whole, unexceptionable as an expression of the resultant opinion received from many different sources. It is recognised at the outset that a "certain number" of deaths are due to preventable causes, and that a "certain number" of deaths are inevitable, which obviously signifies that the actual numbers of preventable and inevitable deaths are quite undetermined. One of the first services to be expected from a standing committee of experts would be information as to the relative proportions between these two classes of deaths. Idiosyncrasy as a factor cannot be eliminated. Anæsthetics, like all other poisonous drugs, act differently on different constitutions. Alcohol in known quantity does not necessarily produce identical effects upon different persons, but, as regards chloroform, ether, and other poisons, before we are entitled to appeal to idiosyncrasy we require to know what quantity of any one of these poisons may have been actually administered. Such information might usefully be acquired at small cost by a standing committee of the Home Office, and made available to the medical profession and to the intelligent laity in a convenient form.

The use of anæsthetics "of longer duration," inclusive, presumably, of chloroform, for the purposes of minor surgery, including dentistry, is considered in paragraphs 9 and 10 of the report. Although evidence was offered on behalf of the Incorporated Society of Extractors and Adaptors of Teeth to the effect that there had been 1,249,167 administrations of general anæsthetics by members of the society with only one fatal accident, the committee is of opinion that the administration of those anæsthetics the effect of which is of prolonged duration should be confined to qualified medical men.

The report is almost precisely on lines recommended by the General Medical Council in that it urges the need of legislation, that it recognises the necessity of limiting the administration of general anæsthetics to *qualified* medical and dental practitioners, and of prohibiting single-handed anæsthetising and operating.

There is no doubt that this report may prove to be the initial point leading to the acquisition of much useful knowledge and to greatly increased safety in the increasing number of cases where, thanks to Lord Lister and to the system of aseptic surgery, operations are possible, and anæsthetics therefore required. In the words of the report, there is need yet for much careful clinical observation, controlled, if necessary, by physiological experiments.

METRIC MEASURES.

THE Decimal Association has recently issued a circular on the progress of the metric system of weights and measures in this country, and also two papers written by Mr. Aldred F. Barker, director of textile industries at the Bradford Technical College, advocating the adoption of the metric system in the textile trade. It appears from the circular that the total number of metric weights and measures verified in the United Kingdom during the year ended March 31, 1909, was 8797. As this was the first year in which the obligation upon local authorities to distinguish between metric and imperial weights and measures in their returns to the Board of Trade was enforced, comparisons of this total with the totals for previous years, as furnished in the returns, would necessarily be misleading; but it is evident that the metric system is making steady headway here. Of the weights and measures verified and stamped in this country during the year in question, 1 in 1280 belonged to that system. Opponents of the metric system have an axiom to the effect that, whatever its merits, its compulsory introduction would be absolutely disastrous to the great textile industry. Mr. Barker's papers form a highly technical refutation of this axiom. He shows that the metric system could be adopted by the industry with a minimum of inconvenience, and that it would afford a more methodical and practical basis for those mysterious lists and tables which are to the textile trade what the Nautical Almanac is to the astronomer.

Mr. L. J. Spencer, of the Mineral Department, British Museum, has contributed to the March number of the *Mineralogical Magazine* an interesting paper on the weight of the "Cullinan" diamond, and on the value of the carat weight. He directs attention to the discordant values given by various authorities for the weight of the "Cullinan" diamond expressed in carats, and points out that the adoption of an international standard carat would be the best means of preventing such discrepancies in estimations of the weights of precious stones. The "metric carat" of 200 milligrams, the adoption of which was advocated by the International Conference on Weights and Measures in 1907 as a universal standard, has met with considerable support abroad, but diamond dealers in this country are not at present disposed to abandon their time-honoured but diverse-valued carat of about 3 troy or avoirdupois grains, the various equivalents adopted for which by different firms do not appear to cause much inconvenience to the trade. In these circumstances, only the exclusive adoption of the metric carat by all the more important foreign States would render official action possible towards its legal recognition or compulsory adoption in the United Kingdom.

FUNGAL STUDIES.

MR. C. L. MOORE has followed up his studies of the Myxomycetes of Picton County in Nova Scotia, by a short account of some Nova Scotian aquatic fungi referred to the species Saprolegnia, Achyla, Aphanomyces, Leptomitus, and Sapromyces. The paper, which is published in the Transactions of the Nova Scotian Institute of Science (vol. xii., part iii.), contains figures and descriptions of the antheridia and oogonia for most of the species.

An important contribution to the literature on the Mycetozoa is provided by the list of species from Ceylon compiled by Mr. T. Petch, which is published in the Annals of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya (vol. iv., part vi.). The list enumerates 102 species, the majority of which are also found in Europe; *Alwisia bombarda* and *Erionema aureum* are two tropical species recorded from the wet country. The commonest species are *Didymium effusum*, *Physarella mirabilis*, and *Hemitrichia clavata*. Physarella may be said to invade the laboratory, where it develops on logs kept for growing other fungi. Mr. Petch notes that there is a greater tendency for the plasmodium to wander than in Europe, which he ascribes to the greater rainfall and humidity. *Stemonitis herbatica*, Physarella, and *Didymium effusum* have been gathered, from the crowns of palm trees, 20 feet from the ground; *Perichaena chrysosperma* frequently ascends to a height of 50 feet on Bombax trees.

Mr. Petch has also prepared a second part of his revisions of Ceylon fungi, which appears in the same number of the Annals. As a result of the examination of fresh specimens, a number of specific names have been reduced to synonyms. It is noted that certain characters generally regarded as specific may sometimes be merely variations due to weather. Thus the white gills of *Lepiota Zeylanica* in showery weather pass through a yellow stage before changing to red, whereas in fine weather the yellow stage is not evident. Again, the stipe of *Lepiota pyrrhaes*, which ordinarily bears an annulus and scales, appears smooth and ringless when grown in a saturated atmosphere. With reference to the genus Auricularia, the author offers several reasons for recognising two species, *Hirneola polytricha* and *Auricularia tremellosa*, both distinct from the common European species *Auricularia auricula judae*.

The October (1909) number (vol. cxviii., part viii.) of the *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Vienna, is entirely devoted to botany. Prof. von Höhnel contributes a further set of notes on Javanese fungi. He creates a new genus, Treubiomyces, for a fungus (Nectriaceæ) collected on leaves of *Ficus elastica*, which bears rough patches of clustered hyphæ surmounted by long hairs. Another fungus, *Limaculina samoensis*, taken on the same host, is characterised by a perithecium raised on an under layer of hyphæ, the *subiculum*, which bears short round cells and stellate spores. In the same number Dr. P. Fröschel communicates a short paper on the latent period in heliotropic experiments, in which he