

ANNOTATIONS

πάντα ρεῖ

The medical student who is said to have translated our heading into "everyone has a discharge" would hardly have been "sent up for good" in any well regulated school, for the true meaning is that everything is in a state of flux. It offers us a suitable heading for some reflections on the future of the profession. Far reaching changes are being ventilated in the press and it seems to be certain that after the war things cannot go on as they have in the past. Some are wholeheartedly in favour of a state controlled medical profession, both practitioners and hospitals, while others view the prospect of state control with dismay.

There are at least two sides to the question; first, the general public and secondly the profession; while the latter can be subdivided into consultants, public health officers and general practitioners. From the public view-point we think that the medical services hitherto provided have on the whole worked well, and from the practitioner's point of view, fairly well. It has often been said that no medical practitioner need starve, but most of those consultants who have started their careers without private means have had a very uphill struggle in the beginning. And few medical men manage to save enough to leave a fortune to their descendants. In favour of state control at first sight there would seem to be much to be said from the view-point of the general practitioner: regular working hours, a regular holiday, a guaranteed income and a pension on retirement. The scheme for pooling the medical resources of any district, so that no one is out of bed at confinements every night in the week, sounds well, but it rather overlooks the wishes of the patient, who may have asked Dr. X to attend her, and may not wish at the last moment to be put off with the services of Dr. Y. One of the bugbears of state control is the inevitable beurocracy and the red tape which it entails.

The ophthalmologist is in rather a special position. Most of his work comes to his consulting room. As a rule he does not deal in parts of the body outside his own sphere; should he find evidence of general disease he usually communicates with the patients' medical attendant or suggests a physician or specialist as the case may be. So far we have been thinking of the more opulent types of patient. Those less well-off have also to be considered. Hitherto vast numbers of the poorer elements of the population have obtained their glasses through the sight-testing opticians. When it is a simple case of refraction or of presbyopia there is no reason to doubt that a large proportion of these are provided with suitable lenses.

As ophthalmologists it is our obvious duty to press for a proper ophthalmic service for all classes of the community by qualified medical practitioners with ophthalmic training who should receive an adequate fee for their work. A revision and extension of the National Ophthalmic Treatment Board would seem to be the ideal solution of our part of the problem.

We view with alarm the prospect of state control of the voluntary hospitals and we think that free choice of doctor must be accorded to the patient for the success of any scheme of re-organization of the health services. And, lastly, a similar freedom should be meted out to the medical practitioner. May we not agree with that great Scottish physician who, in one of his prefaces, said he thought, with Adam Smith, that a mediciner should be as free to exercise his gifts as an architect or a mole catcher?

A Singular Error

Madame de Staël's well known epithet *vulgaire*, applied to the writings of Jane Austen, was a blow which staggered lovers of the Hampshire novelist's books until some one suggested that the adjective in this case meant "commonplace" rather than "low." Thence onwards everything was comfortable. Our own comfort is often disturbed round about the beginning of each month by the fear that we have missed some dreadful howler in reading the proofs: Could a graph of our feelings be constructed it would show a regular rise and fall each month over a good many years with occasional excrescences above the common level where we have blundered more than usual. We regret to have to record that this happened in our October number, where, on page 436, occur the words "There is little or no *data*." We understand that this slipshod construction is increasingly common in physical literature. That such a monstrous error should be prevalent is indeed a flaw in a centuries-long system of classical education. There is, however, no reason to despair, all will be well when the new Education Act is passed and we may look forward with confidence to the time when, in the words of our erudite Minister of Education, the boy well grounded in Latin will "take" (not only) "the internal combustion engine" (but also the whole range of physics) "in his stride."
