the Royal Society was "that in case of judicial inquiries as to collisions or accidents, witnesses giving evidence as to the nature or position of coloured signals or lights should be themselves tested for colour and form sense." In the opinion of men of practical experience the enforcement of this recommendation would go a very long way towards removing the present defective conditions. If every Board of Trade inquiry involved without question the examination of the look-out's eyesight, all shipowners would, as a matter of business, and for their own safety, take care that none but men of proved good eyesight were placed on the look-out. The Board of Trade has stated that should there be any case of an official inquiry in which the question of form or colour vision may be concerned, arrangement would certainly be made for testing the sight of the witnesses. The meaning of this pronouncement is not very clear. We are inclined to suspect that it might be paraphrased as follows: "If we find that any collision has been due to defective eyesight or colour blindness, then we will examine the eyesight." This is to invert the proper order of the inquiry; the eyesight of the look-outs should be tested first, and the result of such examination should be one of the facts brought under the notice of the Court as a matter of routine. The system should be made to work automatically.

That we are stating no hypothetical opinion as to the Board of Trade's attitude on this point is shown by the correspondence which took place in reference to the *Elbe* and *Craithie* disaster, in which, it will be remembered, 380 lives were lost. On the Board being advised of the desirability of an examination of the eyesight and colour sight of such of the *Craithie's* crew as were on deck at the time of the catastrophe. They wrote in reply:

That the question of the powers of vision will be carefully borne in mind in the Board of Trade inquiry into the cause of the collision between the *Elbe* and the *Craithie*.

The inquiry took place, but the question of defective sight not being mentioned, the Board were again communicated with, and the following extraordinary answer received from them that:

the witnesses were not examined as to their eyesight, and that the evidence of both sides showed that colour blindness had nothing to do with the collision.

Colour blindness may or may not have been the cause; but, considering the awful nature of the catastrophe and the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence forthcoming, the Board's failure to test the eyesight constituted, we cannot help feeling in the face of their letter, a serious dereliction of duty.

THE NEED FOR MEDICAL EXAMINERS.

It would, however, be necessary that these examinations should be conducted by skilled persons, and the same remark would equally apply to the desired compulsory examination of apprentices before they sign indentures. It would be unjust to condemn the present examiners employed by the Board of Trade for mistakes which occur. It is the system which is at fault. The Board of Trade complacently asserts that the present tests are conducted by examiners, each of whom has been carefully tested as to his qualifications, and the Board appears to derive satisfaction from the fact that the present tests are necessarily of as simple a nature as possible. We desire to ask why the tests are necessarily of as simple a nature as possible? Why are they not efficient, and carried out by persons specially trained? Why are they not entrusted to properly qualified ophthalmic surgeons? A person of ordinary common sense who finds that his vision is below the standard of other people does not consider that he has done his duty by himself if he goes into an optician's shop and gets "fitted" with a pair of spectacles. No doubt people used to do this, but the educated classes have practically given up such a suicidal course of conduct, and that knowledge of the danger of ignorant meddling with eyesight is penetrating among the poorer classes is shown by the enormous numbers who apply at the various ophthalmic hospitals to have the refraction of the eyes properly estimated. If this be so, is it not in the least degree absurd that when it becomes the duty of the State in the interests of public safety to examine the eyesight and to test the colour vision of seamen, the duty is relegated to persons who, however conscientious, have received no special training, and are, therefore, not fitted to form a reliable opinion upon the matter? We are very strongly of opinion that the examination ought to be con-

ducted by medical men who have taken opportunities to become proficient in the most approved methods of examining the eyes for their perception of form and their power of discriminating colours.

IRISH WORKHOUSE REFORM.

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VI.—THE GROWTH OF THE PROBLEM.

THERE are three significant terms in workhouse statistics: the average daily number in the house, the yearly number of admissions, and the flux from year to year in these numbers. The average daily number measures actual workhouse pauperism, the yearly admissions or the total number receiving indoor relief measures pauperism in the country—and by a very stringent test—and the flux of last from year to year measures uncertainty of State or liability to pauperism. A relatively large daily number of inmates accumulating as the result of a relatively small number of admissions yearly is desirable compared with the opposite condition, a smaller average daily number the result of a larger number of yearly admissions. The first represents better care of the pauper-going, with less necessity for the workhouse in the mass.

The general character of Irish workhouse pauperism for the past thirty years is decided by an apparent decrease in the daily average of inmates, increase in the yearly number of admissions, and violent fluxes in short periods in the last. In 1866 the daily average was 50.280, the admissions 184,587; in 1895 the numbers were 40,578 and 276,036. The maximum daily average was 54,246 in 1880, the minimum 40,437, in 1892. The yearly admissions were 140,601, the minimum in 1876, rising to 317,238 in 1880, falling to 253,342 in 1884, then rising to the maximum (351,604) in 1888. In the lustrum 1866-70 the admissions were 1,005,149, and in 1890-95 1,405,962. But in 1866 the population was 5,582,625, and in 1895 4,574,807; and, therefore, while relatively to population the daily average remained stationary, the number of persons using the workhouses nearly doubled. But this has to be limited to the labouring class, the section of the population which has decreased most. The increase and the violent fluxes within short periods show that the life of labour is precarious and insecure.

The increase in the use made of the workhouse in sickness needs explanation. In 1865 the admissions in fever and other serious infectious diseases was 18,410, an abnormal figure, but the figure for 1895 (3,611) is abnormal as being above the recent average. Irish practitioners of experience know well the happy change that has come over the prevalence of these diseases. But the gain is lost in the record of economic degradation. Between 1876 and 1895 the admissions in sickness varied from 45,531 in 1876 to 62,609 in 1880, standing at 56,166 in 1895. This, taking into account decreased population, is a great increase, and, taking into account diminution in zymotic cases, is most unfavourable. It indicates not sickness alone, but want of means predisposing to sickness, and inability to bear its strain on means. For the admissions in sickness and other than in sickness vary together; the last thus were 95,070 in 1876, 298,540 in 1888, and 219,881 in 1895. This means more sickness due directly to want of the means of support and more general inability to meet the strain of sickness.

In 1865 the average daily number of able-bodied inmates was 9,197, and in 1895 5,457. Casuals, who average weekly 3,564, account in part for these. The much talked about casual is, however, a nuisance, not an important element in workhouse pauperism. Child life is the first burden responded to in the social economy, and the children went with the able-bodied, numbering in 1865 15,495, and only 6,356 in 1895. The able-bodied labourer has left the workhouse, taking his children with him, because he has left the country. This is the key to the whole position.

A CONGRESS of Medical Jurisprudence will be held at Brussels in August next for the discussion of questions of medico-legal interest. Among those on the programme are the following: Hypnotism and its Relations with Crime; the Professional Secret and the Law; and the Functions and Duties of Medical Experts in Medico-Legal Cases.