ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIAN SCIENTISTS IN THE PRESENT EPIDEMIC OF INFLUENZA

To the Editor:—Your optimistic current comment (*THE JOURNAL*, Oct. 12, 1918, p. 1223) concerning the change in attitude of the public toward public health methods would be highly reassuring if it were true in the measure that the comment indicates. You say, "When health authorities place a ban on public gatherings, when they insist that the windows of public conveyances be kept open, when they insist on absolute quarantine in order to stop the spread of the disease, the public is ready to obey, and does obey to the fullest measure" (italics mine). Further, "Another feature is the confidence of the public in public health authorities, apparently the result of the intense education of the public in prophylaxis of disease which has been going on during the past decade."

I beg to call your attention to a special telegram to the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, dated Boston, October 7, which reads thus:

In connection with the influenza epidemic, the directors of the "Mother" Christian Science Church here announce that "the mind is a source of contagion" and that "ailments can contaminate only as diseased images are held before the thought and paraded before excited imagination preliminary to having them expressed on the body through fear and apprehension."

They declare that "disease is being industrially promoted through the common avenue of mesmeric [sic] wear," and quote Mrs. Eddy as follows:

"At a time of contagious disease, Christian Scientists endeavor to rise into consciousness to the true sense of omnipotence of life, truth, and love, and this great fact, as Christian Science realized, will stop a contagion."

The church held its regular services Sunday, explaining that good rather than harm was effected. The health officials had asked churches to close during the influenza epidemic [italics mine].

This sort of stuff is doubtless doped out in every Eddyite congregation in the United States, and even the least observing and he of dullest comprehension must have discovered that the following of this cult is large. I have been told that Chicago is a veritable hotbed of Eddyism.

Would it not be wise to bend some editorial energies, if any are available, to the scotching or killing of this skunk in lieu of complacently recording dubious impressions? Here at home the Eddyites have not been able to get by with their "activities" unchallenged.

C. B. BURR, M.D., Flint, Mich.

ILL ADVISED REFERENCES TO TREATMENT IN ARTICLES ON PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS

To the Editor:—The attached clipping is a part of a "syndicated article" that has appeared in a number of newspapers.

It strikes me that this line of so-called information is wrong. In writing on any public health problem, the writer should avoid reference to treatment. The treatment of any particular disease should be decided by the physician in charge after he has examined the patient. It is not right to state baldly that "drugs are virtually impotent." The patient calls the physician for his own relief and benefit, and if he believes all of this article he will probably send to the drug store and buy his own aspirin. And, by the way, is this writer in the pay of the Bayer people and helping them to put across their advertising campaign? Self medication is now one of the great banes of the American people, and such articles, either in the public press or in board of health publications, are the greatest incentive to such "doping." A carefully considered statement on any medical subject is often misquoted both in the medical and the lay press, as instance the comment aroused by Osler's age limit and Bevan's talk on pneumonia some years ago, both of which are still wildly and widely misquoted in both lay and medical publications. No two cases of any acute infection can be treated in exactly the same manner; the age and surroundings of the patient, the condition of the heart, kidneys, lungs and other organs must be taken into consideration, and the very necessary steps taken to avoid dangerous and possibly fatal complications and sequelae. Aspirin may be dangerous or even fatal in

some cases, as may other salicylates. Another bad effect of self medication is that a case improperly diagnosed as epidemic influenza will not be reported, and may be the starting point of a dangerous epidemic. In fact, a case so diagnosed may be almost any one of the infectious diseases. I have seen severe cases of smallpox diagnosed as grip in the early stages, and an epidemic start therefrom.

The authorized public health publications of many states and occasionally of the Public Health Service have been guilty of the actions of which I complain. I think these mistakes are largely due to carelessness on the part of these writers, and calling their attention to them will have a good effect. I was one time the state health officer of one of the Southern states, and know how easy it is to overlook important matters and to make mistakes of judgment.

F. B. YOUNG, M.D., Gering, Neb.

[COMMENT.—The clipping to which our correspondent refers reads:

It should be remembered, too, in treating patients who have acquired "Spanish influenza," care and sanitation are the all-important points. Drugs are virtually impotent, although aspirin may be administered to relieve headaches and body pains. With proper attention the disease will run its course in three days and the patient fully recover in less than two weeks. Death seldom ensues, except through neglect.

No doubt it would be in the interest of public health and the public pocketbook were medicines taken only on the advice of physicians. The objections to the lay advertising of aspirin were thus stated by the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry:

The public does not know, as physicians do, that headaches are merely symptoms of other, sometimes very serious conditions, and that they are often the signal for the need of a thorough physical examination and diagnosis. It is true that they are often also the symptoms of very minor derangements, which will right themselves spontaneously; and that, in such cases, drugs like aspirin may give relief and may do no harm. The patient, however, is not educated to distinguish one class from the other, and therefore anything that tends to promote the indiscriminate use of such remedies as aspirin itself is not always harmless. Alarming idiosyncrasies are sufficiently common that the use of the first doses, at least, should require medical supervision.—Ed.]

Queries and Minor Notes

ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATIONS and queries on postal cards will not be noticed. Every letter must contain the writer's name and address, but these will be omitted, on request.

PURCHASE OF MEDICAL OFFICERS' EQUIPMENT THROUGH QUARTERMASTER'S DEPOT

To the Editor:—In *THE JOURNAL*, October 5, you say that officers' uniforms are available through the quartermaster's department, one depot being located in Chicago. Will you please give me the address?

H. T. K., Joliet, Ill.

To the Editor:—I have been examined for a commission in the Army and expect to be commissioned soon. Will you please tell me if I can buy my uniform and equipment at cost from a quartermaster as provided in the last clause of the "Man Power Bill"? If so, can I get them from the quartermaster of any camp?

L. W. C., Franklin, N. Y.

ANSWER.—In *THE JOURNAL*, October 5, page 1142, appears an item relative to the furnishing of uniforms through various quartermasters' depots. The seven depots mentioned are at New York, Washington, Atlanta, Ga., Fort Sam Houston, Texas, San Francisco, Chicago and St. Louis. Officers desiring to purchase uniforms may communicate with the nearest quartermaster's depot. We are informed by the officer in charge of the quartermaster's depot at Chicago that they are authorized to sell to newly appointed officers, on presentation of the telegram notifying them of their appointment or commission, any articles on the list of goods furnished, at the prices and in the maximum quantities shown. The Chicago sales room is located in Bungalow A, Thirty-Ninth Street and Winchester Avenue. Newly appointed officers residing outside of Chicago may communicate by mail with this department, or with the nearest quartermaster's depot, and the proper forms and information relative to purchase of equipment will be sent to them. The list of equipment and prices is not available for general publication, but will be furnished by the quartermaster to any officer on application. It includes practically everything that the officer will require.