

THE DOCTOR AS A PATIENT

AN interesting editorial on the medical man as a patient, and his relation to the doctor who takes charge of him appears in a recent issue of the *Lancet*.* The editorial is an abstract and a criticism of an article by Professor Theodor Brugsch† in which he discusses the extent to which the attending physician can gain the confidence of his medical patient, owing to the fact that the patient knows too much, and the all important element of confidence is practically annihilated. He has reassured too many patients himself, and has too close an acquaintance with their minds and the psychotherapeutic method in which he has dealt with them, to put any trust whatever in the method when applied to himself, and he assumes *a priori* that it will be applied to himself. The result is, says the professor, that a sick doctor is never a satisfactory patient; he makes the attempt to be his own doctor, unless the attending physician is very strong minded, and the sick doctor too ill to

criticise. Moreover, an integral part of any treatment of patients is the correction of false ideas about their condition, and when the patient happens to be a doctor, his ideas are apt to be more erroneous than they would be if he were a lay man, and they are infinitely more difficult to overrule. There is always an extreme reluctance on the part of any doctor to admit that he is ill, and the result is that he does not become a patient until he is so sick that he is the worst judge of his own condition. It is, therefore, a great mistake, on the part of a doctor who treats a colleague, to think that the sick man must, because he is a physician, be regarded as in some way different from an ordinary lay patient. Too often a cardinal blunder is made by taking his patient into consultation, and treating him as a scientific equal. The professor suggests that the only remedy for this state of affairs is that both sides should recognize it, and the doctor should forbear from treating himself, and take the valuable opportunity of enlarging his knowledge of human nature by observing his own experience as a patient.

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* *The Lancet* 1: 351, Feb. 16, 1929.† BRUGSCH, T., *Deut. Med. Wchnschr.* 54: 27, Jan. 4, 1929.

Editorial Comments

AN AERIAL MEDICAL SERVICE

A scheme for the provision of an aerial medical service in certain regions of Australia has been tried in the past year, with what seems to have been great success. (*Med. J. Aust.* Feb. 16, 1929). The scheme was evolved with the idea of providing medical services in sparsely populated parts of Queensland and northern territory, and it was hoped not only to send medical aid but on occasion to provide transportation by aeroplane to the nearest hospital.

The first volunteer for this work was Dr. K. St. Vincent Welch, who undertook to act as medical officer for the aerial service for one year. No fees were to be charged, and no private practice engaged in. The remuneration (which was not large) was to come from the Inland Mission. It was anticipated that the doctor would cover at least 20,000 miles by air during the first year.

Much experience has been gained from this first year's experiment. Dr. Welch has been at

the beck and call of the people in an immense area, and one which has been suffering from a terrible drought for the past six or seven years. Under the best conditions the townships and stations have contained only a small population, and this has dwindled yet further under the hardships mentioned, but it is expected that when the drought breaks the people will return. Occasionally, the doctor has summoned for trivial injuries and illnesses, but in most cases the need is urgent. As his movements are known to everyone in the area, his visits are the occasion for the assembling of all those who have any complaint whatever. Sometimes the patient has been taken back by aeroplane; sometimes treatment of urgent cases has been carried out at the homestead.

The experiment has been so successful that it is considered worthy of being continued and extended. It is pointed out, however, that the work is of a peculiar kind, calling for special qualities of self-reliance, courage, and physical