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January-June R. P. KNILL JONES
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Editorial

THE recent publicity given to the Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith about their lack of available funds for research into the transplantation of kidneys, resulted in the provision of funds by a public benefactor; although it is doubtful whether this would have ultimately been necessary, the matter has aroused public interest in Medical Research and its place in the national economy. The usual reaction in leading articles has been that since the United States spends, per head, approximately six times as much as we do on Medical Research, we should in some way try to emulate this state of affairs as if we were a backward nation, and thereby regain some of the limelight we have lost in this field. The latter statement is perhaps not entirely accurate, but may yet become true if the drain on our highly-trained scientific manpower, into which a committee of the Royal Society is now investigating, continues at its present rate. To judge from the feelings of emigrating scientists there must be some truth in the statement that a backward-looking attitude on research is prevalent in some parts of the country, and it is this that results in a penny-pinching that is frustrating and disheartening to many research workers. However greatly we may be impressed by the American achievement in this field, there exists a nagging doubt whether all this research is necessary or even valuable. The simple fact that funds are easy to obtain may result in people going into research for reasons that are not altruistic, to produce additions to the ever-increasing flood of scientific papers because they have to, and not because of the intrinsic value of their work.

In this country finance is split between the Medical Research Council, Charities and Commercial Organisations, resulting in an expenditure of 10s. per head of population. The National Health Service provides .03 per cent. of its total budget, and while it would be easy to suggest that more comes from this source, it is unlikely, due to the large number of competing interests for its money. The only other source which does not involve the State directly are the Armed Forces, which across the Atlantic provide a large number of grants for work done outside the official research establishments, and may perhaps be persuaded to do the same in this country.

It is often said that we as a nation can do miracles with the most rudimentary equipment and resources, and this is undeniably a laudable attribute; but does it arise through choice? In order to make the biological sciences more available for objective analysis, it has been found necessary to draw deductions from results obtained by using the relatively new tool of statistical analysis. The measurements required necessitate the use of elaborate and expensive apparatus; thus the simple equipment of our predecessors is replaced by complex; both are essential to research, but the latter is difficult to obtain because of the expense. For this and other reasons research is all too often regarded as an expensive luxury which can be forgotten, but if Man is to keep control of himself and his environment it becomes a necessity.

Those who believe in this are prepared to go to great lengths to surmount difficulties which are put in front of them, and are even driven to obtaining grants from America to carry out work in this country. This is an embarrassing situation which should not have been allowed to occur, but it is hardly sur-