure is still the only guarantee of constancy of properties to be relied upon for Galenical medicines.

The general conservative tendency prevailing throughout the kingdom in regard to weights and measures is well illustrated by the action of the Pharmacopœia Committee of the General Medical Council. While long since acknowledging the advantages which would result from the adoption of a system corresponding with the usage of other countries, and approving the efforts made to realise that object, the disinclination to recommend a departure from previous practice in preparing and dispensing medicines was scarcely less marked in the last issue of the *Pharmacopœia* than it was in 1867. The attempted introduction of an alternative method of expressing by proportional parts the relative quantities of ingredients in official formulæ was at best but a clumsy approximation to the metrical system, and it has been of little practical utility. Professor Attfield suggests that the time has now arrived for adopting the metric system alternatively in a more concrete form than was ventured upon in the *Pharmacopœia* of 1885. There are many arguments in favor of such a course, and it is difficult to imagine what sound objection could be urged.

On the subject of atomic weights Professor Attfield enters into a long disquisition upon the merits of various altered expressions of their precise numerical relations, which have been rendered necessary by the progress of chemical science. These alterations apply to only eleven out of the thirty-two elementary substances included in the table of atomic weights in the *British Pharmacopœia*. The alterations are in all instances small, and insufficient to be of importance for everyday pharmaceutical purposes. It is therefore doubtful whether the alteration of the atomic weights hitherto adopted is desirable in such a work as the *British Pharmacopœia*, or likely to be accompanied with any commensurate advantage. In most instances the differences are within the first place of decimals, and though important in the higher refinements of chemistry, their expression is not yet entirely agreed upon by chemists, or shown to be ascertainable with absolute exactness.

Among the articles of materia medica parti:u