

the Dublin Zoo. A good many lions are bred there, and a very intelligent keeper discussed their health and upbringing. He said the chief trouble they had with them was rickets, but since they had increased the amount of fat in their diet no cases of rickets had occurred. This would tend to show that the food factor is of greater importance, as the lion house is light and airy.—I am, etc.,

Acton, W., April 16th.

W. A. RUDD, M.D.

THE HOSPITAL POLICY OF THE LABOUR PARTY.

SIR,—It seems to me that the most important recommendation of the Labour party in its statement of policy with regard to hospitals is one which you do not name specifically at the beginning of your leading article of April 8th (p. 571), although it is dealt with in the course of your argument. Recommendation 11 says: "It [the Labour movement] would make all public hospitals free and open to everyone who would be likely to derive benefit from institutional treatment." This proposition (assuming that the Labour party uses the term "public hospital" to distinguish it from the private hospital or nursing home) could only be carried out by the State, and so leads naturally to Recommendation 1 and indicates the authority which, in the opinion of the Labour party, should organize a complete hospital system.

Free hospital treatment open to everybody is by no means an impossible proposition. The State, through municipalities and other public bodies, has already taken over the provision of many necessities, such as roads, sewers, water supply, postal services, the treatment of some diseases, the prevention of others, education. There is no reason to suppose that the State provision of free hospital treatment would be any more difficult than the State provision of free education. It could hardly be more costly.

In discussing the proposition of free hospital treatment for all it would be useful to have a résumé of the arguments in favour of the retention of the voluntary system, and of the evidence in support of those arguments; and for this reason I regret that your very able leader was limited mainly to criticism of the misstatements and perversions of the Labour party's manifesto. Doubtless the arguments for the voluntary system have already been set forth by Lord Cave's Committee. But the best answer to Labour's statement is to reiterate the arguments on the other side.

I suggest that the advantages of the voluntary system are to be found under the following headings: cost, competition, humane treatment of patients, freedom of staffs from bureaucratic control, encouragement of the charitable. The matters in which the voluntary system is likely to fail unless very strenuous efforts can be made are: accommodation, distribution, co-ordination, transport. The directions in which no solution will be found, whatever the aspirations of the Labour party may be, are: the avoidance of class distinction and the abolition of hours of waiting. And it is highly unlikely that representation of public bodies or of small contributors on boards of management will lead to any benefit.

There is, perhaps, some interest in the question whether there is any difference, and if so what, in the provision by public authorities of such things as sewers, and of such advantages as education and hospitals. Is it not possible that sewers do not directly affect the individual, who is therefore indifferent to the provider, whereas with the more intimate concerns of education and health there is a tendency to feel that better value is obtained by paying for them directly rather than unwittingly by means of rates?—I am, etc.,

London, W., April 12th.

CHAS. BUTTAR.

SIR,—The leading article in the JOURNAL of April 8th (p. 571) is unjust to the leaders of progressive political thought and to those medical men and women who have spent laborious years in seeking some better way by which the people may have their ills attended.

The profession of medicine has always been held in unusual honour by all sections of progressive political thought. It has been, indeed, looked to as one of the safeguards of the personal liberty of the citizen. The doctor could be relied upon, it was thought, by virtue of his humanist calling to give a sympathetic ear to the poor and ailing as against a robust and well-to-do oppressor. Recent difficulties have not

arisen on this side, but have their origin in the conduct of the insurance system by which the Government, societies, and medical practitioners appear to come into positions of disharmony.

The tragedy of the insurance service has given birth to fresh evils. The new form of service tends to set up standards of practice in which the essentials of our art in the care of the individual are subordinated to the need of keeping pace with exacting non-medical details required by a bureaucratic control. In the impossible task of working for patient, society, and committee, complaints multiply and all four parties are at loggerheads. The public, reading of these quarrels in the press, is critical of medical affairs. Tales of the wealth of doctors, their motor cars, frequent and expensive holidays, and other forms of luxuriant living mask the fact that the great majority of medical men and women have small incomes and live as modest and strenuous a life as any section of the community. The alienation of some part of public sympathy is accompanied by the increase of eclectic practitioners, mental cults, and spiritual healing, unwelcome facts to those who believe the soundest and highest forms of healing of body and mind are and should be obtainable within the fraternity of medicine.

The ancient traditions of our profession have always had an humanitarian basis, and included the highest consideration for the individual patient. This regard for the personal freedom and welfare of the patient has been equally the chief aim with the leaders of progressive political thought. They have sought in every way to gain the whole-hearted co-operation of the profession on behalf of the health of the community. How, then, has the separation, so strongly marked in the leading article, arisen? It is partly, at least, a misconception which could be removed by amicable parley. We may remind ourselves of the results of such time-old disputes by the words of Coriolanus on meeting the tribunes of the people:

"when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
The one by the other."

The fresh disaster which has so suddenly arisen, in so far as it results from practical administrative and financial difficulties with which the Government and the societies have to contend, is their business to solve. The profession, however, is being penalized apparently through these bodies seeking to transfer blame to the profession for their own deficiencies. They cherish the fond illusion that if they can control the doctor most of these difficulties will disappear. The doctor will be taught to manage their members, and that will save them much trouble. The system now being evolved seems to be a means to that end. It is not only foreign to the customs of the healing art, but bears little resemblance to the aims and principles expressed in the best progressive political literature. On the contrary, it is directly opposed to them. Instead of making for social freedom and the evolution of a fraternal body politic, the present trend restricts the individual, creates animosity, and makes for inefficiency.

There is no support in the best progressive opinion for the control of any section of the community by another. The trend of thought is strongly against such a development and in favour of independence of the arts and crafts. Least of all would it support any governmental, financial, or industrial sections in an attempt to control and refashion an art and craft so specialized as that of medicine.

The present issue is confused partly by the use of terms which are now beginning to pass into disuse. Such are "State service" and "nationalization," referred to in the article. These earlier names have become abused and distasteful and should be replaced by others relevant to present aims.

It is clear the profession in England will during the next generation find itself on a new road. In which direction should we tend? In a letter already far too long it is impossible to pursue such a question. What we need to remember is that the best progressive political thought, far from being inimical to medical interests, is the warmest advocate of the profession. It would not hinder or enslave but aid the evolution of medicine as a free art and craft and assist its true function of thinking out and applying the best means for the relief of ailing humanity and the advancement of the health of the community.—I am, etc.,

Forest Gate, E., April 11th.

V. J. BATESON.