

REVIEWS

The Question of Establishing United Nations Research Laboratories. U.N. Dept. of Social Affairs, Lake Success. 1949. (Available from H.M.S.O.) Pp. 290. (10s.)

In October, 1946, the French delegation to the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. submitted a draft resolution which pointed out that a number of research activities can only be carried out in an efficient manner on an international scale, and suggested that an inquiry should be made into the problem of establishing U.N. research laboratories. Accordingly the Secretary-General sent out several hundred letters to various organizations and prominent scientists seeking their opinions on the general principle of U.N. research laboratories.

This report contains a summary of the opinions given (28 pages) and annexes containing individual memoranda and reports (257 pages). In brief, there was a widespread opinion that it would be proper for the U.N. to establish research laboratories and that astronomy, meteorology, geophysics, infectious diseases, nutrition (especially in relation to agriculture), and the social sciences (especially social psychology), among others, would be proper activities for such international laboratories. Although the principle has been widely accepted as sound, many practical difficulties confront those who would attempt to set up such international laboratories and some of these are set out in the annexes. The problem of finding suitable staffs would be very difficult, especially in view of the fact that in all countries of the world national and university laboratories suffer from a scarcity of trained and experienced research workers. If U.N. laboratories are set up, it is clear that they must be on a small scale if they are not to reduce seriously the efficiency of other organizations. At the start it might be proper for a large proportion of their time and resources to be devoted to the training of research workers and thereby to the creation of their own special staffs. A large research programme without a corresponding teaching and

training programme could only further disturb the balance between the demand and the supply of trained scientists.
R. Passmore

Mongolism (Peristatic Amentia). By M. ENGLER, M.D. 1949. John Wright, Bristol. Pp. 208+viii, 28 plates, 12 figs., 24 tables. (21s.)

Perhaps the most interesting and useful part of this monograph is that containing the author's own observations on the physical and mental peculiarities of his mongolian patients. This is supplemented by a comprehensive review of the pathology of the condition, collected from the literature, and lavishly illustrated by photographs, figures and tables. In addition, the author has tried to produce a summary of all that has been published on the subject, and an attempt to show that there can be only *one* explanation. The italics are his. His aetiological chapter is the least satisfying. He passes in review all the hitherto suggested theories of causation, and shows that they rest on very flimsy foundations. He accepts the high correlation between incidence and advanced age in the mother, and produces additional evidence from his own cases. His conclusion is that mongolian idiocy is produced by the implantation of a normal ovum in a diseased uterine mucosa. This seems to be little more than another way of saying that the older the mother, the more likely is the child to be a mongol. It would be better to say frankly that the aetiology is unknown.

Dr. Engler regards the traditional appellation, mongolian idiot, as incorrect and misleading, and unworthy of our race, and suggests "peristatic amentia". By peristasis, he understands the total of all harmful factors acting on the ovary and the uterus. A new name would have a much greater chance of acceptance if it were more colourful and less suggestive of an unproven aetiological theory.

B. Woolf

Owing to the steadily increasing cost of production, it has been found necessary to raise the price of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL MEDICINE, beginning with the first issue of 1950. The yearly subscription will then be 30s. (U.S.A. 5 dollars). Single copies remaining at 7s. 6d. each.

