LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE DOCTOR'S HORSE

SIR—With reference to your June 1978 issue I have two points to make.

The first is to congratulate Dr Burgess on his splendid Article on Millbank and for the most interesting illustrations which accompanied it.

The second is to assure Dr Housam that I do indeed know that Brydon spells his name with an 'o' and not an 'e'! I wrote the Editorial a year or so before I laid down my pen as Editor and was not therefore in a position to check the galley proofs.

Brydon was an Indian Medical Services officer and did not belong to our Medical Service until he retired to the Highlands when he became Medical Officer to a Highland Militia Regiment. He is shewn in a regimental group as a venerable figure complete with white beard. He is buried in Fortrose Cathedral in the East Highlands.

I am etc.,

A MacLENNAN

56 Reigate Road,
Ewell,
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TROPICAL MEDICINE IN DECLINE; DANGER AHEAD?

SIR—My thoughts were stimulated the other day by a notice on the College board which ran:

"The Rockefeller foundation is pleased to announce a programme of research career development awards of five years duration including salary, laboratory support and travel for investigators interested in the great neglected diseases of mankind, primarily the tropical infectious diseases".

Add to this the sad fact that no demonstration was put up by a Service medical officer at the last meeting of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. Two questions arise: Has the interest of the Defence Forces Medical Officers in these areas declined too dangerously low? Will the time come when we will be called upon and be found wanting, like foolish virgins? As I reflected on these latter day circumstances I recalled an occasion many years ago during my Senior Officers Course (which was such a desirable cost-benefit feature of our College postgraduate academic curriculum up to quite recent times) how in a rare moment of leisure during that intensive multi-disciplinary course I gravitated into one of the London teaching hospitals where a lecture on tropical diseases was scheduled for the undergraduates. I was amazed, more than that I was scandalized, to find only seven persons present in that medical school lecture and that included the lecturer and myself. I felt ever so warm inside that we in the Army Medical Service had (the past tense is intentional) the subject well and truly buttoned up so much that if during a ward round in a civilian hospital it ever became known that one was a Service medical officer it was assumed as a matter of fact that one

was something of a general expert on anything with tropical flavour and therefore one's opinion was appealed to for clinical differential diagnosis, laboratory diagnostic aids, and treatment.

Those uninterested medical students of that particular undergraduate year are now qualified and practising medicine in all its various disciplines, and I have a pretty shrewd idea that their interest in exotic diseases and foreign ills and fevers must have increased by leaps and bounds since the coming of the jumbo-jet age, of package tours and sea cruising jaunts. Their education and knowledge in this field must have been kept up-dated and up to scratch by those whose duty it is to propagate and popularise continual postgraduate medical education in the profession. Against this background of increased competence amongst our civilian colleagues have we in the Defence Medical Services maintained our former reputation for tropical expertise? and lastly, Dr Owen proposed recently at the United Nations General Assembly a stand-by arrangement that would place British troops on call for United Nations peace-keeping duties. An infantry battalion or a Royal Marine Commando group would be available at a week's notice for up to 6 months. How would they fare for medical advice if sent to tropical Africa?

I am, etc.

ETHELWALD E. VELLA

Royal Army Medical College,
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24 October 1978

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