for a fortuitous collection of doctors having no intentional physiological bond. It will reduce, not raise, the prospects of the average patient. If a doctor is any good, his patients want him, having chosen him and put their faith in him. If patients cannot do this last, then half his healing power vanishes. When a doctor takes a pride in his practice he will not welcome patients being banded about from one to another. Undivided loyalty is part of the good doctor-patient relationship.

The student needs a practical training to cope with common disease and to lead his flock in the cult of health. The complexity of modern medicine points to a partnership for the average young doctor and urban practice. This includes the incentive of owning the practice, and some degree of competition helps to "ginger up" effort. Conditions of pay, etc., must encourage *quality*, not mere *quantity*, of work.—I am, etc.,

Bristol.

A. WILFRID ADAMS.

Belladonna Poisoning

SIR,—In their article (Oct. 18, p. 611) on this subject Flight Lieutenants M. Hamilton and A. B. Sclare quote Glaister (1944) as stating that cases of accidental poisoning by belladonna preparations are comparatively rare. A brief record of four cases that have come to my notice may therefore be of interest.

CASE REPORTS

A woman aged 50, soon after taking her usual drink of herb tea, became strange in manner, rambling and talking to herself, and fumbling aimlessly with the buttons of her clothes. She was found to be suffering from belladonna poisoning, the deadly nightshade having evidently been accidentally included among the herbs. Although there was no alarm as regards this patient's life, she was badly shaken for a week or two and never quite regained her previous health.

A man aged 62 was in the habit of treating attacks of gout affecting his great toe by rubbing in the liniment of belladonna. One day he rubbed in linimentum A.B.C. (alcohol, belladonna, and chloroform) in addition. This apparently increased the absorption, as on the following morning he had the typical low muttering of belladonna poisoning. He had no recurrence and no ill effects.

A man was about to have a lipoma removed by a relatively inexperienced operator. I looked in to supervise just after the injection had been given, and found the patient a trifle fidgety and muttering to himself. The pupil was seen to be dilated. The solution that had been injected was inspected, and it was found that by mistake an eye lotion containing atropine had been used. Within a few hours this man had a temperature of 106° F. (41.1° C.). He made a rapid recovery.

A consulting physician informed me that he had been called in to a case of pneumonia as the patient had become delirious. The type of delirium suggested belladonna poisoning, and he found that the medicine which was being given contained belladonna. This was stopped and the patient recovered.

These cases all occurred during the six years 1911 to 1917, and I have not seen a case since then. The symptoms are so characteristic that the condition can be recognized at a glance; they are clearly described in Hamilton and Sclare's article.—I am, etc.,

Bradford.

PETER McEWAN.

SIR,—When I was R.M.O. at what is now called the Princess Beatrice Hospital two boys about 15 came into casualty. One was continuously talking quite incoherently; the other knew nothing of the patient but was doing the good Samaritan by taking him to hospital. The patient's pupils were noticed to be extremely dilated. He was treated for belladonna poisoning and quickly recovered. It turned out that he was a chemist's boy whose job it was to wash bottles, and he tasted some sticky black stuff that looked like liquorice and tasted sweet (? belladonna and glycerin).

During the last war when M.O. of a tube shelter I was called to an old lady who was talking incoherently, and it was suggested that drink might be the cause. Thinking of a possible central nervous disturbance I looked at the pupils, which were much dilated but equal. I thought of belladonna poisoning, and her pockets were searched for medicines or tablets. Eventually she was found wearing belladonna plasters on ulcerated varicose veins.

It might seem to be advisable to tighten up the regulations for the sale and dispensing of belladonna. Our friends the

Russians have set us an example in this direction. In Archangel in 1916 one of our party had lumbago and we thought of an application of belladonna. A fellow M.O. and I hunted the chemists' shops exhibiting our passports, red crosses, etc., but to no avail. Regulations were regulations, and only a Russian doctor's prescription would be recognized. The last chemist we went to was a friendly soul who asked us whether we really wanted belladonna, and we replied in the affirmative. He advised us to go to the beauty and cosmetic shop round the corner, where, he said, we could get a pound without any permit at all. We took his advice and carried off the goods.—I am, etc.,

London, N.1.

LINA M. POTTER.

Genetics and Science in the U.S.S.R.

SIR,—The leading article on the Lysenko controversy (Oct. 18, p. 616) contradicts itself to its own destruction as follows: In the fifth column of the article Darlington is commended for putting on record the "facts" of the liquidation of certain Soviet biologists and scientists since 1928, when "Marxist orthodoxy began its ideological incursions into the domain of science," Lysenko being the "new genetic prophet." At the bottom of the third column the article states that "the Lysenko school has many opponents" (meaning Soviet opponents). Therefore either the liquidation was ludicrously inefficient, or else it never happened. Further, how can one have both an "iron curtain" and also the detailed knowledge of Soviet affairs claimed by such as Darlington? These aspects of this and similar matters are irreconcilable.

The whole matter has recently been discussed in three articles in *Modern Quarterly* of Autumn, 1947, in which reference is made to an earlier article of Darlington's in *Discovery*, 1947, 8. He is quoted as saying: "These are no longer questions which can be argued about in Russia. All those who have been prepared to argue have been put away." Yet "the Lysenko school has many opponents"!

I conclude that the *B.M.J.* article is simply another set-piece of anti-Soviet pyrotechnics. Fireworks make much noise, but have little effect on any structure of solidity. And one looks foolish (at best) in praising Hudson and Richens for being "clear, temperate, and impartial" and then falling so obviously short of that standard oneself.—I am, etc.,

London, N.W.11.

R. R. WILSON.

SIR,—In the issue of Aug. 30 (p. 339) the editorial policy of the *British Medical Journal* was stated to be governed by "a sincere desire to inform British readers of the advances and contributions of Russian medicine." As one who deplores the scarcity of news of these matters in the British Press, I heartily welcomed this declaration, and it was with keen anticipation that I hastened to read in the *Journal* of Oct. 18 (p. 616) your leading article devoted to the important genetics controversy in the U.S.S.R.

I found, however, that the article omitted to mention the continued official recognition and encouragement of orthodox Mendelian genetics in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it was rounded off by an acclamation, as a great service to truth, of the wild charges of Darlington published in such a periodical as the *Nineteenth Century*. Thereby, in my view, the editorial deserted the field of objective scientific criticism and entered that of political aggression against an allied nation. It may be helpful to those who wish to study this important subject objectively to mention the valuable series of articles contained in the current issue of *Modern Quarterly*. In one of these there is stressed, with evident pertinence, the importance of reading the original work of Hudson and Richens.—I am, etc.,

Croesfaen, Glam.

J. B. ATKINS.

SIR,—The core of the article "Genetics and Science in the U.S.S.R." (Oct. 18, p. 616) is a quotation of the assertion by C. D. Darlington that Vavilov and others were imprisoned and murdered because of their scientific views. Hudson and Richens in their monograph, which is mentioned in the article as "clear, temperate, and impartial," could find no evidence that this was so, and surely the only verdict that a reasonable man can pronounce at the present time is one of "not proven."