

PUBLIC HEALTH.

A NEW TYPE OF DIPHTHERIA.

Since the discovery of the Klebs-Loeffler bacillus as the cause of diphtheria, and its treatment by a beneficent anti-toxin, this disease, so dreaded in the latter part of the nineteenth century, has been shorn of its terrors. It is therefore disquieting to learn that epidemics of a virulent form have broken out in Great Britain, the germ of the disease being apparently of a different type.

In view of the seriousness of the outbreak it is important that medical advice should at once be obtained in any case of sore throat, for the disease is swift in its course and should be treated without delay.

The protection afforded by modern methods of immunisation should be widely realised, and Public Health authorities in many large cities are providing free facilities for this, and also offer to supply medical practitioners with the necessary material.

In Birmingham, where the city health authorities have adopted a system of immunisation, the number of cases occurring annually has dropped from 1,280, the average between 1901 and 1930, to 417 in 1933, although by no means all the children have been protected by this simple method of control.

We may, however, point out the necessity of securing the co-operation of school teachers when the Public Health authorities decide to circularise parents on the subject. If when this is done, and anxious parents consult teachers, and are told that they have to send out circulars supplied to them as a matter of form, but that there has been no case of diphtheria in the school and immunisation is therefore unnecessary, carefully-thought-out preventive measures by expert medical authorities may be rendered useless. We commend this point to the attention of the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education.

INADEQUATE MORTUARIES.

Complaint of the inadequate and sometimes even disgusting accommodation at mortuaries outside the London district is, says *The Lancet*, by no means rare. Decency and humanity require that the place where relatives are brought for the purpose of identifying a dead body should not offend by its unsuitability. Public health standards demand that local authorities should make proper provision and that post-mortem examinations should be conducted in circumstances of reasonable convenience. On Dec. 22nd the Doncaster district coroner, Mr. W. H. Carlile, condemned the mortuary in Thorne old workhouse. A few days later Sir Samuel Brighouse, the coroner for South-West Lancashire, described the Aintree mortuary as a dirty, disreputable outhouse. The police surgeon described the place as little better than a cart-shed; there was no table and no supply of warm water; the little bowl was filthy and not fit for anyone to wash his hands in; the walls were dirty. His box of instruments, he said, had to be left on the floor or put down on the ground outside. The mortuary slab was the kind of slab which was in common use 50 years ago. The coroner gave orders that the Aintree mortuary should be closed and not used even as a resting-place for bodies. He observed that the Chief Constable of Lancashire had objected to his action in closing the mortuaries at Aintree and Maghull, but he himself was not disposed to accept this officer's dictation in such a matter.

The condition of many public mortuaries is a scandal to which we are glad to see coroners drawing attention, but one most important phase is that to which the British College of Nurses drew attention in 1931, and which received sympathetic attention from many coroners, but by no means all, namely that of the lack of provision for

the care and handling of the bodies of women by women attendants. It is incredible, in these days that such provision should not be made, and it should not be longer delayed.

EPIDEMIC OF MALARIA IN CEYLON.

The widespread epidemic of malaria in Ceylon is causing widespread suffering. Both the State Council and the public are contributing to the relief fund. "Pitiful reports," says *The Times* correspondent, "are arriving of the plight of the sufferers, most of them in need of medicine, food, and attention. The hospitals are overcrowded, and sick are huddled together on floors and in corridors. On the roads processions of bullock-carts are taking men, women, and children in a collapsed condition to the nearest dispensary; others, less lucky, have to walk miles. The churches and other organisations are raising sheds near the hospitals to shelter and refresh the victims, but missionaries state that the position is far too desperate to be dealt with by private organisations. Many deaths have occurred, but it is difficult to estimate their number. Children are particularly affected. In the courts the magistrates find litigants absent, and in one post office the entire staff is ill. The strength of the police departments has been reduced elsewhere to a fraction."

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION.

Dr. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, addressing the Association for Teachers of Religious Knowledge on "Psychology, and religion of the future" said that psychology and religion were destined to dwell together as mutual friends and supporters, particularly in that sphere of activity, open to them both, which might be called the cure of souls. One of the most important discoveries which had been made was that there was a real difference between moral disease and sin and that some people who in the past had been treated as if they were simply reckless evildoers were the unfortunate victims of obsessions and controls which could have been relieved by competent psychological treatment.

One of the most important elements in mental healing and in mental health was the building up of the self round an adequate ideal and in this respect religion had much to give to psychotherapy.

THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR CHEMISTRY.

The 1934 Nobel Prize for Chemistry has been awarded to Professor Harold C. Urey, of Columbia University, New York, for his discovery of heavy water. "Heavy water" is water compounded of oxygen and "heavy hydrogen," and is of the greatest physical, chemical, physiological, and medical interest. The discovery that so common and fundamental a substance as water is really a mixture, says the Stockholm correspondent of *The Times*, is reckoned one of the most important in the history of science and has meant a complete revision of many ideas.

INCORPORATED SOCIETY OF CHIROPODISTS.

At the Annual Meeting of the Royal College of Surgeons, the President, Sir Holburt Waring, announced that the College, together with the Royal College of Physicians, had submitted to the Privy Council a memorandum approving of the suggestion that a charter should be granted to the Incorporated Society of Chiropodists, provided that the scope of the work is suitably limited to ensure that any operation on deformities or on structures below the true skin or the use of anaesthetics, shall be carried out under medical supervision.

At the same Meeting for the forty-fifth time a Resolution was carried reaffirming that members should have representation on the Council. Some day, no doubt, a man will arise with the force of character to carry this reform!

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