

contracts it at the moment of birth. Dr. Mookerji, in his address on Ophthalmology at the Indian Medical Congress of 1894, stated that in Bengal alone there were 600,000 totally blind beggars, 40 per cent. of whom had lost their sight through ophthalmia neonatorum, that is, from gonorrhœa in the mother (*Transactions Ind. Med. Cong.*, 1894, p. 168); and this refers to the beggar class alone, and not to other classes. Such a horrible launching of half a million blind babies, from the day of birth to time of death, must surely punish the call for vengeance of those who would, without wincing, punish the innocent children for the sins of their fathers. In addition to the shocking results on sight, the writer says he takes no account of the suffering from cystitis, stricture, etc., as results of gonorrhœa. Even the so-called lesser forms of venereal disease are not to be made light of.

ERRATA.—In the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of May 15th it is stated that Surgeon-Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. GORMLEY, M.D., is promoted to be Surgeon-Lieutenant-Colonel instead of Brigade-Surgeon-Lieutenant-Colonel. In the same issue Surgeon-Captain C. H. HALE is mentioned as having been awarded the "Distinguished Order;" it should be "Distinguished Service Order."

MEDICO-PARLIAMENTARY.

HOUSE OF LORDS.

THE INFANT LIFE PROTECTION BILL.

THE report of the amendments to this Bill having been received, the Earl of DENBIGH, who is in charge of the measure, moved an amendment to Clause 4 in the following terms. "Any person retaining or receiving an infant under the age of 2 years on consideration of a sum of money not exceeding £20 paid down, and without any agreement for further payment, as value for the care and bringing up of the said infant until it is reclaimed or of an age to provide for itself, shall within forty-eight hours from the time of receiving such infant give notice of the fact to the local authority. If he does not give the notice required by this section he shall be liable to forfeit the amount of any sum received by him in respect of such infant, or such less sum as the Court having cognisance of the case shall deem just, and the Court shall give directions as to the manner in which the sum forfeited shall be applied for the benefit of the infant, and shall, if necessary, cause the infant to be removed to a workhouse or place of safety, and the master of such workhouse shall receive such infant, which shall be maintained in the workhouse or place of safety until it can be otherwise lawfully disposed of." The object of the amendment was to provide a deterrent in cases where a lump sum was paid down for the care of an infant. Where a comparatively small sum was given which would not pay for the bringing up of the child, the inference might fairly be drawn that the child was put out to nurse with the idea that it would never be heard of again. The limit of £20 would include the greater number of cases of baby farming which were at the root of so many of the evils connected with the trade, and would exclude the greater number of genuine cases in which well-to-do people, who, being obliged to leave the country, paid down a lump sum for the care and up-bringing of the children they left at home. The clause was agreed to. At a subsequent sitting the Bill was read a third time and sent down to the Commons.

CONTAGIOUS DISEASES IN THE ARMY.

On the question of the health of the army a women's memorial has been prepared, which is signed by Princess Christian, the Duchess of Connaught, and the Duchess of Teck; the Duchesses of Bedford, Buckingham and Chandos, St. Albans, and Montrose; the Marchionesses of Headfort, Tweeddale, and Zetland; the Countess Dowager of Shrewsbury, Susan Countess of Malmesbury, the Countess of Shaftesbury, and the Dowager Countess of Airlie; the Countesses of Wharnclyffe, Jersey, Bantry, and Denbigh; Countess Stanhope; the Countesses of Arran and Ilchester; Countess Lytton; the Countess of Erne; Countess Cowper; the Countesses of Selkirk, Onslow, Latham, and Ancaster; and a large number of viscountesses, baronesses, and ladies. The text is as follows: "To the Marquis of Salisbury, K.G., the Marquis of Lansdowne, K.G., the Right Hon. Lord George Hamilton, M.P., and the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, M.P.

"We desire to express our anxious hope that effectual measures will be taken to check the spread of contagious diseases among our soldiers, especially in India.

"We appreciate and respect the opinions of those who, notwithstanding the appalling statistics to which a competent committee, appointed by Government, has recently given authority, are opposed to us on this subject. We believe that they hold, in all sincerity, that the evil of rendering vice safer and the risk of degrading women outweigh all other considerations.

"But, speaking as women, we feel bound to protest against these views. We believe not only that preventive measures, if exercised with scrupulous care, do not cause any real danger to women, but that they constitute a valuable safeguard of women's virtue, and afford a great opportunity of escape from a life of vice.

"We feel that it is the duty of the State, which, of necessity, collects together large numbers of unmarried men in military service, to protect them from the consequences of evils which are, in fact, unavoidable in such a community and under such conditions; and with the deepest earnestness we call on the Government to do all that can be done to save innocent women and children in the present and future generations from the terrible results of vices for which they are not responsible."

HOUSE OF COMMONS. THE LONDON WATER SUPPLY.

