

LETTERS

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"Living" Molecule

G. W. Beadle's recent suggestion [*Science* 125, 9 (1957)] that nucleic acids might be regarded as the first "living" molecule presents an opportunity to re-emphasize the fact that such interesting speculations must still be regarded as highly controversial. It would be unfortunate if too little theoretical and experimental consideration continues to be given to alternate views (i) that genes are recent [C. C. Lindegren, *Nature* 176, 1244 (1955); *N.Y. Acad. Sci.* (Dec. 1956)] rather than primary, and (ii) that they may act, to a large extent by inhibiting a "totipotent" cytoplasm [W. Braun, *Science* 104, 38 (1946); B. Commoner, report at AAAS meeting (Dec. 1956)]. Bateson's [W. Bateson, *Problems of Genetics* (Yale Univ. Press, 1913)] and Goldschmidt's [R. B. Goldschmidt, *The Material Basis of Evolution* (Yale Univ. Press, 1940)] arguments that gene mutation per se does not afford a satisfactory explanation of evolution still remain to be answered.

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The Sick Feeling Remains

On 1 March, I learned, via your editorial [*Science* 125, 381 (1957)], all about triage. A little sober reflection eliminated the first waves of nausea, but the sick feeling remains. It is difficult to reconcile a civilized spirit with the science (if this is what it is) of triage.

This is not written in criticism of Ziperman or of DuShane; indeed, I thank you for introducing me to this macabre game. With a little imagination, we can envision the glorious band which has survived five or six consecutive disasters through the Machiavellian hand of the "sorting officer." Naturally, the "sorting officer" of the hostile power will have weeded out his necessary and superior crop. Thus the world (if there be one left) will be minus the everyday human flotsam and will be happily inhabited by those necessary to survival—including "sorting officers."

It is devoutly hoped that more time, energy, and diplomacy will be channeled into avoiding these "civilian disasters," so that triage and its disciples are left without a future.

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Limited Attendance

There is a statement in "Social aspects of science" [*Science* 125, 145 (25 Jan. 1957)] to the effect that our recent Conference on the Practical Utilization of Recorded Knowledge found it necessary to hold parts of its deliberations behind closed doors and to refrain from publicizing the full record of these "confidential" sessions.

The sessions were not confidential, but rather attendance was limited to those in various subject areas who might contribute best to these sessions. As per plan, summaries of these sessions have been published in the book *Documentation in Action*, edited by Shera, Kent, and Perry (Reinhold, New York, 1956), which records the proceedings of the conference.

We believe that the technique of limiting attendance in certain types of meetings helps to stimulate discussion by spe-

cial interest groups who might otherwise be inhibited from presenting their views in public. This was indeed the case in these sessions.

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Damaging Rumor

The main part of your editorial "Scotching a damaging rumor" [*Science* 125, 7 (4 Jan. 1957)] is a letter from the State Department, the contents of which seem to be quite clear. Contrary to your belief, however, the letter will be considered by a great many people abroad as a definite confirmation of the absolute truth of the "damaging rumor."

The State Department definitely says that one visit may not be damaging—"Repeated visits . . . may raise a question as to the visa applicant's political affiliations."

This means that, whatever your reasons for visits to Moscow may be, you cannot, in the eyes of State, escape the red taint if you go there more than once.

And this, after all, is just what the rumor said?

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