

arrows in the course of this expedition, and that Major Windsor will let us know the result of his examination.—I am, etc.,

Birmingham, Jan. 9th

ROBERT SAUNDBY.

THE NEW CELL PROLIFERANT.

SIR,—May I correct the statement made in my note on the new cell proliferant in last week's issue, that Dr. Titherley and Mr. Coppin had discovered the cell proliferating capabilities of allantoin? Obviously they analysed the comfrey for Dr. Macalister, to whom alone is due the credit of having originated the investigation, and of having discovered the therapeutic qualities of allantoin.—I am, etc.,

Liverpool, Jan. 8th.

W. BRAMWELL.

SIR,—I can confirm Dr. Macalister's remarks upon the value of allantoin as a cell proliferant. Towards the end of last year there was an explosion at works in the neighbourhood of the hospital, and we were called upon to treat a large number of men who were severely burnt on the hands, forearms, and face. The burns were mostly of the second or third degree, and for about a week they were dressed with gauze soaked either in a solution of picric acid or in a solution of iodine.

Dr. Macalister asked me to try dressing them with allantoin, and kindly provided us with a quantity of it. In the first instance it was tried on two or three cases only, but the results were so satisfactory and so convincing to house-surgeons, dressers, and nurses, that dressing with allantoin solution soon became general. It not only stimulates epithelial growth, but "cleans up" sloughing surfaces in a most remarkable fashion.

When nurses and house-surgeons are really keen about any particular line of treatment there is generally something in it. This has certainly been our experience with allantoin.—I am, etc.,

Liverpool, Jan. 8th.

R. W. MURRAY.

SIR,—I am interested in Drs. Macalister and Bramwell's papers in the JOURNAL of January 6th respecting the *Symphytum* or common comfrey, giving the composition of, and cases treated by, this herb; and I think it is more valuable than we imagine, but the mad rush for new drugs has put a lot of old remedies in the shade. I well remember fifty years ago that in other parts of this county the inhabitants used to make a decoction of the herb, and give it to those suffering from bad coughs and what they called weak chests, and were quite satisfied with its soothing effect, and highly esteemed it. I have also known it used in Devonshire for sore and broken parts of the body; by scraping and applying the root thus pulped, it is considered very soothing.—I am, etc.,

Strete, Devonshire, Jan. 6th.

CHARLES J. R. LAWDAY.

SIR,—Dr. Macalister may be interested to know that the following description appears in *A Complete English Dispensatory*, by John Quincy, M.D., published in 1733:

Rad. Consolidae, Roots of Comfrey.

These are more efficacious in this Intention than the flowers taken notice of. They are sometimes made into a Conserve in the Shops, but such slimy or glutinous Bodies are very imprudently worked up into such Forms, because the Sugar in a little time destroys that very texture from which their medicinal Virtues arise. This Root is very conveniently boiled up into a Jelly, and if it be a little sweetened, as it is used, is not at all amiss. It is very strengthening, and good against all Fluxes whatsoever, but particularly Seminal Weaknesses; and where the Virulence is removed, it is excellent in old Gleets; and to stop the Whites in Women.

I am, etc.,

Pontardulais, Jan. 8th.

R. J. ISAAC.

A HOSPITAL FOR PAYING PATIENTS.

SIR,—I do not wish to burden your columns by replying at length to the letter of Dr. Harvey Hilliard in your issue of December 23rd, 1911, p. 1676, as your space is probably as limited as my time, but with your kind permission I would like to assure Dr. Hilliard that the opinions he has seen fit to express (and they are obviously those of an

interested party), have in no way altered my views on the matter in question. By what right Dr. Hilliard claims to command a greater knowledge of nursing homes and their management than I do myself, I cannot quite see. I have not the pleasure of Dr. Hilliard's acquaintance, but I believe he is engaged in the practice of anaesthetics. If this is so, I cannot admit his right to criticize the experience of any practising surgeon in a matter which so obviously concerns the surgeon rather than the anaesthetist. I am sorry if I have accidentally hurt Dr. Harvey Hilliard's susceptibilities, but I know, as indeed we all do, that plain truths are frequently unpalatable fare.—I am, etc.,

London, W., Jan. 6th.

LAWRIE MCGAVIN.

SIR JAMES BARR AND THE INSURANCE ACT.

SIR,—The substance of the letters of Sir James Barr and his supporter Dr. A. Rugg Gunn lies in their expressed opinions that the National Insurance Act will tend to racial decadence, and will be subversive of eugenic ideals. To those interested in questions of race hygiene these opinions may seem hasty and ill judged, for the simple reason that most legislative enactments dealing with health and social reform are of the nature of experiments, whose ultimate outcome from the racial point of view cannot be predicted.

The interaction of nature and nurture, heredity and environment—to the study of which the Bishop of Oxford so forcibly directed the attention of the profession last July at Birmingham—is as yet practically unknown in human affairs. It is unscientific of Sir James Barr to abuse Mr. Lloyd George for introducing this Act to the Legislature, for it is practically certain that this Act is the product of the social conscience and lies outside the will of any one man. If Mr. Lloyd George had not introduced this Act a similar one would have been introduced by someone else, and this also from the various points of view would have been equally faulty. Group action for both social and individual ends is becoming the characteristic of the twentieth century, and some eugenicists will see in the Insurance Act the beginning of that control which will in the end lead to the realization of their aims. If the medical profession acts collectively so as to gain such conditions of working that medical science will have full play, we need not fear that the race will suffer by this Act. Nay, more, the profession of medicine will gain in status, and its educative powers will lead more and more to the establishing of sociology on a biological basis.—I am, etc.,

Warrington, Jan. 7th.

J. S. MANSON.

SIR,—There is one point in the letter of Sir James Barr which I should have challenged sooner had I not thought that it would certainly have been dealt with by some one better qualified than myself. He says that he objects to the Insurance Act because "it is a long step in the downward path towards socialism."

Now many of us who call ourselves socialists are quite as bitterly opposed to the Act as Sir James Barr. Moreover, our opposition to it has this advantage over his, that it is founded upon ethical principle and not political prejudice. We strongly oppose the Act because it indefinitely perpetuates the very worst features of the competitive system.

Towards the end of his letter Sir James praises the work done by medical officers of health, as indeed well he may. But he does not seem to have realized that the whole-time salaried medical officer of health is a typical socialistic institution. We socialists have a scheme of our own, which was first outlined in the Minority Report of the Royal Commission, and of which many already approve who would not call themselves socialists. It would extend the State medical service, of which we already have the beginning in our Army and Navy Medical Services and in our medical officers of health, and would create a "Clinical and Domiciliary" staff of medical officers whose work would commence with the poorest of the poor, who are not touched by the Insurance Act, but who obviously most stand in need of help. There would also be an "Institutional Staff," who would look after the