

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

STERILISED SURGICAL CATGUT.

The Ministry of Health has recently issued a Memorandum on Sterilised Surgical Catgut, which states that "the recent occurrence in rather rapid succession of several groups of cases of tetanus infection following surgical operations in which catgut had been employed has called particular attention to the dangers connected with the use of inefficiently sterilised catgut. It was the recognition of these risks which led to the issue of the Therapeutic Substances (Catgut) Regulations, 1930, made under the Therapeutic Substances Act, 1925, and since incorporated in the Therapeutic Substances Regulations, 1931. Under these Regulations the manufacture for sale and the importation of sterilised surgical ligatures and sutures (a term which includes catgut and certain other substances of animal origin used for the same purposes) is prohibited except under licence from the Minister of Health and the granting of such a licence is conditional upon the routine testing for sterility of samples from each batch of catgut manufactured or imported, whilst in addition the premises, staff and methods of manufacture are controlled by periodical inspection.

"The patient into whose body is introduced at operation catgut sold as 'sterilised surgical catgut' (*i.e.*, catgut manufactured or imported under licence) may, therefore, be regarded as adequately safeguarded from tetanus infection from this source, but in many hospitals catgut is still employed which is not controlled under the Therapeutic Substances Act, but is bought as raw catgut and is 'sterilised' in the hospital itself by a process which may or may not be satisfactory. In nine cases (of which five proved fatal) occurring in three groups which have recently come to the notice of the Ministry of Health the evidence pointed very strongly to such 'home cured' catgut as the source of infection."

The methods of manufacture and of sterilisation are described, with the conclusions which have been arrived at by the Ministry as a result of their investigations.

CONCLUSIONS.

"There are many problems connected with sterilised surgical catgut which require further investigation including its fate when introduced into the human body, the conditions under which micro-organisms which have survived in its interior may multiply and infect the patient's tissues, and the best method of ensuring the sterility of the catgut whilst preserving those physical properties upon which its usefulness to the surgeon depends, but in the meanwhile the following conclusions can be drawn from our present knowledge of the facts :—

1. The efficient sterilisation of catgut for surgical purposes is far from simple and presents special problems.
2. Serious danger attends the use of raw catgut, or so-called internally sterilised catgut, to which sterilising processes of doubtful efficacy are applied in the hospital.
3. Many brands of efficiently sterilised catgut controlled under the Therapeutic Substances Act are available.
4. Post-operative tetanus, gas-gangrene and other infections from surgical catgut can be prevented by the use of catgut manufactured by licensees under the Act or of other catgut sterilised by methods similar to those employed by licensees.

It is clear, therefore, that the authorities of all hospitals in which surgical operations involving the use of catgut are performed should investigate carefully the origin of the catgut and any method of sterilising it which may be employed in their hospitals, in order to prevent the occur-

rence of fatalities from the use of catgut containing the tetanus bacillus or other dangerous micro-organisms."

This important memorandum, which can usefully be studied in detail, can be obtained from His Majesty's Stationery Office or through any bookseller, price 2d. net.

POISON GAS.

At the Annual Representative Meeting of the British Medical Association held at Oxford, the following resolution was adopted :—

"That this meeting condemns unreservedly the use of poison gas in warfare as inhuman in its results and degrading to civilization, and relies upon the Council to do everything in its power with a view to securing the co-operation of the medical profession in all countries in order to prohibit the use of poison gas."

Dr. H. D. Woodroffe (Woodstock), in the course of a discussion on a previous resolution, said he had been for the past 18 months in touch with the general schemes as outlined by the Home Office and as they were being carried out by local authorities, and, if they were properly carried out, they would afford a very high degree of protection to the civilian population.

"I heard," he said, "from an official of the Home Office in the last few days that, by the end of next year, there will be 25,000,000 respirators for issue to the civilian population, and I want to say here, categorically as a thing I know for a fact, that our British respirator is 100 per cent. protection against any gas that can be used in war. That I will state very definitely as an official fact."

INSTRUCTORS IN ANTI-GAS MEASURES.

The Air Raid Precautions Department of the Home Office announce the appointment of 10 doctors to be medical instructors in anti-gas measures.

These instructors, who will be stationed in London and in other centres throughout the country, including Scotland, will give anti-gas training to medical practitioners, medical students, and nurses.

The instructors will be given final training at the Civilian Anti-Gas School during the next few weeks, and they will begin their work in October.

"NO NEEDLESS NOISE."

The Anti-Noise League, 166, Victoria Street, London, S.W.1, in a recent leaflet state clerical workers in all ranks suffer to-day from quite unnecessary noise. Traffic outside and inside, telephone bells and typewriters, together with calculating, tabulating, duplicating, punching machines, combine to form a barrage which in many office buildings assaults the nerves through all the hours of the working day. Good evidence points to a difference in efficiency of as much as 9 per cent. for clerical workers, as between noisy and quiet conditions. Figures as to health are more convincing: a firm recently reduced the noise in a large room in which 300 clerks were employed, and it was found that the visits of girls to the medical department decreased from 25 or 30 a day to about half-a-dozen. We cannot say yet that experts are agreed as to how noise injures health or interferes with workers, nor exactly to what extent, but common-sense points to the inevitable extra expenditure of nervous energy required for mental concentration, and experience points to the extreme case which often occurred in the war, in which the ordinary "carrying on" during an artillery barrage of several days caused extreme extra fatigue to troops even when the danger to life was negligible and when the noise had become scarcely perceived through familiarity.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)