

how it was dealt with by the superintendent. He for his part has no desire to crib, cabin, and confine himself to the asylum premises all the time, so it is naturally convenient for him to be able to say that, although absent himself, he left two or more experienced men to act in his place. The more men he leaves the better it looks. The rest is easy to follow. A docile type of assistant is required, who has some common sense, little initiative, and attenuated ambition, content to plod along with routine duties, occupying his far too abundant leisure with cricket, tennis, etc., all about the doors of the institution, who can be relied on not to do anything important in his patron's absence. Such a career would hardly appeal to many of the men Dr. Spence desires to see enter the service. In justice, of course, it must be admitted that many superintendents encourage research, but, when all is said and done, scientific research, irksome if simple duties, and indifferent cricket with patients do not constitute a very complete life for the majority. Let the county councils step out and treat their asylum physicians as they do their other medical employees, relieve them of their schoolboy dependence, let them have full opportunities for ordinary social intercourse, marry after a certain approved service if they feel so inclined, and generally give them the status of a citizen. By doing so they will get picked men, capable of sharing and being held responsible for many of the superintendent's now too many responsibilities, to the great benefit of the patients, the superintendent, and themselves.—I am, etc.,

March 3rd.

MORE FREEDOM.

MEDICAL INCUNABULA.

SIR,—In connexion with the German Commission for a General Catalogue of Incunabula, the Bibliographical Society is collecting information upon the incunabula in the libraries and elsewhere in this country. To this I should like to call the attention of those interested. It is easy to get the necessary information from the libraries of the Royal Colleges, but I would like particularly to know of:

1. Any fifteenth century medical works in the libraries of the hospitals and medical societies.
2. Medical incunabula in private collections.

—I am, etc.,

WILLIAM OSLER,

Oxford, March 8th.

President of the Bibliographical Society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHEST HOSPITALS.

Professor Koch's Opinion.

SIR,—In regard to the proposed sale of the Mount Vernon Consumption Hospital, the following extract from the late *Professor Koch's address* at the first International Congress on Tuberculosis, held in London in July, 1901, is of great interest. Speaking of the part played by special hospitals in the prevention of tuberculosis, Professor Koch uses the following words:

The only country that possesses a considerable number of special hospitals for tuberculous patients is England, and there can be no doubt that the diminution of tuberculosis in England, which is much greater than in any other country, is greatly due to this circumstance. I should point to the founding of special hospitals for consumptives and the better utilization of the already existing hospitals for consumptives as the most important measure in the combating of tuberculosis, and its execution opens a wide field of activity to the State, to municipalities, and to private benevolence.

Such words indicate the seriousness of taking such a step as has been contemplated by the Mount Vernon Hospital authorities, contrary to the expressed wishes of the medical staff.—I am, etc.,

London, W., March 12th.

R. MURRAY LESLIE.

A GERMAN Congress on alcohol in youth will be held in Berlin during Easter week, and on Tuesday Professor Aschaffenberg of Cologne, in the course of a discussion on the scientific study of alcoholism, will read a paper on the physiological action of alcohol.

Public Health

AND

POOR LAW MEDICAL SERVICES.

REDISTRIBUTION OF POOR LAW MEDICAL DISTRICTS IN THE BURNLEY UNION.

In commenting on the difficulty that has arisen between the Burnley Guardians and the local profession with regard to the treatment of their district medical officers (*BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL*, March 8th, p. 533), the hope was expressed that at a final meeting of a special committee of the guardians appointed to consider the matter some means would be found to settle the dispute on an equitable basis. This hope has not been fulfilled, for the committee recommended that the union should be divided into fifteen districts, that the present public vaccinators be given twenty-eight days' notice, and that each of the newly appointed medical officers be made public vaccinator for his own district. These recommendations were carried at the next board meeting by a large majority. This re-arrangement of the medical districts is strongly opposed by the local profession. The Burnley Division of the British Medical Association has approached the Local Government Board, asking that its consent be not given to the scheme. It is urged that the new districts have been made in a very arbitrary manner, and would result in much inconvenience both to the doctor and the Poor Law patient, and that in some which have no poor residents nearly the same salary is allotted as in other districts where there is a considerable settlement of the poor. The Colne and Brierfield District Councils have also protested against the arrangement, so that it does not appear satisfactory to any but the present guardians of the union. It is further alleged that the latter have hurried on the matter in order to establish the proposed scheme before the approaching election of a fresh board. It is to be hoped that the Local Government Board will review the matter very carefully before giving official sanction. We feel sure that the local profession will maintain without wavering its strenuous opposition to a scheme which it regards as harmful to the sick poor and to the profession.

It would appear that the Burnley guardians have already given notice to the present public vaccinators to determine their appointments. This has been done without waiting for the sanction of the Local Government Board, which has invariably refused to permit public vaccination to be utilized for Poor Law purposes, as it has always rightly considered that the duties of a public vaccinator are quite distinct from those of a Poor Law medical officer; and, further, that it is not for the good of the public, nor does it tend to efficient public vaccination to mix it up with the Poor Law. A similar attempt was made some years ago by a metropolitan board of guardians, but permission was refused by the Local Government Board, and we trust that the latter will not hesitate to maintain the same policy in this matter that it has wisely adopted in the past.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD REPORTS.

Ringwood Rural District (New series, No. 74).—The extensive outbreak of typhoid fever in the town of Ringwood, in Hampshire, in the autumn of last year is the subject of an important report to the Local Government Board by Dr. Hugh A. Macewen, one of the Board's medical inspectors. The outbreak involved seventy-seven persons living in forty-nine houses, and five cases terminated fatally. The population of Ringwood town is about 3,000. In the course of inquiries as to the cause of the outbreak, well-grounded suspicion fell upon a supply of ice cream, but after investigating the circumstances in some detail Dr. Macewen came to the conclusion that it was not an essential factor common to all the cases reported. The water supply of the town is obtained from shallow wells or from the Cockstone stream which courses through a part of the populated part of the town. Although it was not shown conclusively that all those who were attacked had drunk water from this stream, it is certain that the majority of them had. The opportunities for the pollution of the stream were so great through middens, drains, slop water cast directly into it, and other filth found in proximity, that suspicion must be attached to it. A regrettable feature of the report is an account of the attitude of the rural district council in whose administrative area the town is situated in dealing with the epidemic. No provision had been made for isolating any cases of infectious disease, and it was not until a week or two after the commencement of the epidemic, and when forty-eight cases had occurred, that a temporary hospital was established at a disused farmhouse. Still more unsatisfactory is Dr. Macewen's statement that from interviews he had with certain members of the district council, and from