

## Letters, Notes, and Answers.

THE telegraphic addresses of the BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION and JOURNAL are: (1) EDITOR of the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, *Aitiology, Westrand, London*; telephone, 2631, Gerrard. (2) FINANCIAL SECRETARY AND BUSINESS MANAGER (advertisements, etc.), *Articulate, Westrand, London*; telephone, 2630, Gerrard. (3) MEDICAL SECRETARY, *Medisecra, Westrand, London*; telephone, 2634, Gerrard. The address of the Irish office of the British Medical Association is 16, South Frederick Street, Dublin.

Queries, answers, and communications relating to subjects to which special departments of the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL are devoted will be found under their respective headings.

### QUERIES.

N. asks for advice in the treatment of a male patient who for eight years has suffered from leucoderma on the back of the hands and on the soles. The patient resides in India, and the spots disappear or fade so as to be hardly visible, when he goes to Europe.

#### THE PRICE OF BROMIDES.

W. F., M.D., asks: Can any of your readers say what is the best substitute for bromides? I am a parish doctor to a district of nigh on 30,000 inhabitants, and as such I have at present seventeen epileptics who must have their full dose of bromide. Lately I have received a parish order to attend another very severe case who in the ordinary way would not have been granted an order at all; now one has been given because they say they cannot afford to buy the medicine at its present price.

#### WEIR'S VACCINATION INSTRUMENT.

VACCINA asks if any reader could inform him whether the instrument bearing the above name in dealers' lists was invented by Dr. Alexander McCook Weir (M.D., Queen's University, Ireland) of Nottingham, who wrote a work called *Vaccination Reform* in 1878. This book is mentioned under Dr. Weir's name in the *Medical Directory* of 1888, but our correspondent cannot find any review of it in the medical papers of the date when it was published, nor any note of it, or of the instrument in question, in the catalogue of the United States Surgeon-General's Library. If Dr. A. McC. Weir did not invent this instrument, which bears a lancet at one end and a scarifier consisting of four steel needle ends at the other, who was the Dr. Weir who invented it? Is it described, as well as figured, in any medical work? A sample of Weir's instrument is to be seen amongst Lord Lister's instruments now preserved in the museum of the College of Surgeons.

#### INCOME TAX.

##### Superannuation Allowances.

PALINURUS receives £65 superannuation allowance as a retired district medical officer. He inquires whether income tax should be paid by him at the "earned" or "unearned" rates.

\* \* \* The income is to be regarded as "earned"—*vide* Sec. 19 of the Finance Act, 1907—and should be assessed at the lower rate of duty provided "Palinurus" has complied with the statutory requirement to make a claim to that relief before September 30th. If no such claim has been made he is liable for the current year at the full—that is, "unearned"—rate of tax. If the total income of himself and wife should be less than £700 he can still claim to have the "abatement" of £70 to be set against the £65 assessed.

#### PHENOLPHTHALEIN COLOUR REACTION.

DR. C. DE R. (Gnaratingueta, Brazil) asks for an explanation of the following colour reaction: A mixture of phenolphthalein and magnesia was ordered; when the chemist was triturating the two powders together they assumed a light pink colour, which became crimson when some drops of water were added.

\* \* \* This colour is due to the formation of a small quantity of the magnesium salt of phenolphthalein. Although magnesia is only very slightly soluble, it is sufficiently so to interact with phenolphthalein when the two are triturated together, and the magnesium salt of phenolphthalein is red, as are its sodium and potassium salts. We have not heard that the salts of phenolphthalein differ in action from the substance itself.

### ANSWERS.

PRESIDENT OF A DISTRICT NURSING ASSOCIATION.—Measles must undoubtedly be classed as an infectious disease, and the infection can be carried by a nurse to other patients, but with reasonable precautions it is unlikely. Our correspondent would do well to obtain a copy of a report on district nursing in relation to measles and whooping-cough, presented to the meeting of the Central Council for District Nursing in London, as reported in the JOURNAL of July 24th, p. 156. (London: P. and S. King and Son, Limited. Price 3d.)

