

## *Editorial*

JOHN HUNT

AT 8 O'CLOCK on a cold morning in January the telephone rang and a voice said "I am John Hunt". In a bright and cheery voice he invited the sleepy listener to serve on the foundation council of the College. When the first council met it was found that all the others had received a similar call at about the same hour in the morning. Many of us had never met John before and were clearly puzzled as well as charmed by the phenomenon. We learnt that for months past John had been getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning to work on the steering committee's report, to reply to letters and to enlist support for the project. It is not common knowledge that for many years before he had been mulling over the idea of an institution of this kind to help general practice. He had, and still has, one of the best private general practices in London. The care, far beyond the call of clinical medicine, which he bestows on his patients can be vouched for by many to whom he has handed over the care of his patients when they left London. His letters of introduction are always meticulously written, giving those necessary but often neglected personal details which make the task of taking over a patient so much easier. He knew all those who were important in the profession and many also of those who carried heavy responsibilities in government. Such a man was ideal to become the secretary of the foundation council of the College and in so electing him the foundation council sentenced him to years more of early rising. Ever since then he has performed admirably all the duties which the College has imposed upon him, in addition to many more he imposed upon himself. Quite soon he became a legend, known to all who mattered, respected and loved by all. His great ability to smooth out difficulties, his diplomacy and his generosity—"I will take him out to lunch" became a catch phrase—all these gifts helped more than can possibly be realized in smoothing the way of the College. Its present flourishing state is evidence of how well he did it.

The present state of general practice is largely due to the work of the College. The now notorious Collings report which described without trimmings the poor service which some general practitioners were giving to their patients was the trigger which encouraged John Hunt and Fraser Rose to call for the establishment of a college. The response was immediate and general practitioners began to rediscover faith in their work. Members flocked to join the new college, not only from Britain but also from Australia and New Zealand and from many other lands across the oceans. As secretary of council, John Hunt had to advise and help these, as well as to play his part in the foundation of faculties at home; for it was decided from the beginning on the insistence of Fraser Rose that the college should not be a "London" society but regionalized throughout the British Isles. He had to travel widely, was present at the inaugural meeting of nearly every faculty and his speeches on these occasions were listened to with close attention. His ability to remember faces and names is remarkable, but this gift was one which he carefully nurtured, jotting down surnames and christian names on scraps of paper for later reference: But then he is meticulous in all he does.

After serving as secretary for many years he was for a year a vice chairman of council before being elected president. Now he has retired after a distinguished term of

office. One of the defects of the constitution of the college council is that there is no place in it for a retiring president and so we will see John Hunt no more on the top table at council meetings. No one can imagine that John can possibly let go of all that he has achieved. He has already hinted that a book will be written about the founding and early years of the College. He will be seen here and there delivering his characteristic addresses, not as a patriarch (for they by definition are elderly and John is blessed with the virtues of perpetual youth) but as the doyen of the College, looked up to and loved by all.

The College owes its existence to him, we in the College owe him a great debt for what he has achieved on our behalf.

In a recent letter to the chairman of council Lord Taylor (Stephen Taylor, author of *Good general practice*) wrote: "In Britain, and indeed wherever the British pattern of medicine is followed, the decay in general practice has been halted and the rôle of the family doctor has regained its lustre. Moreover the new general practitioner of today is as much a scientist as his hospital colleague. This double revolution is due in the main to the work of the Royal College of General Practitioners and its founding father, John Hunt".

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### GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND MENTAL DEFICIENCY HOSPITAL STAFFING

The report of the subcommittee appointed by the standing Medical Advisory Committee and the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committees of the Scottish Health Services Council in its report on the staffing of mental deficiency hospitals stresses the usefulness of general practitioner attachments to these hospitals. They comment "many who are at present patients in mental deficiency hospitals do not require specialized medical care of any kind. It is owing to a lack of facilities for their care in the community, that they are to be found in hospital as 'patients'. They may not need any more help from doctors than the average member of the community who is living at home and is at work. These 'patients' require from time to time the service of a general practitioner on account of intercurrent illness, and to review the general state of their health and development. The general practitioner, employed on a part-time basis in a mental deficiency hospital, has therefore a very real part to play in the medical staffing structure; and many specialists employed in these hospitals have paid tribute to the excellent work done there by general practitioners. The number of general practitioner sessions which is appropriate, depends of course upon local circumstances in the hospital and the availability of general practitioners from the community".