CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,

In your friendly review of my book 'Hay Fever: A Key to the Allergic Disorders'* I am gently taken to task by your reviewer for my disagreement with some current conceptions. In particular I fail to believe that 'house dust extract is an entity which differs from the sum of its components.' The idea is stated thus with admirable clarity by your reviewer, but as a rule this mystic conception is enshrouded in a nimbus of indefinite words by the more devout allergists. I usually call it myself 'The Spirit of Dust' idea, or even more irreverently the 'Demon Dust of the Allergic Pantomime.'

I stick to my guns; I do not believe that house dust has a chemical entity all to itself; most of the component substances can each be identified by means of a patient possessing a singleton sensitization to an ingredient substance. If that particular substance is missing from a dust the singleton sensitive cannot react allergically. For instance, a man sensitive only to grass pollen (and such a one is quite commonly found) will not react *allergically* to a dust collected in London in January. It is true that certain specific substances cannot at present be identified with equal ease, e.g. the many mould spores which can produce asthma, etc., but that is because a patient's specificity to the various *pure* mould spores has not yet been worked out sufficiently well. There is no reason to believe that when that has been accomplished mould spores will prove to be an exception.

There is of course a non-specific irritant to be found in many collections of dust (histamine or a histamine-like substance perhaps); this will, as we all know, bring up a wealing on anybody's skin, but that has little or nothing to do with the allergic disorders as I understand them.

Demon dust has another aspect. I lived during most of the last war in some laboratories which were quite impossible to keep dusted, you could write your name in it almost anywhere. The dozen or so very competent housewives who also lived in the place got as emotional about that dust as if it were foul sin. They could not let it be as we men could (and did), they agonized about it, calling it outrageous, disgraceful, horrible and indecent. In fact they showed every sign of conurbation.

*See POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL JOURNAL, February 1951.

If there is a spirit of the dust I should guess that it is largely a psychological spirit—and *not* allergic.

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SIR,

I should like to thank you for your Editorial in the current issue of the POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL JOURNAL, but will you permit me to suggest a term which, I believe, expresses the spirit of your able article more fully and more aptly than the ugly word *geriatrics*, which reminds one of things like jerry-building and Jerry the Hun.

The word I have in mind is the word *eugeria*, which was brought to my notice in an article by Sir James S. Ross appearing in the Ministry of Health Monthly Bulletin for December 1950. I need not, myself, attempt to argue a case which has been so much better argued by Sir James Ross, and I have no doubt that his article will readily be available to you. I should like to commend it to your attention, and for myself I write as a convert to his point of view. I would like to see us written about as *eugerians* instead of *geriatricians*, who seek to promote *eugeria*—the care of the aged.

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SIR,

In the article on the teaching of geriatrics published in the March 1951 issue of the POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL JOURNAL, the statement appears, 'No textbook of geriatrics has been produced in this country, whilst such articles as have appeared have usually been of an administrative rather than a clinical nature.' May I take this opportunity of pointing out that my book 'Old Age' has recently reached its second edition and was reviewed in your journal in September 1950.

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