

laboratories were inspected. Visits were paid to the Royal Veterinary College and the National Museum. The meetings on the second day were held in the Royal College of Surgeons, and there was a good attendance. Mr. H. Hunter read a paper on cereal breeding in Ireland, with special reference to barley. Other papers read were experiments on the pollination of our hardy fruits, fungus in human skin disease, and a note on two new forms of rot in the potato tuber, the latter embodying the results of investigations carried out at the research station established at Clifden, co. Galway, by the Department of Agriculture in 1909 for the closer study of the various diseases of the potato. The afternoon was devoted to visiting the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Albert Agricultural College, Glasnevin.

This association has a membership in Great Britain and Ireland, and there are also a few members in the colonies. It holds annual meetings at different centres, those already visited including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and Edinburgh. The members are biologists interested in the application of biology to agriculture, medicine, fisheries, or any other department of economic importance. The Dublin visit should prove to be of particular interest to the members of the association, as very active work in economic biology is being done in Dublin and the stations dependent on Dublin, under the authority of the Department of Agriculture.

## Correspondence.

### THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND THE PROPOSED STERILIZATION OF THE "MENTALLY UNFIT."

SIR,—In your issue of December 9th, 1911, your Special Correspondents reported the proceedings of a meeting of the London County Council held a few days previously, and stated therein that at the close of a discussion "Mr. J. W. Gilbert, who spoke last, was the only member of the Council to declare opposition to the method of dealing with recurrent insanity by sterilization of the insane."

Based on this report, in my address to the Section of State Medicine of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland (January 19th, 1912) I made the following observations:

Only last month the London County Council, groaning under the yearly increasing incubus of lunacy charges, demanded almost unanimously the sterilization of the unfit. The chairman hinted at "segregation" and "colonization," as well as the "surgical operations—of course under proper precautions"! A past chairman is stated to have said: "Though the minds of the insane have gone, their bodies were left, and they propagated their species in an alarming extent," and he, too, demanded the knife.

So spoke the City Fathers of our Modern Babylon, who evidently fail to see any other solution of the problem than the adoption of those measures which the Orient potentates of ancient Babylon put in force to preserve the chastity of their women. One cannot help wondering whether the progenitors of the members of this Council were in every case free from taint or defect. It would seem morally certain that in such an assembly, drawn from such varied sources, some few at least must have sprung from families which suffered the all-too-common lot of mental affliction. If so, did these individuals pause to think that if the procedures they now so violently demand were in operation a generation ago they would not be now in the enjoyment of existence, and under circumstances which indicate the hall-mark of success in prosperous and honourable careers? The baton sinister of mental defect is to be found on the escutcheon of every family of known descent, though placed in the background by the emblazoned glories of the *honourable ordinaries*.

I understand that exception has been taken to the expression "demanded almost unanimously the sterilization of the unfit," and I am informed that no resolution was moved on the subject, and that there was not a full attendance of the 136 members of the Council. Furthermore, I am informed that the Council, before taking any definite position on this question, have very properly asked the Asylums Committee to submit a report on the causation of insanity and its increase.

We may assume, therefore, that whatever may be the opinion held by individual members, the Council as a body has not committed itself to a view which is open to such grave doubt as is involved in this question, nor will it do

so without much careful deliberation. A definite expression of opinion from an important administrative body such as the Council on a matter of such vast interest to the public would go far to influence the attitude of other bodies entrusted with like responsibilities. Hence its decision will be awaited with anxiety by all those who, like myself, are daily engaged in considering the problem of insanity in its many aspects.—I am, etc.,

M. J. NOLAN, R.M.S.,

President of the Section of State Medicine of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland.

Down District Asylum,  
Downpatrick, March 19th.

### HYPODERMIC MEDICATION BY NURSES.

SIR,—The letter of "G. P." in the *JOURNAL* of March 16th, p. 644, indicates the very serious rivalry and competition which the general practitioner experiences, occasioned by the enormous growth and development of the "nurse" during the last decade. The general practitioner has himself to blame in a great measure, for he has gradually allotted to nurses the task of passing catheters and administering enemata, and, occasionally, to save himself from being called up at night or otherwise disturbed, the hypodermic injection of morphine.

But this is not the only direction in which the general practitioner loses his place; latterly there has grown up a custom for the "specialist" to go about with his own nurse, who now takes the place of the young medical man who always used to "devil" when operations in private were in progress. Thus the "specialist" saves the fee usually paid to an assistant, and the profession loses, while the unqualified person gains all the advantage. This practice of employing an "unqualified" woman is one that should be curtailed, for it appears to be unfair to the many qualified men and women who are not overwhelmed with professional engagements.

Since the time has now arrived when the unqualified woman takes upon herself to "medicate," assuredly some steps should be taken to control the march of the ubiquitous nurse, who often allows the patient to think she knows more about the case than the doctor.—I am, etc.,

March 18th.

RENLM.

SIR,—Without wishing to disagree with "G. P.'s" point, that it is undesirable for nurses or other unqualified persons to administer hypodermic injections of potent drugs on their own responsibility, I see no reason for his referring in such a sarcastic manner to "such a superior person as the modern nurse." Would he prefer to revert to the ancient style of Mrs. Gamp? The modern nurse is as indispensable as she is overworked and underpaid. All honour to her!—I am, etc.,

March 19th.

WOMAN PRACTITIONER.

### MEDICAL EDUCATION IN LONDON AND PROFESSOR VON MÜLLER.

SIR,—In a communication to the *Muench. med. Woch.*, No. 6, reference was made to an article in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* for January 27th, 1912 (No. 2665), entitled "Medical Education in London and Professor von Müller." This article was written by a London teacher anonymously, and dealt with my evidence on university education before the Royal Commission. Although I expressly stated that I had no intention of giving any advice about the possible reform of English medical teaching, and purposely limited myself to a description of the German methods, the author has interpreted my remarks in a manner unfriendly to us, and has uttered a warning against the adoption of the German university system in London, because by this means "incalculable damage would be done." For this purpose the author has drawn a very unfavourable picture of German medical education, hospitals, and doctors, which can only be ascribed to a lack of knowledge of German institutions. This account ought not to be allowed to pass unchallenged.

It is incorrect to say, for example, that the students are under no circumstances allowed to enter the wards and work among the patients. The truth is that the students receive daily instructions in the wards in the various methods of clinical examination, and have the opportunity of personally examining patients under the strict supervision of the professor and the junior teachers. As many