

Static Electricity from Curtain Rails

SIR,—During the recent dry weather sparks have been noticed when moving bedside curtains which were hung from non-metallic rails. On reflection it is no surprise that friction between two insulators (when dry) will set up an electrostatic charge.

Several types of these rails and fittings have been produced in the past few years and, since they are so free running and silent, they have been adopted in many hospitals for bedside curtains. The usual practice is to secure them to a framework—often metallic—which is not separately earthed. (A formidable task for every bed in every ward in all the hospitals concerned.) One is worried when one thinks that ether may have been used on a patient in the enclosed space of the curtained cubicle and that there is the possibility of a static discharge when the curtains are opened at the completion of the procedure. I doubt if a serious danger in fact exists, but it would be most alarming if some patient or nurse should have to show us what the extent of the danger might be.—I am, etc.,

Stanmore, Middlesex.

A. W. WARLTIER.

Suxamethonium Muscle Pains

SIR,—With reference to the numerous discussions concerning muscle pains after suxamethonium which have appeared in your journal, I would like to make one observation. This is that in my experience when suxamethonium chloride is used in conjunction with electroplexy it never gives rise to subsequent muscle pain.—I am, etc.,

Paignton.

R. J. T. WOODLAND.

Translating from Russian

SIR,—Following Professor D. H. Smyth's lead (May 21, p. 1561), your correspondents (July 2, p. 71) have been calling for the publication of a Russian-English dictionary which should be absolutely comprehensive, should include genders, stress marks, etc., and should be printed in clear type. Surely such a dictionary, if it could be produced, would be uncomfortably large and prohibitively expensive, in view of the extremely limited demand. Furthermore, the publication of the dictionary would be a prolonged business, and many new terms would have been added to the vocabulary by the time it was eventually printed, making it necessary to take steps to keep it up to date, and detracting from its assumed value as a complete work of reference.

I should like to make the following suggestions. Firstly, it must be recognized that the translation of scientific Russian texts is a specialized job, requiring specialized knowledge and qualifications, one of which is the acquisition of an extensive vocabulary from familiarity with Russian scientific literature on subjects with which the translator is also familiar. Secondly, the existing facilities, both for scientific translation of the occasional article and for cover-to-cover translation and abstraction of current Russian medical and scientific journals, should be more widely publicized. Thirdly, one of the organizations, in this country or abroad, handling Russian scientific translation on a large scale should be encouraged to maintain a "living" dictionary in the shape of a reference bureau, to which requests for information on terms not included in the existing dictionaries could be made. Such an arrangement would be far cheaper than a new dictionary, and would have

the advantage of being absolutely up to date all the time. It would also serve as a focal point where many experienced translators could pool their ideas and share their knowledge, to the great ultimate gain of all who are engaged on this work. An additional advantage of the idea would be that, if the demand for the "super-dictionary" grew, the bureau would be in an ideal position for composing it.—I am, etc.,

Rotherham, Yorks.

BASIL HAIGH.

Fools and Wise Men

SIR,—In the concluding paragraph of his Centennial Oration of the Institute of Neurology Dr. Macdonald Critchley (July 2, p. 6) has attributed to Lenin a modified version of a well-known Sanskrit saying which means: "All the wise men may not be able to answer even a single question asked by a fool; for he who appears or pretends to be a fool may even be wiser than the wise men."

However, English readers may be interested to know that in 1806-7 some students compiled a list of questions and went in a deputation to the then President of the Royal Society (Sir Joseph Banks) with a request that they be allowed to circulate copies of the list. The despotic Sir Joseph angrily dismissed the deputation, remarking at the same time that "a few fools could ask more questions in half an hour than wise men might answer in years." This anecdote has been mentioned in the preface to the first volume of the *Transactions of the Geological Society*, published in 1811. Sir Francis Galton, F.R.S., has vouched for its authenticity in page 9 of the October number of the *Biometrika* published in 1901, pointing out that one of the deputationists, Mr. Greenough, later became an F.R.S.—I am, etc.,

MANGALORE NARASHIMA PAI.

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Belmont.

Vacuum Cleaner Injury

SIR,—In reference to the medical memorandum by Mr. Miles Fox and Dr. E. L. Barrett (June 25, p. 1942), I wonder if the vacuum cleaner injury which they described is really as uncommon, or as unknown, as most of us would like to believe. Perhaps you and others may remember the bawdy parody of Shakespeare's "Five Ages of Man" in which the last stage of all is represented by "vodka and vacuum cleaners."

After reading this memorandum I quoted this now rather ancient parody to some of my staff, and a Polish graduate of a well-known university said: "You have that in your country too. We had it also in an exact translation in my country when I was a medical student." Needless to say the delicacy and decorum of your paper forbid a recitation of the original.—I am, etc.,

Lanark.

J. BRYANT.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield

SIR,—I wish to call to your attention an error in the article by Dr. J. O. F. Davies entitled "Visit to the U.S.A." (June 18, p. 1879). Blue Cross is said to pay doctor fees and Blue Shield to pay hospital expense in the article. This is just reversed. It is Blue Cross that pays the hospital expense and Blue Shield pays the doctor's fees.—I am, etc.,

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M. L. JANOWER.