

There is no conception of what proportion of that income used to come from no-longer-existent contracts or appointments to hospitals, public authorities, schools, etc., nor what is still needed to perform that work in the nature of qualified assistants, domestic or dispensing staff, or housing accommodation. All these points might have been discussed, would have attracted larger attendances in divisions, given a feeling of reality to the matter, and accumulated essential information qualifying the B.M.A. to advise in drafting the regulations which are the important things in the Act now. There was not even a statement that no medical practitioner ought to suffer appreciable loss by entering the service: yet, if the service has seemed to start smoothly, that is because quite a lot of the profession are resigned to more work, often for less pay. The essential trouble with the B.M.A. is that it is unpractical. I hope more correspondents will write frankly about their difficulties, and that the B.M.A. Executive will recognize these more readily than (to judge by letters I have received from widespread correspondents) they have hitherto. I am a strong believer in the possibility of a successful service, but we must be much more honest with ourselves and the public than B.M.A. policy has hitherto allowed us to be.—I am, etc.,

Hove, Sussex.

W. A. BOURNE.

Service Doctors in Far East

STR.—In his reply (Aug. 7, p. 311) to my letter concerning the service of doctors in the Far East I feel that Major-General R. Edgeworth-Johnstone has either deliberately or unintentionally side-tracked the issue. In addition he appears to be ignorant of the regulations governing the granting of family passages. Contrary to what he states, the grant of an Army passage is *not* dependent on the availability of Army quarters. If the officer concerned can provide private accommodation for his family, a passage may be granted. There are in fact two scales of allowances, one for the officer occupying Army quarters and one for the officer in private accommodation.

The points system which the Major-General so carefully outlines has little bearing on the allocation of family passages. I personally know three officers who have the same or less number of points than myself and whose wives were granted passages to Singapore and live in private accommodation. These concessions appear to be available for some and not for others, and it seems to be the policy to put all possible obstacles in the path of the conscript doctor who wishes to bring his wife out to join him.

Many doctors, despairing of the administrative battle, have brought their wives out at their own expense. These officers have been in receipt of the increased allowance paid to officers living with their wives out here. The officer under the age of 25, in addition to receiving only the half-scale ordinary marriage allowance, is on no account entitled to a family passage for his wife. Nor if he arranges and pays for the passage himself is he entitled to the increased local marriage allowance without which it is impossible to live.

I think that penalization of the married officer under 25 is grossly unfair at any time. When it amounts to enforced separation at a time when separation is not necessary (v. the large number of military families at present in Singapore) it is nothing short of criminal. No amount of official explanation will make it anything else.—I am, etc.,

Singapore.

D. R. MORGAN,
Lieut., R.A.M.C.

Shortage of Nurses

STR.—One of the most important factors preventing the building up in this country of a successful comprehensive health service is the shortage of nurses. Hospitals and other branches of the Health Service are carrying on, in some cases struggling on, with nursing staffs much below the minimum requirements. Hospital beds are lying idle while waiting-lists are expanding. The over-burdened nurses are becoming more dissatisfied, and a vicious circle has been set up, reducing further the already too few.

Much has been done to try and improve the nursing shortage. First, the Rushcliffe Committee introduced better salaries and conditions of service. Their original recommendations followed by many successive improvements were thought to be sufficient inducement, but these have obviously failed.

Then the Working Party on the Recruitment and Training of Nurses, under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Wood, investigated very thoroughly the whole matter, and published a very comprehensive report of 116 pages, which in my opinion points out very definitely the seriousness of the position but suggests little or nothing to improve the situation within the next twenty-five years.

It must be admitted that all efforts up to now to build up an adequate nursing service have failed. The reasons for the shortage must be investigated further, and other attractions used to counteract them. The aims to be achieved are (1) to attract sufficient numbers into the profession, and (2) to attract the correct types of persons into the profession (I say persons to include both sexes).

The answer to (1) would appear simple. Give them a big enough salary and you will get the numbers. But what would be the result? Large numbers would commence training with no intention of completing it; others, intending to complete their training and make a profession of nursing, would be so disgusted with some of their colleagues that they would resign; and there would be no incentive for a junior nurse to reach senior status and carry more responsibility. We must, therefore, have such conditions as will achieve both aims—sufficient numbers and correct types.

In my opinion the only way to do this is first to raise nursing to the status of a profession, in fact as well as in name. A student nurse should be considered and should consider herself of equal status as a student of medicine or law or accountancy or any other profession. How is this to be achieved?

The solution, I think, might be found along the following lines. (1) Do not keep increasing the salary of a student nurse, but as soon as she qualifies give recognition to her professional status, and give her an adequate salary—e.g., £300–£350 per annum. This, of course, should increase as her professional skill and responsibility increases. (2) For persons who could not afford the three to four years of training with low salaries, scholarships should be granted to those who prove themselves suitable. Scholarships could be considered by examination or interview. (3) Living and working conditions must be improved in many hospitals. To do this building priority must be given for nurses' homes and hospitals.

I feel sure that only by working along these lines will the strength and status of the nursing profession be improved. And it must be done now. Already the nurses themselves, and many of them are very excellent nurses of the best type, are beginning to lose sight of the fact that nursing is a glorious and noble profession. Backsliding is easy, but progress can only be achieved by strong and immediate efforts.—I am, etc.,

South Shields.

N. STRANG.

POINTS FROM LETTERS

Guild of St. Luke

DR. H. M. RAVEN (Broadstairs) writes: There have been several communications in the *Journal* lately on the subject of doctors, clergy, and healing. The main link between the two professions used to be the Guild of St. Luke. The officers of the guild are apparently not functioning; I believe the Provost, Dr. Bokenham, has died. Would it be possible to revive the guild, which has had an honourable past and which must still contain many members, including myself. Perhaps a meeting of old members and others interested, to be held at B.M.A. House, would be allowable and useful. This letter may catch the eye of an ex-official of the Guild of St. Luke, and I hope he may feel inclined to take the initiative.

World Food Shortage

DR. H. M. STEPHENSON (London, S.W.5) writes: In a leading article (Aug. 14, p. 345) you praise the optimism of Sir John Boyd Orr for his belief that the nations of the world may yet show as much concern about feeding the 2,500 million people in the world as in feeding the 2½ million people in Berlin. A facile optimism can be shown by anybody who belittles a problem by mis-stating it. The problem is not to feed 2,500 million people but to feed 2,500 million people who are increasing at the rate of 1% per annum. . . . The 40 million square miles of cultivable land in the world might support in food a total of 6,000 million people. . . . At the present rate of increase that total will be reached in about 50 years. Improved agriculture may defer the disaster for perhaps another decade. I can think of no remedy that mankind—which includes their churches—would accept. But surely realizing the truth of a problem may induce first a few and then the many to try to solve it. . . .