

THE PUBLIC, OR THE STATE, AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

THERE has been a good deal given in recent numbers of the JOURNAL bearing upon the subject of this heading, but it is a subject of such importance that it merits a great deal of discussion; and especially so because as prevention is unquestionably better than cure, and the medical profession constitutes the most competent body for the prevention of disease, the relations between the public and the profession are not of the best, nor even "better" sort. A complete change would prove to be a great public benefit. Why not in some way secure, lay hold of, this public benefit? Forty years ago Dr. John Forbes, a physician of eminence, in an address in London, said, "Redoubled attention should be directed to hygiene, public and private, with a view of preventing diseases on a large scale, and individually in our sphere of practice. Here the surest and most glorious triumphs of medicine are to be achieved."

Eleven years ago in October last (Oct. 12th '75), the Editor of this JOURNAL, in a paper upon this same subject, read before the York County Medical Association, said, "The physician is associated in the minds of the people, as he is in reality, with disease rather than with health. Does he wish to be so associated? Would it not be far more pleasant, more agreeable, more profitable, (or it could be made so) to be regarded as associated with, defenders of, Hygiea—the 'sweet smiling goddess of Health'? The science of medicine appears to have been built up, so to speak, on the wrong side of disease. Physicians occupy the position of an army standing indifferently or idly in the rear, only commencing to act when the country has

been invaded and the enemy is in the midst of the citizens, active in destruction, rather than that of an army at the 'front,' ever vigilant and ready to act on the first advance of the enemy. Is this, gentlemen, an honorable position for the members of our noble profession?" Again, compared with the field of prevention, "Does not the field of cure fall into comparative insignificance? Nature maintains her supremacy in the healing art. She will yield but little to us in this. Her power to heal is vastly greater than ours." Sir William Jenner has said, "No one acquainted with the present state of the science and art of medicine will for a moment question that to prevent disease is its first and most important aim."

The method of practising medicine in China, or what is said to be the method, every body has heard about. But much nearer home, in a country where science is perhaps more progressive than in any other country—in Germany, the practice of medicine has been greatly changed during recent years. There, the idea, as expressed by Stein, that "The function of the physician is an official and public one, and that, consequently, the members of the medical profession should act under a common guidance, and constitute an independent though integral part of the organization of the state," has long been acted upon in all social legislation. There, the profession have already acquired, in association with the local authorities, the control not only of all public health matters for the prevention of disease, but of every organization for the relief of distress and the prevention of crime.

It will be a good and profitable thing