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CORRECTION

Annual Meeting—Kingston upon Hull, 10-18 July 1974

The speakers on "Machines as an Aid"—the symposium to be held from 9.15 to 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 18 July, during the Scientific Meeting (*Supplement*, 30 March, p. 34)—will be: Mr. John T. Scales, Stanmore, and Prof. N. S. King, Loughborough.

Twenty-five years ago

From the Supplement, 23 April 1949

Heard at Headquarters

TEST CASE?

Anyone who has studied the various opinions of learned counsel taken by the Association on the question of medical trade unionism will have discovered how complicated the whole issue is, and indeed how much depends on the interpretation that the courts might give to a few words such as workmen, masters, and trade. The Medical Practitioners' Union, which is a properly registered trade union and claims the full protection of the Trade Disputes Act, 1906, has also taken counsel's opinion recently. Their counsel met the Association's to discuss the problem, but they could not reach agreement. Commenting on this deadlock, the *Medical World* of 1 April hints of further action, saying, "The Medical Practitioners' Union remains unshaken in its certainty of a sure legal foundation, but it will now have to take the necessary steps to make this certainty manifest to the profession." These words seem to suggest that the M.P.U. will bring a test case of some kind in the courts.

FIT FOR WHAT?

It is a far cry from the lowing of cattle on primeval plains to our administrators' utterances, but these still bear traces of their ancestry. The emotional and ambiguous connotations of words make it difficult to phrase instructions precisely, and the regulations that so voluminously govern the activities of N.H.S. doctors are labyrinths of saving clauses designed to exclude all meanings but one. Precision of this kind, which is usually achieved only at the expense of clarity, is out of place in letters—a point made by Sir Ernest Gowers in his admirable book *Plain Words*. Imita-

tion "legalese" is far more annoying to read than the genuine article, yet it abounds in letters running on administrative errands throughout the health service. A correspondent tells us that a regional hospital board sent him a letter asking him to certify that the candidate for a job "is 'free from any physical defect or disease which now impairs her capacity satisfactorily to undertake the duties of the post for which she is a candidate'." The writer of the letter apparently quoted this curious phrase from another document, presumably because he felt that he would be sailing across an uncharted sea if he asked our correspondent to certify that the candidate was fit for the job.

UP TO CAPACITY

The proposed increase in the size of the Council, as a result of bringing in a larger number of directly elected members, the increase not being quite offset by the decrease in other categories, will tax the seating capacity of the council chamber at Headquarters to the full. At present the chamber seats 64 members, with four others—the Chairman, the President, the Chairman of the Representative Body, and the Treasurer—on the dais, but seats have also to be provided for officials. If the recommendations are approved the new Council will be almost equal in number—within two or three—to the first Council of the Association when it was founded in 1832. That Council numbered 70 members. It was widely drawn from all parts of the country, including Edinburgh and Norwich and Swansea. Each member of Council then represented between four and five members of the Association. Each member of the present Council represents between 800 and 900.