

BELFAST.

Belfast Board of Guardians: Revision of Diets of the Workhouse: Pilfering of Food: Energy of the Board.—Abolition of Glanders.—Scarcity of Junior Medical Men.

AN important Committee of the Board of Guardians has lately handed in their report after six months' labour; the subject was the revision of the dietaries. Dealing with the feeding of over 3,000 inmates and nearly 200 officers, including nurses, the Committee have had no light work, and the time spent was in no way excessive. The Chairman of the Committee was Dr. McDonnell, who has so frequently shown a thorough grasp of affairs and intrepidity in advancing reasonable and practical reforms. Dr. McDonnell and the Committee were congratulated by the Chairman of the Board upon their excellent and accurate report, which must have entailed considerable anxiety and calculation, and was passed unanimously. It would require much space to give even an outline of the changes recommended; greater differentiation is to be observed, separate and practically new scales are suggested for the maternity, lunatic, and fever departments respectively; a purely milk diet is suggested in the infirmary now for the first time. The visiting medical officers have given their sanction and approval to the suggested alterations, and an estimate is submitted that the adoption of the scheme will save the ratepayer at least £1,000 a year.

At a subsequent meeting the Subvisiting Committee made a report regarding the distribution of food; pilfering had undoubtedly been prevalent, especially in the children's department. The Committee were of opinion that it was due to the employment of pauper help, and recommended that in any subsequent complaints the officer in charge be held responsible.

Other subjects, professional and non-professional, occasionally give rise to fierce and acrimonious discussion, but it is highly satisfactory to see that the Board are not afraid to attack palpable evils, and publicly to condemn, both by emphatic words and far-reaching changes, past systems, they gain credit by not cloaking evils.

In the spring some cases of glanders occurred among the horses in town. The public watering troughs were closed, with the very satisfactory result that no case of glanders has been reported since May 26th. It is now recommended that these troughs be permanently closed—a suggestion which the principal carrying firms and large horse owners approve. Standpipes are to replace the troughs, and owners will provide their own buckets.

The phenomena, lately not uncommon, of good medical vacancies going a-begging, has brought into prominence the scarcity of younger medical men. The Royal Victoria Hospital has been one short in the qualified resident officers since midsummer. At the Down District Asylum, Dr. Nolan, the resident medical superintendent, reported that the vacant assistant medical officership had been extensively advertised, but that there was not a single application. Numerous medical men have had the greatest difficulty in obtaining holidays from lack of substitutes; the war no doubt is responsible for the immediate dearth.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE PLACE OF THE LECTURE IN MEDICAL TEACHING.

SIR,—At the risk of being considered a fogley, I venture to contend, in the teeth of your article, and of the approving letters of your correspondents, that the lecture still has a proper and a very important place in medical and other education, and ought no more to be abolished because the student has textbooks at his service, than textbooks should be abolished because lectures are open to him. Both have their places in education; both are important; and neither can be profitably omitted or substituted for the other. But, then, the lecture must be a lecture, and not an extract from a textbook, and the textbook must be a textbook and not a written lecture. The information given in the textbook is, or ought to be, more complete and detailed, and more systematically set forth, than is possible in lectures, and to the textbook the student can refer again and again at his convenience. But

what the writer of the textbook cannot do is to watch the faces of his readers and see if he is making himself understood; to emphasise his utterances according to their relative importance; to play round a leading principle, to recur to it again and again, presenting it in different words, in different lights, from different points of view, adapting his expression to his auditors, until he satisfies himself from their demeanour that they have got a firm grip of his meaning; neither can the textbook diffuse around it the charm of personal magnetism, or communicate the glow of enthusiasm to its readers. Dr. Wightman, who found all lectures a waste of time, must have been singularly unfortunate in his lectures. That it is a waste of time to attend some lectures is as true as that it is a waste of time to read some textbooks; but Sir W. Gowers has placed it on record that it was by attendance on the lectures of Sir W. Jenner that he gained the knowledge that won him the gold medal at the University of London; and he must be a peculiarly constituted man who, having ever heard a lecture by the late Dr. H. G. Sutton does not still carry in his memory some precious truth, expressed in massive diction, and glowing with the sincerity and force of the lecturer.

One of the uses of the lecture is clearly and well indicated by Dr. Adams: "A good lecture, delivered by an impressive speaker, instinctively sends a man to his book to read the subject up." Surely that is a very important function of the lecture. It excites; it stimulates interest in the subject; it induces the student to work at it *con amore*; and, if this were all it did the oral mode of teaching would still, for this purpose, be "justified rather than the other." But this is not all it does. The best of textbooks must omit much which it is the function of the lecture to supply. The most recent of textbooks begins to be out of date as soon as the proofs are corrected. There are large areas of our science and art in which knowledge is fluctuating and opinion is doubtful, in which, it may be, huge strides are being made from month to month, and even from week to week—*teste* just now the subject of malaria—and in these regions the only possible guide for the student is the lecture.

But for lectures to be valuable the lecturer must be competent—competent in knowledge, competent in expression, competent in character and personality—and the number of competent lecturers is limited. If the outcome of the new University of London is to give to every student the opportunity of attending a competent lecturer in each subject of study it will indeed be justified by its work.—I am, etc.,

Catford, S.E., Oct. 13th.

CHAS. MERCIER.

INSURANCE COMPANIES AND THE PAYMENT OF MEDICAL REFEREES.

SIR,—For years I have always refused to examine for less than a guinea except in one office only of the industrial class. In the case of one American office the amount of work required was so great—much greater than I had ever experienced before—that I stated that I could not give up so much of my time for less than two guineas. Need I add that I have had no further experience of this office as far as the office in New York is concerned? If all medical men followed such a rule, the offices would soon have to raise their standard, and we should then have nothing unjust, but "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work."—I am, etc.,

October 11th.

M.

SIR,—I have no faith at all in the solidarity of the medical profession, but I feel strongly that the attempt of the New York Life Company to cut down medical fees ought to be resisted. Short of throwing up my appointment I am prepared to resist it; but I know very well that if I refused to work for 10s. 6d., others would be found ready to do it, and really I am not prepared to say they would not do the work as well, or at least well enough for the company. I am an examiner of many years' standing, but require all the fees I can earn to keep things going.

It ought to be "infamous in a professional respect" to cut down fees, far more so than keeping an unqualified assistant under proper supervision, but it is not at present thought to be so. Hence my attitude. I enclose my card, and am, yours, etc.,

October 13th.

AN EXAMINER.