

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

### MEMORANDUM ON SMALLPOX.

The Minister of Health, Mr. Walter Elliot, has issued a Memorandum on Smallpox, published by the Stationery Office, price 2d., the primary object of which is to draw the attention of Local Authorities to the possibility which now exists of preventing or limiting the spread of smallpox by prompt and vigorous action as soon as it is reported to have appeared.

During the last three years this country has enjoyed comparative freedom from smallpox, although for some years prior to that period there was an epidemic of the non-virulent type of the disease, known as variola minor. The virulent type of the disease, variola major, virtually ceased to be a serious administrative problem here nearly twenty years ago, and the risk that it may again become seriously epidemic has been much reduced by the vigilance of the Health Authorities at seaports and airports and by their observance of the measures laid down in the International Sanitary Conventions now in force.

The Memorandum contains an account of the incidence of and mortality from smallpox in England and Wales since 1901, and it is pointed out that whatever justification there may be in the presence of variola minor for relaxing the standard methods of control adopted for the virulent type of the disease, there is none for a policy of indifference: variola minor is not invariably mild or entirely innocent of complications and permanent disfigurement, with an extensive rash its victim is unsightly and repellent, and when epidemic it causes an amount of invalidity which cannot be viewed without concern by those entrusted with the care of the public health.

The Memorandum contains a summary of the procedure which Medical Officers of Health should at once adopt on becoming aware that smallpox has appeared in their districts.

### THE EMPIRE RHEUMATISM COUNCIL.

Mr. Francis Fox, Secretary to the Empire Rheumatism Council, writing to the press on this subject, quotes facts chiefly drawn from the 1936 Reports of the London County Council School Medical Officer. The work of the L.C.C. medical services in regard to child rheumatism is probably, he says, the best in the world.

There are estimated to be, in round figures, 10,000 cases of rheumatic disease among children attending the L.C.C. schools, girl sufferers much in excess of boy sufferers. Of these 2,039 were so serious as to call for institutional treatment. Of the 2,039 1,900 were discharged, 500 of them classed as physically defective, many of them as "unfit for any type of school or work."

The tragic note of the Report is in the statement that, in spite of the fact that probably all is being done that is humanly possible in the light of present knowledge, yet, since at the present time the immediate causation of juvenile rheumatism and the factors conducive to its occurrence are more matters of speculation than ascertained fact, no advance in the direction of prevention seems at present possible. It is clearly of the utmost importance that skilled research workers in bacteriology, biochemistry, and cardiology should concentrate on the problem. The absence of definite knowledge regarding the causation of the disease inevitably reflects itself on the question of treatment.

To provide that skilled research is the task which the Empire Rheumatism Council has set itself, with the full sympathy of the Ministry of Health and with the greatly appreciated assistance of the L.C.C. medical services, of the Medical Research Council, and of most of the health organizations of the kingdom.

### MIRACLES OF SCIENCE.

From diverse sources, says *The Times*, come proofs of fresh extension of the power of science for the betterment of human life. Most striking is the account of the new drugs which have effected cures of a dread disease, pneumococcal meningitis, from which recovery has been hitherto almost or altogether unknown. In the full sense of the word this may be called a miracle. Though there was good reason to believe that the sulphanilamide group, to which these preparations belong, had valuable properties for destruction of noxious germs, the exact mode of its operation in the body is unknown. Their success, however, is established, and we have further demonstration that the family of compounds to which they belong is efficacious in the treatment of that destructive scourge, puerperal fever, and other dangerous diseases.

A correspondent of the same journal writes: "The new drug which (as you reported) holds out the promise of remedying that dreaded disease pneumococcal meningitis is called 'M and B 693' because its inventor discovered it after 692 previous attempts to obtain a chemical compound of the precise molecular structure desired. 'M and B' are the initials not of the inventor but of the Thames-side firm of the manufacturing chemists in whose laboratories the research work was carried out. This numerical method of nomenclature was introduced many years ago by two eminent pioneers in the realm of biochemistry, one of them the German Erlich and the other the Japanese Hata, who, working in consort, produced '606,' otherwise known as salvarsan, after 605 negative experiments. The point at which the inventor of the drug '693' started was the product which is known for short as sulphanilamide. This drug has been remarkably successful in the treatment of diseases due to a certain type of streptococcus, notably puerperal fever, but by changing the molecular structure of sulphanilamide in a definite way the inventor of '693' has succeeded in producing a product which is antagonistic to the germ which causes pneumococcal meningitis."

### TREATMENT OF PNEUMONIA.

The new preparation, "M and B 693," which, as stated above, has given good results in the treatment of some cases of pneumonia, has now been made generally available for the treatment of pneumococcal infections.

### THE HEALTH OF LONDON BUSMEN.

An interesting interim report has been issued on the series of conferences which are being held to investigate the effect of working conditions on the health of London busmen. The conferences were arranged in consequence of allegations made by the London omnibus men during the stoppage in 1937.

Those taking part in them consist of two representatives each of the Medical Research Council, the London Passenger Transport Board, and the Transport and General Workers Union. The report makes the positive statement that omnibus drivers and conductors are more prone to gastric sickness than similar workers on tramcars.

In support of this opinion the report draws attention to an investigation made into the sickness experience of London transport workers, with special reference to digestive disturbances, carried out by Dr. Bradford Hill on behalf of the Industrial Research Board.

This inquiry concluded that in 1933-35 the omnibus drivers had a relative excess of gastric sickness (in proportion to all sicknesses) of 12-14 per cent. over the figure shown by tramcar drivers, while omnibus conductors had a similar excess of 15-18 per cent. over tramcar conductors. Expressed in a different way, one day in 6½ total days of sickness recorded by the two groups of omnibus workers

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