

sanitary problems, always troublesome in an Oriental city, are exceptionally difficult of solution in Calcutta, owing not only to physical conditions, but also to the crass ignorance and the extraordinary timidity and obstinacy of the bulk of the population. Moreover, the Health Officer is not merely a sanitary adviser; he is the administrative head of the departments which control vaccination, the management of the markets and slaughterhouses, and the food supply, as well as the ordinary health arrangements of the city; he must therefore be an administrator as well as a sanitary expert.

Dr. Cook has held the appointment of Health Officer since 1898, and during these eight years not only have sanitary conditions been profoundly modified by the advent of plague, but health problems of every description have forced themselves to the front, and the Commissioners are becoming more and more alive to the gravity of the responsibility which devolves upon them for ameliorating the sanitation of the city. A considerable majority are of opinion that the time has come for effecting radical improvement in the methods of the health department. It is felt that the present dual system, under which a separate staff deals with plague prevention, is inefficient as well as extravagant; the Commissioners have resolved to amalgamate the plague with the health department under one head, while it is proposed to largely increase the pay of the health officer and to make the post pensionable, with a view to attract the best possible man to the appointment. Surely, the Corporation is not only within its rights in taking this action, but the Commissioners deserve commendation, and not censure, from a professional journal for their efforts to improve the health administration of the city.

As invariably happens when an attempt is made to improve *personnel*, difficulty has been experienced in dealing with the claims of the existing incumbent. Every one will agree that considerate treatment ought to be meted out in such cases, and the question is whether Dr. Cook received such treatment or not; to throw light upon this question it is necessary to consider the terms of his tenure of office. Dr. Cook was originally appointed health officer in January, 1898, for a term of five years, which was renewable at the option of the Corporation. In February, 1902, the Commissioners decided to re-engage him for a further period of three years, his employment to be terminable at any date subsequent to the expiry of the term of re-engagement, by a six months' notice on either side. The Commissioners were fully within their rights, therefore, when they decided in December, 1905, by a large majority to give Dr. Cook six months' notice.

But although the Commissioners were within their strict rights in thus terminating Dr. Cook's employment, it was felt by many of them that the method adopted was too summary a dismissal of an officer who had served the city to the best of his ability for a period of eight years, and this view was warmly taken up by the press, and by outside opinion generally. An attempt was accordingly made in Dr. Cook's interests in January, 1906, to induce the Commissioners to reconsider their decision, but a motion to this effect was rejected by one vote. A second attempt made on March 9th proved more successful, for the Commissioners agreed to withdraw the six months' notice, and to extend Dr. Cook's service until October, 1907.

It is difficult to understand how these facts can be made to support the charge levied against the Corporation of inconsiderate treatment of their health officer; on the contrary, they point in a diametrically opposite direction. There can be no doubt that a majority of the Commissioners are of opinion that the time has come to endeavour to obtain the services of a health officer superior in ability and capacity to Dr. Cook; and, holding these views, they were perfectly justified in giving him notice; while by extending the term of that notice from six to twenty-one months, they have acted towards Dr. Cook not only with due consideration, but with generosity.

It seems unnecessary to deal at length with the remaining portion of your article, and it will suffice to say that the Corporation was advised that the intimation to Dr. Cook of the six months' notice was a sufficient intimation, a view with which the Bengal Government concurred, and that the resentment felt at Dr. Cook's application for leave immediately after the extension of his service was by no means confined to the Indian Commissioners, but was

warmly expressed by some of the Europeans who had been foremost in advocating the extension.

I must plead the importance of the subject as an apology for the length of this letter, for it would be disastrous if medical men were deterred from applying for the post of Health Officer of Calcutta, when it falls vacant, by the misconception to which you have—I feel sure inadvertently—given circulation. It is with the object of removing these misconceptions that I ask you to publish this letter.—I am, etc.,

Municipal Office, Calcutta.
September 27th.

