

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND POOR-LAW MEDICAL SERVICES.

THE Local Government Board of Mitley, Essex, have applied to the Local Government Board for a provisional order to dissolve the district and merge it in the Tendring Rural Sanitary District; and a local inquiry is to be held upon the subject on Tuesday next, by Lieutenant-Colonel Ponsenby Cox, R.E., one of the inspectors of the Board.

### POOR-LAW MEDICAL RELIEF IN THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND.

SIR,—As acting medical officer of one of the parishes in the above division of Scotland, I trust you will allow me to make a few remarks on the letter of "Ex-Medical Officer" in your impression of January 22nd. He states that the real and only grievance of Scotch Poor-law officers is the present uncertain tenure of office; and that, if this evil were removed, there would not be much cause of complaint. My own experience—probably also that of the great majority of my professional brethren—is, that this is only one of our grievances; and that, were it removed to-morrow, we would still have some cause of complaint. Indeed, it does not even appear to be the most serious: his own predecessor held the same appointment for twenty-six years, and he refers to two others who held theirs for nearly the same period. I know two medical men who, unless incapacitated by old age within the last two years, held the same appointments since the Act came into operation; and there are many instances throughout the country of an unbroken tenure of from five to thirty years. A faithful servant is seldom summarily dismissed without sufficient cause, and a medical officer will rarely be put out of office without a sufficient reason. Each change entails trouble and expense upon the board; and there is risk of losing the grant, unless the vacancy is filled within a certain period. To my knowledge, one parish that I know ran the risk twice, and would certainly have lost it, were it not that a neighbouring practitioner gave a helping hand in the emergency, by attending in said parish weekly or fortnightly, as occasion required. Parochial boards are intelligent enough when pecuniary interests are concerned; and, as a rule, they do not approve of capricious removals. When I obtained my present appointment some years ago, there was not even one year's engagement—simply an obligation on both sides to give three months' notice; and I am not in the least afraid of being removed, unless I resign of my own accord. Many, however, do so; and others, again, quit in disgust. Of the latter, I can give two instances. One removed to Glasgow, where he is fairly successful; the other has a lucrative practice in Liverpool, impelled thither by their experience of the hardships of a country doctor in a wide district in the North. It consists with my own knowledge, that the present officer is the sixth in one of the districts referred to within the last six years; and another neighbouring parish, at present vacant, has had a similar experience. Removals of this kind must be traced to causes other than our tenure of office.

Wide unmanageable districts are peculiar to the north and north-west. In Ross-shire, for instance, I may notice two: one forty miles long by twenty broad, with a population of 5,148; another about the same extent, with a population above 4,000. Both are intersected by arms of the sea, and traversed by almost impassable mountain-ridges, lakes, and rivers. The roads to some of the townships are passable; many are crossed by streams as yet unbridged; and in some cases there is scarcely a footpath. The medical man on more than one occasion is known to have got his horse to swim over a swollen river, while he and the saddle were ferried. The climate, again, is unfriendly. Frequent rains, on long journeys which cannot be delayed until fair weather, tell upon even the strongest frame. The privations and hardships of medical men in their visits in these districts are not at all exaggerated in your issue of January 15th.

"Ex-Medical Officer" can point out one medical man in the North who has retired on a competency. It would have been well first to have ascertained how much of this same competency was derived from professional remuneration, and how much from the profits of farming. The choice which the gentleman referred to has made will leave little doubt which of the two is more profitable, medicine or farming. Many medical men in the Highlands take farms; some do so in order to make a livelihood. A very respectable unmarried medical gentleman told me he would never have saved a penny were it not for his

farm; and that the first year or two he was in his parish, without his farm, he was more out of pocket than his yearly income. Another gentleman in Argyshire told me that, on settling his drug-bills at the end of the year, he scarcely had £100 left out of his income from all sources.

As to the income in the district of Tongue and Farr, it may be correct; but it is not the fact that the present medical officer has £250 from the different boards, etc. He has £150, as may be seen from the *Medical Journal* of November last. I question if there is one district in the north or west Highlands where anything near £400 *per annum* can be made, except where town and country practices are united; but these are few and far between, and scarcely to our purpose. If we take into consideration the various sources of income in the above district: salary, £150; midwifery and vaccination fees, the latter paid by the board, the legality of which, except in pauper cases, we may be allowed to doubt; the handsome fees from so many first-rate families, according to "Ex-Medical Officer"; and from several large sheep-farmers,—it might, if all this were true, be possible to realise the amount specified.

But it is our duty to look at the salaries offered by boards outside of Sutherland; and a reference to the *Medical Directory* will show that these are even much less than £110 *per annum*. It may be true that the medical officers of these boards have also large private practice; but, unfortunately, the fees are small, and few of them are paid in the Highlands. It is quite true that the Duke of Sutherland supplements the salaries of medical officers on his own estate to the extent of £40 *per annum*, and also provides house, offices, and garden rent-free; but it does not follow that others in the North are equally fortunate. In other districts, medical men generally pay rent and taxes, and even then their accommodation is frequently inadequate and uncomfortable. Under existing circumstances, medical men in the North should be provided with house, garden, and offices rent free.—Your obedient servant,  
February 1876. D. B.

## MILITARY AND NAVAL MEDICAL SERVICES.

### THE GUARDS.

WE congratulate the Brigade of Guards on having at last succeeded in replacing Dublin by Shorncliffe as one of their out-stations. It will be remembered that a similar arrangement had been effected before the *Trent* affair and the necessity which this involved of sending two battalions of household troops to Canada. Fenian troubles then rendered it advisable once more to place the Guards in garrison at Beggar's Bush Barracks; and we presume the country is only now sufficiently quiet to permit their final withdrawal. The advantages to be derived from this alteration cannot fail to make themselves felt by improved health and diminished invaliding; and we feel convinced that the hard-worked men will keenly appreciate the bracing properties of sea-air, after London and its depressing influences. The evils of town-service are not only confined to its manifold temptations and the undoubtedly debilitating effects of prolonged residence without due change, but the very heavy sentry duties are well known to be prejudicial to health. Two or three nights "out of bed", as it is popularly termed, cannot but prove injurious in the long run; and this exposure and want of sleep are looked upon by many as one of the chief factors in the great amount of destructive pulmonary disease met with in the Guards. Change of quarters to Dublin implied no substantial relief in this respect; whereas the camp at Shorncliffe will supply abundant instructive work, so un-mixed with exhausting conditions, and so thoroughly associated with tonic surroundings, as to entitle the six months' term of duty there to be looked upon as the occasional holiday which is requisite to prevent the total break-down of the jaded Londoner.

ABERNETHIAN SOCIETY.—The annual general meeting of the Abernethian Society was held on Thursday, March 16th, Dr. Vincent Harris, President, in the Chair, and ninety-two members present. From the Secretary's statement, it appeared that there had been nineteen ordinary meetings of the Society, with an average attendance of rather more than thirty-one members; that fifty-six new members had been admitted during the session; and that the balance in the hands of the Treasurer is £73:3:1. The following gentlemen were elected officers for the ensuing year. *Presidents*: Mr. Keatley, Mr. Macready. *Vice-Presidents*: Mr. Mills, Dr. Wharry. *Treasurer*: Mr. Savory. *Secretaries*: Mr. Darbishire, Mr. Pye. At the close of the meeting, a vote of thanks to the outgoing officers, proposed by Dr. Herbert Taylor, and seconded by Dr. de Havilland Hall, was unanimously accorded.