

THE EXETER MEETING.

THE route from England to Ireland via Fishguard, which has recently been opened by the Great Western Railway, is now in active work, and should add to the number of Irish medical men attending the annual meeting at Exeter. The steamers which make the passage have been specially built for the purpose, and being worked by turbine engines are free from vibration, and travel so fast that the sea passage lasts considerably less than three hours. The route, moreover, affords a direct connexion with Exeter from Dublin, Galway, Athlone, Kildare, Killaloe, Kilkeuny, Limerick, Tipperary, Clonmel, Cork, and Killarney. For residents in London and other great centres the journey to Exeter is, of course, very easy, as the Great Western now has expresses which complete the journey from London in three hours, and from North and South Wales, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and the Midlands in general with corresponding rapidity.

"HOSPITAL ABUSE."

MR. STEWART JOHNSON (Secretary, Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street) writes: My attention has been drawn to a letter in your issue of May 25th headed "Hospital Abuse," in which the name of this hospital is mentioned.

From details mentioned by your correspondent, it is not difficult to identify the case he refers to. Here are the facts:

The child was first brought to the hospital on April 8th as an out-patient. The father's wages at that date were 26s. a week, but up to the previous February they had been only 21s. Since March 7th, a week before her confinement, the mother had been earning nothing. It is true that she works when she is able, but her earnings amount on an average not to 12s. a week, as your correspondent states, but to 6s. The figures of the wages of both father and mother, I may remark, are confirmed by their respective employers. The couple have two other children in addition to the baby who died in the hospital.

On April 8th the family were paying 7s. 6d. rent for two rooms in a house on the southern bank of the Regent's Canal, but between that date and April 25th, the date when the baby was admitted as an in-patient, they moved into a block of County Council buildings, where their rent was 8s. 6d. a week, the smallest amount which the regulations against overcrowding permitted them to pay; 2s. 2½d. a week, moreover, is paid out of the family income for the man's club and for the insurance of the members of the family and the woman's mother.

Such being the financial circumstances of the family, it is difficult to see how there could be any objection to the child's receiving hospital treatment even as an out-patient. But the child was in need of more than out-patient treatment. Even when first seen, the child was seriously ill, and only the great demand for beds for children under the age of 2 prevented her from being admitted earlier than she actually was.

It is quite true that the child was buried at the expense of the hospital, but it is not true, as your correspondent states, that the proposition to bury came from the hospital. The hospital only buried the child at the request of the mother, on her asserting that she was unable to pay for the funeral, and undertaking to repay the cost by instalments. Of the 6s. she received from the insurance company on the death of her child, 1s. was paid for the death certificate, 1s. for the fares of the mother and grandmother to the cemetery and back (the father was unable to attend the funeral), and 2s. 6d. as the first instalment due to the hospital.

As regards the inquiries into the circumstances of out-patients in general at this hospital, I might explain that in the case of all out-patients seen by the honorary medical staff the parents are obliged to give the following information about themselves, which is recorded and card indexed:

The address of parents,
Occupation of father,
Name of father's employer,
Total family earnings,
Number of family dependent,
Rent,
Number of rooms occupied.

In the case of patients seen by the casualty officer, who are only allowed to attend for a very limited period, the following information is elicited and recorded in a book:

Address,
Father's occupation,
Total family earnings.

The questions, I might add, are only the minimum of what is asked, if thought necessary. The inquiry officer follows them up with what questions he considers most appropriate, and if any of the statements appear doubtful the patients are visited in their homes with a view to check their accuracy. More than that, a certain number of cases are selected every day to be visited that are not even doubtful, because it is considered a good thing to let the patients know that the statements they make are liable to be verified.

It is difficult to see how more can be done in the way of inquiry without making the process so inquisitorial as to keep away from the hospital many of those rightfully entitled to attend.

THE DOCTRINE OF PRE-EXISTENCE.

J. S. B. writes: Dr. Stoddart, in his excellent lecture on Early Symptoms of Mental Disorder, in speaking of illusions of recognition, says: "Such a person enters a village where he cannot possibly have been before, and at once experiences a feeling of recognition—feels that he has been there before. This phenomenon has given rise to the *absurd idea of pre-existence*" (the italics are mine). This particular phenomenon may not rank high as evidence in favour of the doctrine of pre-existence and reincarnation, but does it follow that the doctrine itself is "*absurd*"? The arguments in its favour are many and weighty. It is a cardinal doctrine of many of the great religions of the world. Millions of the human race believe it with unquestioning faith. Great philosophers and poets have either believed the doctrine, or at least have not treated it as absurd. Wordsworth—the most Christian of poets—affirms it in those well-known lines beginning "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting..." It was taught in the early Christian Church, especially by the saintly Origen. It has really never died out, and is accepted and is being taught by many Christian thinkers and teachers. It was asserted, or at least strongly hinted at, by Christ Himself. One who is a great teacher and one of the world's great spiritual forces, speaking of this doctrine, said: "I know what it has of hope, of strength, of encouragement in the face of difficulties in the world. I know what it means for the heart-broken, who fall in despair before the puzzle of life, to have the light thrown upon it which makes life intelligible, for the misery of intellectual unrest is one of the worst miseries that we face in the modern world." If I lived and worked amidst the human wreckage in Bethlem, I should hesitate ere I described a doctrine like this as "*absurd*," seeing that it is sacred and an inspiration and hope to thousands of human souls to-day.

FIRST AID TO THE WOUNDED AND SICK IN THE PUBLIC STREETS.

DR. THOMAS DUTTON (London, W.) writes: The profession appear to try and help the public in a very strange manner. A number of medical men are now advocating street ambulances in a very energetic manner. With the want of these I entirely agree, but by far more important is the question of rendering first aid to people who are suddenly taken ill or meet with some accident in the public streets. These are at present at the mercy of policemen and well-meaning but extremely dangerous lay helpers. I have explained before, in a letter to the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, that long before any ambulance could arrive the poor victim may have been killed or seriously injured by ignorant first-aiders, who know nothing about the *rational* of the treatment they recommend. I gave a good illustration of a young lady who fell in an epileptic fit in Hyde Park. One wanted to give her brandy, another to make her drink cold water, a policeman ("blood to the head," said he) to stand her upright; while a nurse wanted to violently flex and extend her arms. I had to fight all these (not being in a physician's uniform they would not have me to be a doctor), and tell them to leave her alone, after undoing her dress. I should think it should be patent to any one that long before taking steps to provide ambulances a few clear, simple, definite rules should be drawn up by the London County Council, and strictly enforced, so that when any unfortunate person is suddenly prostrated by illness, or meets with an accident in the public streets, he or she will know that they will not be further injured by the mistaken kindness of their fellow citizens. I have seen a number of victims injured, and I believe two killed, by the chaos that at present reigns when any one is laid prostrate in the streets of this civilized Capital of the Empire. I call the attention of members of the profession once more to a subject that must interest them, because when they are called to a street accident under the present confused conditions, it is impossible for their skill to be of any avail, for the public crowd round and prevent them from exercising it.

A CORRECTION.

THE offices of the Royal Hospital for Incurables are situated at 4, St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C., and not as printed last week in the reply to Dr. W. A. Aldred's inquiry.

SCALE OF CHARGES FOR ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.

Eight lines and under	20	4	0
Each additional line	0	0	6
A whole column	2	13	4
A page	8	0	0

An average line contains six words.

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