

MEDICAL NOTES IN PARLIAMENT.

[FROM OUR LOBBY CORRESPONDENTS.]

THE BUDGET OF 1898-99 was disclosed to the House last week by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a speech of much interest. It was on the whole regarded as a disappointing Budget, and the remissions of taxation will not benefit the medical profession to any great extent. The tobacco duty remission will help smokers of pipes a little, but with an eightpenny income tax in peace times the hard-worked general practitioner wants more lessening of direct taxation. The extension of the limit of abatement from £500 to £700 per annum will be some help to a number of practitioners, and will really reduce the income tax as follows: Incomes just under £400 will pay at the rate of 4.8d. in the £, under £500 at the rate of 5 6d., under £600 at the rate of 6.4d., and under £700 at the rate of 7.2d. The abatement is good so far as it goes, but there is a feeling, which is growing stronger, that precarious incomes which depend on a single life like those earned by the medical profession should receive more consideration than they do at the hands of the Treasury.

THE HABITUAL INEBRIATES BILL was introduced and read a first time on Monday. The Home Secretary said that the principal object of the measure was to substitute for penal treatment in prisons of habitual drunkards reformatory treatment in inebriate reformatories. Such institutions might be established by the State, or by local authorities, or by private individuals. The establishment of such institutions had been accomplished abroad, and to some extent in this country, and had been recommended by three departmental Committees. The criminal habitual inebriate had hitherto been practically untouched by existing Acts. The Bill recognised two classes of criminal inebriates: first, those who were guilty of serious crime caused by habitual drunkenness; and, secondly, petty offenders who continually appeared before the courts. Both classes would under the Act be liable to committal to an inebriate reformatory for a period not exceeding three years. The more serious offenders of the first class would be treated in State reformatories, or certified reformatories under suitable regulations; and the offenders of the second class in certified reformatories. The regulations made by the Secretary of State for these institutions would be subject to the control of Parliament. The Bill will affect Scotland, but is not drawn to affect Ireland. It is an elaborate measure of twenty-eight clauses and three schedules, and will require careful consideration in Committee.

THE VICTORIA EMBANKMENT EXTENSION BILL was the title under which the Westminster Improvement Scheme came before the House on Tuesday. Before the debate opinion was very evenly divided as to its chances of success, but the discussion disclosed a strong feeling against the Bill. The case as regards the overcrowding and slums in the scheduled area proved to be comparatively weak. There was also much opposition to the line of the new avenue, and to the proposal to erect a long and lofty block of buildings near the river at the end of the Victoria Tower Gardens. The large majority of 4 to 1 by which the second reading of the Bill was rejected was, however, mostly due to the wholesome instinct which the House of Commons has against any financial scheme proposed by a private body, especially when it includes members of the House. The scheme of improvement has for the present been decisively rejected, but the division and the debate ought to stimulate the County Council to undertake a better scheme at no distant date.

THE BELFAST CORPORATION (HOSPITALS) BILL was the second private Bill which came on for second reading on Tuesday. The day was, indeed, a remarkable one, as private business lasted till the dinner hour. In the Belfast case a religious difficulty was raised, but the majority of the House refused to consider it. Whatever the grievance may be in Belfast, the English and Scotch members mostly felt that medical institutions ought not to be connected with questions of creed, and so did not favour the opposition to the Bill.

FOOD ADULTERATION.—A Bill to amend the Food and Drugs Act, according to a statement by Mr. Chaplin in reply to Mr. Channing, will be introduced in the House of Commons when the Government sees any prospect of making progress with the measure. Mr. Brodrick has informed Major Rasch, in regard to the alleged poisoning of soldiers at Hilssea by vinegar supposed to be adulterated with arsenic, that an inquiry had taken place, but that further investigation was desirable. Mr. Chaplin, in reply also to Major Rasch, said his attention had been called to a resolution passed by the Central Chamber of Commerce on April 5th with reference to the importation of chemically treated French milk. The Local Government Board had, however, no power to prohibit such importation, and he was not at present in possession of information which would justify him in taking prohibitory action, even if there were any power. He should be glad of any information the hon. member could give him.

VACCINATION OFFICERS AND PROSECUTIONS.—Mr. Broadhurst asked the President of the Local Government Board whether, in the case of relieving officers who were also vaccination officers he intended that they should act in vaccination cases without the authority of the Poor-law guardians, or even against their authority; and, if so, whether legislation would be necessary to provide this new power, and, if not, under what Act the power was given. Mr. Chaplin, in reply, said he contemplated that the relieving officers who were vaccination officers should be in the same position in this matter as any other vaccination officers, and that vaccination officers should undertake prosecutions independently of any directions from the guardians themselves. No new legislation would be required. The vaccination officers would exercise these powers under the Vaccination Acts of 1867 and 1871, and under regulations issued by the Local Government Board in accordance with the provisions of the Act of 1874. In reply to Mr. Labouchere, Mr. Chaplin said it had been the practice of the vaccination officers to institute proceedings under the Vaccination Acts, either under the general or special directions of the guardians, but he was not prepared to say that it had invariably been the case. It was not proposed that the proceedings should be instituted by the medical officers of health, but by the vaccination officers, who were, under the statute, appointed for the express purpose of prosecuting persons charged with offences against the Vaccination Acts. The cost of prosecutions would be charged on the rates, as at present.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON SEWAGE has been completed, and the names of the Commissioners and the terms of the reference under which they will act will be published in a few days. The delay in the formation of the Commission has been due to the necessity of appointing Scotch and Irish members. Its composition will, we believe, be found to correspond closely to the forecast already given in this column, with the addition of members officially connected with the Local Government Boards of Scotland and Ireland. With these additions, Lord Iddesleigh, as Chairman, will have as colleagues engineering experts, one from the Local Government Board, a distinguished chemist, Sir Richard Thorne Thorne, a physiologist whose name will carry authority with all, and we hope some representative of the medical officers of health.

GUY'S HOSPITAL BILL.—A special report was brought up in the House of Lords as follows: Mr. James William Lowther reported from the Committee on the Guy's Hospital Bill, that they had agreed to the following special report: "That the Bill seeks to alter the general law by enacting that the death of the grantor of any land to the Corporation of Guy's Hospital within twelve months from the date of the execution of the deed of gift of such land shall not invalidate the said deed, but it appearing that Mr. Attorney-General was satisfied with the provisions of the Bill as submitted to the Committee, they were of opinion that the said provisions should be allowed. Under these circumstances the Committee had passed the Bill without amendment, but had determined to report the same specially to the House." The Guy's Hospital Bill has passed the report stage in the Commons, and now stands for third reading.

PETITIONS.

Petitions in favour of the Bill dealing with the adulteration of food products were presented from the County of Somerset, against State regulation in regard to certain contagious diseases in East India, and against the Midwives' Registration Bill from the British Medical Association.