

LONDON LETTER.

THE series of congresses, more or less scientific in character, which in England claim a share of attention from men of science, who devote some of their hardly earned vacation to them, may be considered to have closed with the Sanitary congress at York. Sir Spencer Wells presided over it, and in his opening address observed that the main question now to be considered is, how sanitary improvements may be carried still further by the co-operation of investigators, legislators, and administrators. For this purpose he suggested the formation of a college of health, to organize a well-directed attack against existing obstacles. Much, however, had been done: in the last fifty years, for example, the average duration of life in Great Britain had been raised from thirty to forty-nine years. Of the various subjects discussed at the congress, probably the disposal of the dead was the one which excited the greatest interest. There appeared to be decided evidence that the feeling in favor of cremation was on the increase; and the opinion of the representative clergy present was to the effect that they were waiting for a decisive word from the scientific men upon the matter, by whom they were willing to be guided.

The return to England of the Solar eclipse expedition on Sept. 20 was speedily followed by a letter from the *Times* correspondent who accompanied it, in which the chief results obtained were discussed in preliminary fashion. Most of this letter is reproduced in *Nature* for Sept. 23. The new facts obtained were chiefly due to the work of Professor Tacchini, who satisfied himself that there was a great distinction between the eclipse prominences and those seen by the ordinary method. Both he and Mr. Lockyer consider that the former are due to down-rushes of comparatively cool material upon the sun's surface, and that they form a whitish fringe round the more incandescent centre. This, if well established, has a very important bearing on the theory of solar physics. Captain Darwin's work appeared to demolish entirely the idea entertained by Dr. Huggins and others, that the solar corona could be and had been photographed at times other than those of eclipses.

The opening of the medical schools in connection with the metropolitan hospitals, at the beginning of October, is always signalized by the delivery of some thoughtful introductory addresses by prominent members of the staff. One of the most remarkable of these was delivered at St. Mary's hospital by Dr. Malcolm Morris, and dealt with mysticism, scepticism, and materialism in medicine. He thought that the element of

mysticism in medicine had been forced on it by the public. It was the result of two opposing conditions,—the absolute knowledge demanded by the laity, on the one hand; and the more or less extensive ignorance of the professor of the healing art, on the other. This ignorance, where it existed, he must not acknowledge: he was expected to be able to recognize disease, and to know how to treat it. Despite recent strides, medicine was still extremely defective. The absolute knowledge insisted on by the public could not be obtained, and therefore had to be invented. Scepticism in medicine was neither more nor less than modern fatalism. The tendency of the present day was to devote attention to the part rather than the whole, and it was too commonly supposed that truth lay at the bottom of the microscope. At King's college, Dr. G. Johnson, F.R.S., urged at some length the value of the study of chemistry as a mental training and discipline, and then proceeded to point out that the only safe foundation for specialism was a thorough knowledge of disease in general; and this he illustrated by reference to diseases of the eye and of the larynx. The principal of the Royal veterinary college pointed out that in both human and veterinary medicine the elaboration of the germ theory of Pasteur, in its earlier triumphs in the department of surgery, was likely to be surpassed by what might reasonably be expected would yet be achieved in the domain of medicine.

True to the exceptional character of the year in matters of temperature, October has set in unusually hot, 78° being recorded in the shade in London on Oct. 1. Such an October temperature has only once been exceeded during the maintenance of existing records.

W.

London, Oct. 3.

NOTES AND NEWS.

CAPTAIN BAKER, British steamship *Red Sea*, Liverpool to New Orleans, reports to the U. S. hydrographic office that on Sept. 19, when some miles north of the Azores (exact position not given), he experienced what he considers an earthquake shock, on account of its suddenness, force, and after-effects. The first warning of a meteorological change was noticed in the dropping of the barometer for a tenth or more, and the freshening of the breeze, though veering. This was suddenly followed by a shock, sudden and powerful, causing the vessel to be thrown on her beam ends. She quickly righted, and was headed on just in time to meet the immense sea which suddenly rushed towards the port bow. She rode it gallantly, throwing her propellor far out of the