

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In the issue of SCIENCE for January 1, there is a note by P. J. O'Gara on albinism in the English sparrow. As he asks for further observations I may say that I do not believe partial albinism is at all rare in the English sparrow. Although I have not recently observed any in this part of the country, some years ago, when living in Oregon, I used frequently to see English sparrows that were partial albinos associating with normal members of the same species.

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WITH reference to Dr. O'Gara's note on the above subject in your issue of January 1, 1915, I may state that in England it is of comparatively common occurrence. Cases are frequently reported in the *Field* newspaper, and I have known of three examples myself. Partially white birds are by no means rare.

I also possess a specimen procured by my brother at Mosul in Asia Minor.

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TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In your issue of January 1, Dr. P. J. O'Gara, of Salt Lake City, Utah, states that on several occasions last summer he saw a single female English sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in the busy streets of Salt Lake City with a pure white plumage. He had never seen any reference to albinism in the English sparrow, and he asks if other observers have found this character to be common in that bird.

In reply, I may say that albino sparrows are fairly frequently seen in different parts of New Zealand. I have about 600 correspondents in the domain who send me notes on natural history, and I have received from them about a score of albino sparrows. These birds were first introduced into New Zealand in 1867, and now are the worst of all the bird pests. Albinism also is not unusual in the English blackbird (*Turdus merula*) in New

Zealand; several complete albinos have been reported to me.

It is interesting to note that our native birds show a very marked tendency towards albinism. There are few species of native birds that do not show this tendency. It is very noticeable in the Kiwi (*Apteryx*), whose soft, fluffy plumage, when pure white, is surpassingly beautiful. Our native birds also have a tendency towards melanism, but this is not so marked as the albinistic characteristic.

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QUOTATIONS

AN ATTACK ON THE HEALTH LAW OF NEW YORK STATE

LAST week we commented briefly upon the first annual report of the New York State Public Health Council, congratulating our fellow citizens upon the results of the council's activities and upon the framing of a new sanitary code for the state. And even as we were penning the lines several bills were being introduced into the state legislature which, if adopted, would seriously cripple the work of the commissioner of health and nullify the new sanitary code.

These bills, fathered by Assemblyman Hinman of Albany, five in number, are in the shape of amendments to the public health law. The first (Int. 1561) is directed against the commissioner of health and instead of the present injunction that he "shall not engage in any occupation which would conflict with the performance of his official duties," orders that he "shall devote his entire time to the duties of his office." This is perhaps the least objectionable of the proposed amendments, apart from the insulting innuendo concealed in it, for the duties of the commissioner of health are so exacting as practically to demand his entire time in any case. The second bill (Int. 1600) will, if it becomes a law, seriously interfere with the sanitary work in the state, for it reduces the number of sanitary districts from a minimum of twenty to a maximum of ten, and at the same time fixes the salary of the sanitary supervisor of each district at a maximum of \$2,500. In other words, it doubles

the labors of the sanitary supervisor and reduces his salary about 20 per cent. The third amendment (Int. 1601) makes permissive, instead of mandatory, the establishment of divisions in the State Department of Health and gives the commissioner the power to increase or decrease the number of these divisions, to consolidate them, or to change the name of any division at his pleasure. This is an altogether unnecessary interference with the existing law, and if it had any effect it would be in the line of decreased efficiency as making the divisions impermanent and liable to change at the whim of any one in power for the time being. The fourth amendment (Int. 1602) strips the Public Health Council of its power to define the qualifications of directors of divisions, sanitary supervisors, local health officers, and public health nurses hereafter appointed. The introducer's object in this amendment is not apparent, but the result of its enactment would inevitably be to open these appointments to unqualified persons and to create a number of jobs to be given in reward for political services. The fifth and worst of this series of bad bills (Int. 1603) would deprive the Public Health Council of the power to establish sanitary regulations, would delegate this to the legislature, and would even abolish the present sanitary code unless it shall be approved by the present legislature—and how much chance it would have of being approved by a legislature which had already adopted these amendments one can well imagine.

These, briefly stated, are the bills by the enactment of which it is proposed to impair the efficiency of the health department and to vitiate the work it has already accomplished. What may be the reason for the introduction of these bills it is difficult to understand. Their passage would not be in the interests of economy, for the worst of them, if passed, would not save the state a dollar, and others would rather increase the expenses of health administration by reducing the efficiency of the department, by putting the formulation of a new code in the hands of inexperts and of men ignorant of sanitary science, and by opening many of the most responsible positions to

incompetents. No business can save money in that way. The entire appropriation asked for by the health department is only about \$400,000—a paltry sum in comparison with the saving of lives and of dollars as well, which it is certain will result if the present law is let alone.

As a direct result of the work of the department during the past year there are two thousand persons, one thousand of them children, alive to-day in this state, outside of New York City, who would have been in their graves but for the efforts of Dr. Biggs and the Health Council. Are Mr. Hinman and his colleagues in the legislature willing to let these and three or four thousand others (for the life saving in public health work is cumulative) die next year in order to save thirty-five thousand dollars in the salaries of the sanitary supervisors who are to be dropped?

We can not believe the legislature will pass these reactionary amendments or, if it does, that the governor will sign them. But it will be better to spare both the legislature and the governor trouble by killing the bills in committee. This would doubtless be their fate if every physician would at once file his protest with the chairmen of the committees which now have the bills under consideration. In such protest the bills should be referred to by their introductory numbers and the protest should be addressed to the chairman of the respective committee as follows: Introduction Number 1561 (the first one above mentioned), Judiciary Committee, Assemblyman Frank B. Thorn, chairman; Int. 1600, Ways and Means Committee, Assemblyman Alexander MacDonald, chairman; Int. 1601, 1602 and 1603, Public Health Committee, Assemblyman Gilbert T. Seelye, chairman. We need not add that prompt action is needed to save the state from this threatened calamity.—*New York Medical Record*.

SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Biology. By GARY N. CALKINS, professor of protozoology in Columbia University. New York, Henry Holt & Co. 1914. Pp. i-viii + 241. 101 figures.