

on hospital staffs shall have every facility offered to them to preserve their familiarity with hospital work and with every advance in professional knowledge.—I am, etc.,

Helston, March 12th.

FERDINAND REES.

SIR,—May I encroach on your space in order to congratulate Dr. John Fletcher upon his excellent letter appearing in your issue of March 3rd? After a protracted series of controversial letters and addresses written and delivered upon a bewildering number of side issues, a statesmanlike view of the problem in its entirety and a sincere attempt to point a broad path to its solution are more than welcome, and are in themselves a reproach to querulous bickerings on such matters as "staff funds" and "maintenance costs."

The main point of a "hospital policy" surely must be to keep the hospitals open. Only second to that comes the duty of improving them. We find, as a matter of fact, many hospitals struggling under a crushing debt, and a few which have actually had to curtail the number of beds, and that even this position is only achieved after special appeals, lotteries, and competitions. The most discouraging consideration of all is that even by keeping open a fixed number of beds a hospital is in reality fighting a losing battle since an ever-increasing population demands a corresponding increase of hospital accommodation. As for the secondary duty of improving hospitals, he would be a bold man who talked to the average committee these days about improvements.

The question is purely one of finance. If voluntary subscribers cannot, or will not, shoulder the financial burden involved by the normal steady growth of hospitals, then what remains? Who else can shoulder it if not the State? Surely it is our duty to press before the public the fact that there is at least a very grave possibility of a generally enfeebled hospital service if the present financial system is carried on unaided, and also to endeavour to formulate an alternative scheme.

It is certain that sooner or later we shall have a Government with views and aims differing from those of the present administration, and probably with ideas of its own on the subject of hospitals. Those views on general principles will probably take the line of "so many people, so many beds, so many doctors." Surely it would be only the most common prudence to formulate a scheme, in advance of such a day, for the common help and guidance of Government and profession.

Many doctors propound a baffling proposition that State aid for a hospital would immediately cause a peculiar form of cerebral atrophy in the staff, resulting in the loss of all desire for doing good and original work, both clinical and pathological. Especially do they fear a complete loss of "initiative." All the evidence is happily against such a state of affairs. During the war magnificent work, both individual and co-ordinated, was performed by a profession working directly for the State. Within the last few years tropical medicine has been converted from a sort of chaotic mythology into a science, mainly by the labours of gentlemen in public employ. Our public health service is respected throughout the world, and again, is staffed by public servants. The recently opened Maudsley Hospital is to be supported mainly by public money, but nevertheless was widely welcomed as an institution certain to be of great value. The list could be extended indefinitely.—I am, etc.,

March 7th.

JUNIOR.

#### BRITISH SPAS: THE NEED OF SCIENTIFIC CO-ORDINATION.

SIR,—Six years ago, in a lecture before the Royal Society of Arts, one of us ventured to point out what he conceived to be the promising possibilities of British hydrology, if the resources of our country were organized in a scientific spirit, and if this department of medical knowledge were given academic recognition.

At present both those who provide and those who carry out the various methods of treatment at the British spas have an exceptionally difficult task to perform, because they are to a large extent isolated. We do not perhaps realize what a wealth of material, how much time and thought and money, what persevering energy and devotion go to the making of a modern spa; and, on the scientific side, what careful study of methods of treatment is required in the most difficult class of cases and, above all, what alertness to new impressions and new knowledge. Recent years have increased all these demands.

There is now happily in some quarters a unifying leaven at work. It is recognized that rivalries and jealousies are a gratuitous aggravation of difficulty and block the way of progress. It is becoming evident that there can be no real rivalry between the British spas because each of them is endowed with waters and climate of a different type. For this reason the proper development of each spa must follow individual lines. When this natural differentiation has been agreed and worked out a great step will have been taken in the history of British waters.

The British Spa Federation has made a fine beginning in the work of co-ordination on the business side. Representatives of the principal spas are now brought together in periodical meetings, with authority to deal with many problems of a technical and business character, and of course a united propaganda. Those who know something of the hard work that has been devoted to this patriotic effort must wish it complete success. Undoubtedly without an enlightened policy of this kind the actual treatment, which is, of course, more interesting to medical men, would now be difficult to carry on.

On the scientific side there is as yet no unifying or co-ordinating influence at work. We stand exactly where we did six, or for that matter sixty, years ago. One sees praiseworthy but isolated endeavours by spa practitioners to perfect themselves in the branch of medicine in which they are engaged. One even sees here and there unassisted efforts at research into the action of waters and baths, but nowhere an organization for study or instruction. And yet if an art is to be practised, surely it should be taught. What can be the future of the spas if the young scientifically minded medical man is not attracted to them? The scientist at the spa cannot be dispensed with. How little do our senior students and junior graduates know of the wealth of opportunity awaiting them in the study and use of physical methods of treatment—for example, of the astonishing effect of external treatment in chronic disease, of the fascinating study of the manifold reactions aroused in the body by physical agencies? And again, in the present absence of teaching, what can the physician or the general practitioner know of the principles of medical hydrology and of their practical application in England, that he should prescribe a course of waters to his patients? Here, as elsewhere, he must understand the value of treatment before he can recommend it.

It may be said that such matters belong to the post-graduate period. But it may fairly be claimed that those who wish to make a study of medicinal waters and baths should have the means of doing so both before and after graduation. In France, Italy, and Germany every year, with official and academic authority, study tours—often following a systematic course of lectures—are planned to the chief spas, where interesting discourses and demonstrations are arranged. To the medical youth in these countries is thus given an opportunity of a personal study of the accepted methods of treatment by waters and baths. The new generation begins where the old leaves off, and both science and practice are assured of an orderly progress. Many older practitioners also avail themselves of these study tours.

In England none of the proposals that have been put forward during the last twenty-six years to initiate a similar teaching of medical hydrology have as yet borne fruit, the latest and most serious proposal in 1914 being held up on account of the war. Now that men's minds are again seriously considering the problems of peace, perhaps this matter also may be dealt with. Will the Ministry of Health and the medical schools, in the public interest and in the interest of science, accept any responsibility for the medical use of waters and climates? Upon the answer to this question will depend, *inter alia*, the scientific development and the efficiency of the British spas.—We are, etc.,

R. FORTESCUE FOX,

President of the International Society of Medical Hydrology;

J. CAMPBELL MCCLURE,

President of the Section of Balneology and Climatology of the Royal Society of Medicine.

London, W., March 7th.

#### IONIC MEDICATION.

SIR,—In your issue of March 10th, (p. 409) there is a paper by Dr. David Campbell, giving his opinions as a result of a serious attempt to estimate the value of ionization treatment. Since he makes several quotations from my small book may I be allowed to allude to a few points. He thinks there is no evidence for "lytic action." The experiment I saw in