C. G. H. ALLEN,
Chairman, Calcutta Corporation.

* * * The question whether the treatment which Dr. Cook has received from the Corporation of Calcutta was inconsiderate or not must be a matter of opinion about which we cannot argue with Mr. Allen; his letter, however, only tends to confirm the impression that the treatment was inconsiderate. The Chairman merely succeeds in showing that the action of the Corporation was not illegal—a point our article did not touch. He would have us believe that the one anxiety of the Corporation is to render the health department more efficient. The Corporation of Calcutta consists of some fifty members; about one-half are elected by the ratepayers, the remainder are representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Trades Association, the Calcutta Harbour Trust, or, like the Chairman, Government nominees. It is obvious, therefore, that the position of the health officer must be insecure unless he be an officer appointed by the Government serving under the Imperial Sanitary Commissioner but attached to the Corporation, or unless he has the thorough support of the Government of India. The Chairman does not dispute any of the facts stated in our article of July 7th, and the warning then given appears to be fully justified by the text of the advertisement drafted by the Health Special Committee of the Corporation on April 30th. After stating that a candidate must give his whole time, must be a registered medical practitioner, and must hold a diploma in public health, the advertisement continues as follows:

He should have practical experience as Health Officer and he should be able to administer the various departments employed on the sanitary works of a large city. The appointment will be for a period of five years renewable from time to time for further five-yearly periods at the discretion of the Corporation. The Health Officer is liable to removal during his term of office for misconduct or neglect of or incapacity for his duties. The minimum monthly salary of the appointment is Rs. 1,500 which may be raised to a maximum of Rs. 2,000 at the discretion of the Corporation, and a Health Officer who completes fifteen years' satisfactory service will be entitled to a pension of £300 a year.

A more curious provision than that contained in the last clause we have never read in the conditions of a public appointment. The officer is to enter into a contract to serve for five years, his appointment is only renewable at the discretion of the Corporation, but he can earn no pension unless he has completed fifteen years' service. Will Mr. Allen, as a civil servant himself, tell us that, knowing the treatment which Dr. Neild Cook has received, candidates of the calibre desired are likely to come forward?

THE ORGANIZATION OF BRANCHES AND DIVISIONS.

SIR,—Though by no means prepared to endorse in detail all the suggestions advanced in the letter of Dr. F. J. Smith dealing with the respective spheres of action of the Branches and Divisions of the Association, I am in cordial agreement with his desire to emphasize the influence of the Branches on what may be termed the local policy and business of the Association. It is to the interest of the Association, and indeed of the whole profession, that local professional movements shall not be suggested or directed by personal or sectarian influences, and to avoid the risk of this the controlling influence of an authority selected over a wide area is necessary. Such a statement in no sense involves a reflection upon the Divisions; it is merely a presentation of the familiar truth that no man is a suitable judge of a dispute in which his own interests are engaged. Under the existing arrangements the Branch can exercise at least some measure of control, and so far as Dr. Smith wishes to maintain, or even to increase this, I am in entire sympathy with him.

Perhaps in the discussion of this matter it will be wise to recollect that the Association has been lately passing

through a revolutionary experience and that for a time, at all events, constitution tinkering had better be avoided. For this, together with other reasons, I would suggest that it is not advisable at the present moment to seek to define a new arrangement of the respective functions of the Branches and Divisions. If, however, an attempt is to be made to do this to the prejudice of the Branches, it is satisfactory to find so stalwart a champion as Dr. Smith prepared to do battle on their behalf.—I am, etc.,

London, W., Oct 21st.

C. O. HAWTHORNE.

THE TAXATION OF MOTOR CARS.

SIR,—Will you allow us, on behalf of the Committee of medical men who are users of motor cars, to call attention to a matter of importance. Under the existing Motor Car Act, which has been temporarily prolonged, the owners of motor cars are called upon to pay (1) for a licence to drive; (2) a registration fee; (3) a carriage tax of £2 2s. for cars under 1 ton weight, and of £4 4s. for cars over a ton weight.

Now there are good reasons for anticipating that in the Act which is being drafted the last of these three will be materially increased, and that cars will be taxed according to either their weight or horse-power. In either case, the new taxation will fall heavily upon medical men, who, owing to the exacting nature of their work, the requirements of reliability, the rough roads and steep hills they have to traverse, must use substantially-built cars with adequate horse-power.

It is not right that motors used by medical men in their daily work should be taxed as though they were the pleasure vehicles of the rich. The medical man has neither time nor money to allow of such luxuries; his motor car has to be used strictly for professional purposes, and, in consideration of the enormous amount of gratuitous work that he does, ought to be exempt. Surely it is to the advantage of the public to encourage the use by medical men of a means of progression which enables them to render such speedy help in moments of emergency. It is, however, likely that heavy taxes will be thrown upon medical men unless they bestir themselves, and try to defend their own interests.

We would, therefore, suggest that each medical man should forthwith write to his own member of Parliament or to any others he may know, for protection and support. Those members of the public who are favourably disposed are asked to write to members of Parliament, and express their sympathy with this movement.—We are, etc.,

C. B. LOCKWOOD,

Chairman of Committee of Medical Men who are Users of Motor Cars.

