

Medical Matters.

THE PREVENTION OF PLAGUE.

An exhaustive Memorandum on Plague, prepared by Dr. Arthur Newsholme, Medical Officer of the Local Government Board, and supplementing a circular and regulations already issued, has been sent by the Department to the sanitary authorities in England and Wales, accompanied by the request that these officers will use their best endeavours to carry its suggestions into effect. The Memorandum details the general characteristics of plague, its symptoms, diagnosis, and method of spreading. It defines the disease as follows: "Plague for administrative purposes may be defined as a disease of rats, which incidentally and occasionally attacks man. Fleas form the intermediaries between the diseased rat and man. If the fleas of infected rats . . . are excluded from access to human beings, plague will seldom, if ever, spread from animals to man."

It is reassuring to learn that experience proves plague can be easily controlled in this country, under conditions of efficient sanitary administration. These concern (a) human sources of infection, (b) infection from inanimate objects, (c) infection from lower animals, especially the rat.

Human Infection.—The control of human infection is effected by the discovery of suspected cases of illness, and their prompt notification to the Medical Officer of Health. The Medical Officer of Health is bound under penalty to report every recognised case of plague to the Local Government Board, and in order to aid in the identification of plague newly developing in a district, the Board have arranged for bacteriological examination of material sent by the Medical Officer of Health in the earliest cases without cost to the local authority.

Isolation and Observation of "Contacts."—The next step is the isolation and observation of contacts, and although personal infection is only likely to occur in the pneumonic form of plague, the isolation of all plague patients is considered desirable because, amongst other reasons, disinfection, and the disinfestation of premises from vermin can be more efficiently secured after the patient's removal.

The Production of Personal Immunity is attained by treatment with plague prophylactic, by strict personal cleanliness, especially of the hands, and by the use of a respirator, containing a film of cotton, made to cover the nose and mouth.

In regard to the *disinfestation of inanimate*

objects, that, we are told, will be most efficient which secures the disinfestation of the rooms and all articles of bedding and clothing from fleas. Clothing which may harbour infected fleas is dangerous. Domestic cats are a safeguard against invasion by rats and mice, but a cat which shows signs of illness should be destroyed and buried.

Precautions against Rats.—The continuous suppression or limitation of rats in a district into which rat plague has been introduced will prevent the occurrence of human plague of local origin, and efforts should be concentrated towards this end. Houses should, as far as possible, be rendered rat proof, and the domestic invasion of rats should not be encouraged by allowing morsels of food to lie on or under the floor, or in ashpits.

In short, the lesson of the Memorandum is "Be clean."

HYGIENE OF THE MOUTH.

Dr. Bonnes, as reported by the *British Medical Journal*, calls attention to this important matter, and comments on the too general neglect of the teeth. He points out the close relationship the hygiene of the mouth bears to a great variety of pathological processes. Affections of the mouth, indeed, are important factors in nearly all respiratory and digestive ailments, owing to microbial infection from the inspired air and the fermentation of particles of food in the buccal cavity. Buccal sepsis predisposes to anginas, oedema glottidis, leucoplakia, adenitis; while various observers have noted the close connection of dental troubles with those of the visual apparatus. Septic gastro-enteritis of buccal origin is by no means uncommon. The practice of cleansing the teeth ought to be begun in early childhood, and as much during the first dentition as during the second. The author recommends cleansing the teeth after every meal with a red rubber brush. He believes this does not injure the gums, and their vitality is not lowered by bleeding. The elasticity of the brush, too, allows of more energetic friction without damaging the enamel. The brush can be sterilised by boiling. After reviewing the various forms of dentifrice on the market—several of which, especially the carbolated dentifrice and those of oxygenated water, he condemns as being injurious to the buccal mucosa—the author gives his adherence to the paste form of dentifrice. This, he says, is the best and most practical. It ought to contain an inert and insoluble powder; an antiseptic, miscible and in definite quantity; and a more or less fluid excipient, capable of maintaining the contact of the other constituents.

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