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Editorial.

THE LIMITS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH.

THERE can be no doubt that there is a growing fear not only on the part of the uneducated but also on that of the educated public, that our hospitals are becoming schools for the furtherance of scientific research, rather than institutions where the welfare of the sick is the first consideration. The vitality of the question is further emphasised by two contributions which have recently been made to the literature on this subject, namely, an article in the "Nineteenth Century and After," on "The Scientific Use of Hospitals," by Sir Michael Foster, and an exhaustive pamphlet issued by the National Anti-vivisection Society, 92, Victoria Street, S.W., by its Hon.-Secretary, Mr. Stephen Coleridge, which demonstrates at a glance how public funds subscribed for the benefit of the sick poor are utilised for the maintenance of medical schools practising vivisection. There is much to be said from both points of view. Sir Michael Foster urges "That in our hospitals adequate use is not made of the great opportunities which these offer for gathering in new medical truths," and he deals with the assertion that

hospitals are used for experiments, namely for the advancement of medical and surgical knowledge, by demonstrating that it is impossible for a medical practitioner to treat any patient, whether in his private practice or in a hospital, without making him more or less the subject of experiment "for, on the one hand, he cannot be absolutely sure of the result of his act, while on the other hand, he is prepared to make use of the knowledge afforded by the result. And these two things constitute the essence of scientific experiment." It is obvious that the strong point of this argument lies in the essential fact that medicine and surgery are sciences, and that the present knowledge of their disciples can in no sense be considered as final and complete. If progress is to be made, new forms of treatment based upon the most recent knowledge, must be tried, and such treatment is more or less experimental. Take as an instance the well known discovery of anæsthesia, which has conferred the greatest boon upon tens of thousands of persons. The process by which the possibility of rendering patients unconscious to suffering was arrived at was in the highest degree experimental, but it was nevertheless absolutely justifiable, as subsequent events

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