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BIOGENIC STIMULATORS

Third Witch:

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf
Witch's mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark,
Root of hemlock digg'd i' the dark,
Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse,
Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips,
Finger* of birth-strangled babe,
Ditch-delivered by a drab,
Make the gruel thick and slab:

* Why not placenta?

Add thereto a tiger's chaudron
For the ingredients of our cauldron.

All:

Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Second Witch:

Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.

Macbeth, Act IV, Scene I.

The late Sanford Gifford said (*Hand-book of Ocular Therapeutics*): "The difficulty in estimating the value of

therapeutic agents administered in an attempt to aid this mechanism (the defensive mechanism of the body) is, therefore, obvious. This explains the remarkable variance in reports of different observers and often of observers whose clinical judgment is usually very reliable, as to the effect of various therapeutic agents. A chance series of cases with a fortunate outcome may convert an ophthalmologist of unquestioned standing into an enthusiastic advocate of a measure which has little to recommend it theoretically, and which in the hands of other men may later prove absolutely worthless. Thus it is necessary to greet the first reports on the use of any new agent with a certain amount of reserve. Agents of recognized value should not be abandoned in favor of new ones unless the evidence in favor of a change is convincing. The evidence of a small number of case reports alone is apt to be unsatisfactory, and one will be slow to take up the use of a new method unless there exists a certain foundation of theoretical and experimental reasons why the new method is likely to prove of advantage."

The fundamental common sense in this thought of a great ophthalmologist bears repetition today, when one is bombarded by press releases of new and often astounding discoveries of cures in the medical sciences. The evils of premature, spectacular publicity are too well known to be discussed here, nor is it necessary to detail the harm done to the public, and eventually to the entire medical profession, by such propaganda, either willful or innocent. The history of medicine is filled with these false alarms that have misfired, or, what is less serious, backfired into the faces of those responsible. What we never discover is the total cost to the afflicted, either in mental distress engendered by their false hopes, or to their pocketbooks, which in our material-

istic age seems to be more important. What is morally worse, by far, is the example set to our younger men who see the leaders "getting away with it" and thus are inspired to imitation.

Elsewhere in this issue will be found an article by Dr. Dan M. Gordon on the "Treatment of Retinitis Pigmentosa with Special Reference to the Filatov Method." It will bear careful study, for it details the history of the flotsam and jetsam of the wrecks of ideas regarding the treatment of this disease. This paper reemphasizes what Duke-Elder has so ably expressed. "None of them (remedies for pigmentary degeneration of the retina), however, has shown anything approaching lasting or consistent results, and it is probable that the temporary improvement following many of them is due to an increase in the metabolic activity in the eye rather than to any specific action. In the assessment of all of them it is well to take into consideration the natural fluctuation in the progress of the disease, as well as the enthusiasm of the practitioner and the credulity or the desperate hopefulness of the patient."

One has no quarrel with Filatov and his co-workers over the attempt to treat this so far hopeless ocular condition by any means whatsoever, fantastic as those means may seem to us. The mysterious and at present unknown action of his "biogenic stimulators" requires investigations of the most rigid and controlled sort, before they can be hailed as the long sought philosopher's panacean stone of ocular therapeutics. The work of Gordon and others is an attempt to evaluate and clarify the premise of Filatov. It is necessary that such work be done, under most careful scientific scrutiny and in the Eye Institutes that are especially equipped to carry out such meticulous study.

It would seem, from a study of the available Russian literature, more or less

abstracted to be sure, that the tissue therapy of Filatov is a new way of introducing a foreign-protein reaction, although differing in some respects, perhaps, from such biogenic stimulators as milk, typhoid vaccine, and Coley's serum. A severe febrile reaction has been produced in a "moon-blind" horse by the injection of sterilized horse feces with some improvement of his periodic ophthalmia (author). Sterile abscesses have been created as biogenic stimulators by many means (seton, croton oil, cupping, sterile blood, and so forth) and "laudable pus" was celebrated a long time ago. In fact, the witches' brew of Shakespeare may well contain the pharmaceuticals we are looking for, if Filatov's work with offal is substantiated.

No, the quarrel is not with Filatov and his group, primitive and slightly obscene as his treatment may seem to be to us. It is with the noisy group of fellow travelers in this country who by aggressive publicity measures seek to promote this treatment in the press for political purposes. This is the true danger to science.

On April 28, 1946, the *New York Herald-Tribune* carried a descriptive announcement hailing in enthusiastic terms the Filatov method. The ophthalmologists of this country were besieged with requests by their patients, afflicted with retinitis pigmentosa, for this treatment. In a personal communication, Dr. Robert Leslie, business manager of the *American Review of Soviet Medicine*, stated that the American Society for Russian Relief issued this newspaper release to the press, which he had not authorized. However, in the June, 1946, issue of the *American Review of Soviet Medicine*, four out of the nine main articles were by Filatov, or Filatov and Verbitska, considering the treatment of retinitis pigmentosa and the fantastic results of their methods of treatment (85 successful re-

sults out of 110 cases). Dr. Leslie circularized the ophthalmologists of this country with letters calling attention to the articles and offering a copy of the issue for one dollar. The magazine *Newsweek* has carried several articles about this treatment, and not long ago a group was formed in New York, financed for the sole purpose of promoting and perhaps exploiting the Filatov treatment.

It is to the credit of American medicine that there has been no blind stampede into this grotesque field of therapeutics. Scientific work will rise or fall upon its own worth and integrity. Scientific truth will ultimately prevail and all the subversive trumpets in Christendom or in pagan countries cannot promote for long an issue that is basically unsound. They can only succeed in confusing us and hiding for a time fundamental errors. These noisy promoters often end up by mistreating the common man whom they pretend to protect and whose welfare they affect to coddle.

The danger to science of replacing the mortarboard by the pileus, the scarlet gown of the free doctor by the black shirt of Naziism or the red one of Communism, or by the star-studded hood of the necromancer, has been sadly demonstrated only too often in the past history of man's civilization. Politics and the state have no place in the premature exploitation of any medical discovery, regardless of the outcome.

Derrick Vail.

OPHTHALMOLOGICAL STUDY COUNCIL

The third and last of the Ophthalmological Study Council courses is to be given this summer in Portland, Maine. As is usual with the end approaching, the managers are just beginning to feel some confidence in their understanding and control of the problems raised by so