### LETTERS, NOTES, ETC.

PATON'S *List of Schools and Tutors* (London: J. and J. Paton, 1915. Cr. 8vo, pp. 1107; illustrated. 2s.), now appearing for the eighteenth year in succession, is a book for parents. It gives particulars and pictures of many of the best English schools for boys and girls, with lists of the scholarships and exhibitions obtainable, and information as to the curriculums and fees. The book circulates in England, India, the Dominions and Colonies, so that it makes a wide appeal. The second half of the volume contains information as to the occupations and further educational studies that may be taken up by adolescents when schooling days are done—engineering, agriculture, the civil services, the medical profession, domestic science, music, and the like.

#### SHIP SURGEONS AND THE WEARING OF UNIFORM.

NAUTICUS writes: From the number of advertisements appearing in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL I gather that there is a serious difficulty in obtaining ship's surgeons. One of the obstacles in the way of applicants is the wearing of uniform. I know several men who would like to take a voyage, but will not go to the expense of providing, or face the indignity of wearing, a uniform which places them in the same category as a purser or second engineer. The uniform is the distinguishing mark of the mercantile marine, a profession to which the medical man does not belong. A surgeon on board is a person without any authoritative status; he is there to treat illness and give advice as to the health of the ship; therefore the uniform is meaningless beyond that of a badge of servitude to the company. Now that ship surgeons may charge fees for the treatment of passengers, thus bringing the relationship between them purely to that of doctor and patient, the wearing of uniform is all the more unnecessary. If shipping companies would abolish the rule, they would receive more applications, as most self-respecting practitioners would prefer to be regarded as the "doctor on board" rather than a member of the ship's crew. Conversely, if applicants would emphatically state their objection to wearing uniform, I feel sure that the companies would appreciate the point.

#### FOREIGN WINES AND TOBACCO.

DR. C. BARRIE TAYLOR (Manchester) writes: I appeal to the medical profession to support the Coalition Government in their endeavour to check the vast importation of foreign luxuries. Medical men can largely assist in the diminution of the consumption of foreign wines and tobacco by their patients. In the case of tobacco, it is well known, particularly amongst the working classes, that there is a considerable amount of "nicotinism" from the use of cigarettes, and it is for the public good that it should be diminished, and tobacco only allowed or prescribed in cases of pain and in a comparatively few other cases. Only this morning I had a patient in my consulting-room who smokes five packets of cigarettes a day, and he seemed glad to know that he would improve if this practice were discontinued. When wine or a stimulant is considered advisable I think most authorities will agree that a good old British whisky diluted with water or effervescent mineral water is equal if not superior to the foreign stimulant. British ales and stout are superior to the foreign production. Even brandy should be greatly diminished in its use. I have attended the recent debates in the House of Commons, and it was particularly impressed that the increase of the tobacco duty by 50 per cent. was made in order to diminish the foreign imports. Some have the mistaken view or excuse that when they are purchasing tobacco they are helping the Government, but the latter is far better assisted by the non-purchase of the foreign article. We cannot have much influence in the cases of other newly taxed articles—motor cars, watches, musical instruments, hats, etc.—but we have with tobacco and foreign wines. Will the 25,000 medical men help the Government and the country to check the stream of gold that is flowing to the U.S.A., and so help the foreign exchanges in our favour, and at the same time benefit their patients?

#### GAS POISONING: A CORRECTION.

IN Dr. Aitchison's letter on gas poisoning, published in the JOURNAL for September 25th, after the word "overflowing" (p. 489, col. 1, line 6) add, "and then perhaps was obliged to open the chamber doors and empty it into the open air."

### SCALE OF CHARGES FOR ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.

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NOTE.—It is against the rules of the Post Office to receive *poste restante* letters addressed either in initials or numbers.