Mr. CHAPLIN has brought in and the House has read a first time a Bill to amend the law with respect to the metropolitan water companies. At present, if a consumer feels aggrieved he can in some cases apply to the magistrate, and in others appeal to the Local Government Board. In the latter instance he must have the support of twenty householders. By

the new Bill, as explained by Mr. Chaplin, all his existing rights are preserved, but if he considers that a company has failed to perform some statutory duty the Bill enables him to lodge a complaint with the Railway Commissioners, who may take steps to secure the proper fulfilment of the duty. The local authorities are at liberty to aid and assist the consumer, or they may take the initiative themselves, in any question which may appear to them to affect the interests of consumers. For the protection of the companies, however, the Railway Commissioners will have power to award costs against the party making a frivolous or vexatious complaint.—The Bill is backed by Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Ritchie, and Mr. T. W. Russell.

THE IRISH POOR LAW SYSTEM.

In Committee of Supply, on the vote to complete the sum of £129,389 for the Irish Local Government Board, a debate arose on the Irish Poor-law system. Mr. J. P. FARRELL complained of the system of dietary in the workhouses, which was in most cases entirely unsuited to the unfortunate inmates. The so-called infirmary in the average Irish workhouse was little better than a death trap. If the Poor-law guardians, from motives of humanity, tried to remedy the defects of workhouse management the Local Government Board disallowed the expense and made them pay it out of their own pockets. While between 1875 and 1895 the population of Ireland had decreased by more than a million, the taxation for Poor-law purposes had increased by about £500,000. The Poor-law system in Ireland was a very antiquated one. The very poor of the community were not properly relieved; officialism took more than its due share of the money by which the system was worked; and great reforms were needed before the Local Government Board in Ireland would commend itself to the Irish people.—Sir J. COLOMBE drew attention to the subject of dispensary doctors, who were not now of a character on which the districts could be congratulated.—Mr. POWER expressed approval of the system under which children were boarded out in Ireland. The results of the system in Waterford were very satisfactory.—Mr. TULLY welcomed the announcement of the First Lord of the Treasury that a new system of local government was to be established, for he believed that the present "antiquated machinery," as it had been justly called, had been the means of debasing public life in many localities.—Mr. G. BALFOUR, who replied for the Government, defended the Irish Local Government Board, and in the course of his remarks, referring to the workhouse system, he said he would be the last to say that he was satisfied with that system in Ireland. He had brought in a Bill the object of which was to make a thorough reform of the system possible. It was impossible to pass that measure this year, but he hoped sooner or later to see an amalgamation of unions which would be likely to form the best foundation for workhouse reform in other directions. The Local Government Board was continually trying to improve its administration, and he could not say that many complaints had come before him to show that the strictures of hon. members as to dietary, ventilation, and so forth were justified. As to the desirability of adopting the system of boarding out workhouse children, he thought its extension to Ireland would be of the greatest possible benefit, and he had included it in the Bill introduced by himself this year. As to the complaint about the deterioration of the dispensary doctors, he could not offer any opinion, but the matter should have his consideration. It was impossible, however, to think of taking the appointments out of the hands of the present authority.—Colonel WARING thought that the employment of trained nurses by Boards of Guardians was a matter of great importance. In his part of the country the workhouses were not, in the ordinary sense, institutions for the poor. They were infirmaries, and therefore it was of the greatest importance that they should be carried on on proper hospital principles.—Mr. DILLON said that no man could deny that there was great room for improvement in the Irish workhouses, and that there were many workhouses in which the treatment of the sick poor especially, and of the able-bodied paupers, was not of a kind to commend itself to any humane man.—After some further debate, Dr. TANNER complained that the demand of the Irish dispensary doctors for horse money was ignored by the Local Government Board.—The vote was then agreed to.

PREVENTION OF PREMATURE BURIAL.

Mr. MACDONA asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his attention had been drawn to the statement made by the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial, that in England and Wales 16,000 persons were annually buried without medical certificates; and whether the Government would take the matter into serious consideration so as to prevent as much as possible persons being prematurely buried.—The HOME SECRETARY: I have not seen the statement to which the hon. member alludes, but it is not the case that 16,000 persons are buried annually without medical certificates. The number of uncertificated deaths in 1896 was 11,464, and there has been a steady decrease for many years past, both in the actual number of such deaths and in the proportion which they bear to the total number of deaths. No cases of premature burial have been brought to my notice, nor am I aware that it is a matter which falls within my jurisdiction; but in any case I am unable to see that the obtaining of a certificate of death would be a guarantee against a premature burial taking place.—Mr. MACDONA asked whether the right hon. gentleman was not aware that a great number of medical men were of opinion that many people were prematurely buried?—The HOME SECRETARY: The certificates are given by the members of the medical profession, therefore it follows that, in their opinion, the persons in regard to whom the certificates are given are dead.

SCHOOL EPIDEMICS.

Mr. CAREW asked the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant if he was aware that in Ireland the sanitary authority had no power to have schools closed for the protection of public health in the case of epidemics breaking out, while in England the sanitary authority had such power; and would the Government extend the same salutary protective power to Ireland?—Mr. GERALD BALFOUR: The facts are correctly stated in the first part of the question, though in England the managers of a school may appeal to the Education Department if they consider the notice requiring the school to be closed unreasonable. I should not like to answer the second part of the question without having an opportunity of consulting the Commissioners of National Education, and taking their views.