H. E. BRUCE-PORTER,

Honorary Secretary,

6, Grosvenor Street, London, W., Oct. 19th.

THE RUBBER TEAT AND DEFORMITIES OF THE JAWS.

SIR,—The valuable paper by Dr. Pedley of Rangoon on the above in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of October 20th, p. 989, also your leaderette, ought to be of special interest to medical men practising in the manufacturing towns of Lancashire. For some years I have been waging a crusade against these evils. In my annual report on the health of the borough of Bacup for 1905 the following paragraphs occur:—

The crusade against "bottle-fed" infants must be pushed forward. Mothers must be encouraged to perform their maternal duties. The "comforter" was a fraud on the unhappy child; it led to waste of its digestive secretions, and it picked up every kind of filth when it fell on the floor. In my opinion, the sucking of air through empty tubes and the use of the teat or comforter seriously interferes with the natural development of the mouth and nasal air passages, and is probably one of the chief factors in the production of adenoids, which are so common; thirty years ago it was rare. This abnormal growth in the nasal air passages seriously interferes with free respiration and speech.

—I am, etc.,

Bacup, Oct. 22nd.

JOHN BROWN, M.D., D.P.H.

THE TEACHING OF PHYSIOLOGY.

SIR,—Under the heading, "The Teaching of Physiology," your issue of Oct. 6th contains some sentences which I consider are calculated to produce a false impression of the manner in which this subject is taught in England at the present time.

Speaking of Dr. Fuchs's *Manual of Practical Physiology*, your reviewer says:

"The writer asks, most pertinently as we think, why the use of the ophthalmoscope and the laryngoscope and the auscultation of the normal heart and breath sounds should not be taught until the student is commencing clinical work."

He further states:

"Each department of practical physiology should receive equal attention. This is by no means the case in English works on the subject, which devote an inordinate amount of space to the experiments on muscle and nerve, and in particular to electrical demonstrations, which usually fail—being of great technical difficulty—and are, medically speaking, quite purposeless."

That the subjects mentioned are ordinarily taught as a part of the course of physiology in important schools is a fact familiar to many, whilst the experience of any one who finds that electrical demonstrations—even when of great technical difficulty—"usually fail" may certainly be characterized as singularly unfortunate.—I am, etc.,

Bristol, Oct. 9th.

A. F. STANLEY KENT.

** We have referred this letter to the reviewer, who writes: Your reviewer begs to call Mr. A. F. Stanley Kent's attention to the correct title of the work referred to, which is *Practical Physiology for Medical Students*. The statements made in the review are literally true as regards London; the defects of the present system are generally admitted.

THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL AND ITS PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

SIR,—The "graceful, rippling prose" of the President's address on the functions of the General Medical Council will have missed its mark if it induces many members of the profession to hope, like your correspondent, Dr. Herbert Sieveking, that it is possible to reform the Council into a body capable of promoting the unity of the medical profession and of securing the many advantages thereby connoted.

The Council needs reform without doubt, but it can never obtain from the State, whether in its reformed or unreformed condition, the necessary powers to secure the unity of the profession. Unity proceeds from within and cannot be forced upon us from without. When we wish for it we can have it. The reconstituted British Medical Association provides for us, if we would use it, ample means for uniting the profession; and with modifications which would meet with no parliamentary opposition it could, without doubt, make effective every reasonable wish of a united profession.

It is earnestly to be hoped that Dr. Donald MacAlister's instructive address will turn aside reformers from running their heads against the brick wall of a State institution for securing unity and will direct their attention to the adjustable mechanism ready to their hands.—I am, etc.,

October 23rd.

PROFESSIONAL UNION.

THE APPROACHING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

SIR,—The triennial election of the Municipal Councils takes place about November 1st, 1906; it is highly important that members of the medical profession should have adequate representation on these public bodies, so intimately concerned with matters of sanitation, midwives, vaccination, and many other medical interests. I write in the hope that they will awake to their sense of duty to record their votes in favour of medical candidates, irrespective of their politics.—I am, etc.,

HENRY DUTCH, M.D.,

London, W., Oct. 21st.

Councillor, City of Westminster.

An International Exhibition, which is expected to prove one of the largest and most successful ever held in a British Colony, will be opened at Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand, on November 1st, and will last six months. During this period special facilities, it is understood, will be offered for reaching New Zealand and exploring it thoroughly, so the occasion seems to offer a good opportunity to those who desire to spend some months in a genial climate. Applications for information will be answered by the High Commissioner for New Zealand, 13, Victoria Street, S.W.