INDEX TO VOLUME III

- ABO incompatibility and Rh immunization (R. H. Malone), 228
- Allometric growth, relativity of, 169
- ASHER, C., and ROBERTS, J. A. F.: A study on birth-weight and intelligence, 56
- BECK, I. F., *see* BROWNE, R. C., BECK, I. F., and McCALLUM, R. I.
- Biological factors affecting family size (F. A. E. Crew), 1
- Birmingham, city wards, social grading of, 217
- , stillbirth rates in, 192
- , housing statistics in, 218
- , malformations of the central nervous system in, 193
- , survey of the chronic sick in, 110
- Birth, injury at, mortality amongst babies from, 85
- Birthweight and intelligence (C. Asher and J. A. F. Roberts), 56
- BOOK REVIEWS:
- BOURDILLON, R. B., and others: Studies in air hygiene (M.R.C. special report No. 262), 146
- ENGLER, M.: Mongolism (Peristatic amentia), 1949, 230
- HOOKE, J. N.: Women's occupations through seven decades, 1947, 144
- MASSEY, A., ed.: Modern trends in public health, 1949, 143
- P.E.P.: Population policy in Great Britain, 1948, 42
- TURNER, A. E., STIRRAT, T. A., and FERGUSON, T.: Haven products: a Scottish experiment in the employment of severely disabled men, 1948, 145
- U.N. DEPT. OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS: The question of establishing United Nations research laboratories, 1949, 230
- WELLCOME HISTORICAL MEDICAL MUSEUM: Catalogue of exhibition commemorating the bicentenary of Edward Jenner, 1949, 146
- BROWNE, R. C., BECK, I. F., and McCALLUM, R. I.: Social medicine: a study of the first hundred patients of a university department of industrial health, 77
- Brucellosis in man, from milk, in Great Britain, 49
- CAWLEY, R. H., WATERHOUSE, J. A. H., and HOGBEN, H.: Studies on puberty. Part II. The pattern of differential growth, 157
- Central nervous system, congenital malformations of, Part I (R. G. Record and T. McKeown), 183
- , in Birmingham, 193
- , in Scotland, 186
- , and disability during pregnancy, 212
- Chronic sick, care of the, Part I, medical and nursing requirements (C. R. Lowe and T. McKeown), 110
- Coefficients, specific growth, 167
- Control charts for the standard mortality ratio (G. Herdan), 69
- CREW, F. A. E.: Biological factors affecting family size, 1
- DAHLBERG, G.: Mortality from tuberculosis, 220
- DELBUE, C., PASSMORE, R., THOMSON, J., and WATT, J. A.: Variations in energy expenditure during walking, 139
- Denmark, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 223
- Diet of students at Edinburgh University (A. H. Kitchin and others), 10
- Dimorphism, sexual, 176
- Diphtheria, from milk, in Great Britain, 52
- Disabled persons, efficiency of ex-miners disabled by pneumoconiosis in light industries in South Wales, 127
- Edinburgh University, diet of students at, 10
- Energy expenditure during walking, variations in, 139
- England and Wales, infant mortality rates in, 183
- , tuberculosis mortality rates in, 220, 223
- Enteric infections, from milk, in Great Britain, 51
- Ex-miners disabled by pneumoconiosis, a study of the efficiency of, in light industries in South Wales (J. A. P. Treasure), 127
- Family size, biological factors affecting, 1
- Fatigue in operational flying, visual tests of, 101
- Finland, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 223
- Flying, operational, fatigue in, visual tests of, 101
- Food poisoning, from milk, in Great Britain, 52
- France, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 224
- Germany, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 223
- Great Britain, milk-borne infections in, 45
- Growth, differential, pattern of, in puberty, 157
- HERDAN, G.: Control charts for the standard mortality ratio, 69
- Heteroplasia, sexual, 158
- HOGBEN, H., *see* CAWLEY, R. H., WATERHOUSE, J. A. H., and HOGBEN, H.
- Homoplasia, sexual, 158
- Industrial health, a university department of, the first hundred patients in, 77
- Infant mortality, from injury at birth, 85
- in Birmingham, 188
- rates, in England and Wales, 183
- in Scotland, 184
- Infections, milk-borne, in Great Britain, 45
- Intelligence and birthweight, 56
- Italy, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 224
- KITCHIN, A. H., PASSMORE, R., PYKE, M., and WARNOCK, G. M.: Studies of the diet of students at Edinburgh University, 10
- KNOWELDEN, J.: Mortality from rheumatic heart disease in children and young adults in England and Wales, 29
- LOWE, C. R., and McKEOWN, T.: The care of the chronic sick. I. Medical and nursing requirements, 110
- McCALLUM, R. I., *see* BROWNE, R. C., BECK, I. F., and McCALLUM, R. I.
- McKEOWN, T., *see* LOWE, C. R., and McKEOWN, T.
- , *see* RECORD, R. G., and McKEOWN, T.
- Malformations, congenital, of the central nervous system, 183
- , in Birmingham, 187
- , in Scotland, 186
- , and disability during pregnancy, 212
- MALONE, R. H.: ABO incompatibility between husband and wife and its relation to Rh immunization, 228
- Milk-borne infections in Great Britain (W. Savage), 45

- Milk products, infection from, in Great Britain, 53
 Mortality amongst babies from injury at birth (W. T. Russell and I. Sutherland), 85
 —, from rheumatic heart disease in children and young adults in England and Wales (J. Knowelden), 29
 —, infant, rates for Birmingham, 188
 England and Wales, 183
 Scotland, 184
 —, ratio, standard, control charts for, 69
 —, tuberculosis, comparative national rates, 220
 Norway, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 222
 PASSMORE, R., *see* DELBUE, C., PASSMORE, R., THOMSON, J., and WATT, J. A.
 —, *see* KITCHIN, A. H., PASSMORE, R., PYKE, M., and WARNOCK, G. M.
 Pneumoconiosis, ex-miners disabled by, efficiency of, in light industries in South Wales, 127
 Pregnancy, disability during, and malformations of the central nervous system, 212
 Puberty, studies on, Part II (R. H. Cawley, J. A. H. Waterhouse, and H. Hogben), 157
 PYKE, M., *see* KITCHIN, A. H., PASSMORE, R., PYKE, M., and WARNOCK, G. M.
 RECORD, R. G., and MCKEOWN, T.: Congenital malformations of the central nervous system, 183
 REID, D. D.: Visual tests of fatigue in operational flying, 101
 Rh immunization and ABO incompatibility, 228
 Rheumatic heart disease, mortality from, in children and young adults in England and Wales, 29
 RUSSELL, W. T., and SUTHERLAND, I.: Mortality amongst babies from injury at birth, 85
 SAVAGE, W.: Milk-borne infections in Great Britain, 45
 Scotland, infant mortality rates in, 184, 186
 —, malformations of the central nervous system in, 191
 Social medicine: a study of the first hundred patients of a university department of industrial health, 77
 Specific growth coefficients, 167
 Standard Mortality Ratio, control charts for, 69
 Stillbirths, due to malformations of the central nervous system, 184, 192
 Streptococcal infections from milk, in Great Britain, 49
 SUTHERLAND, I., *see* RUSSELL, W. T., and SUTHERLAND, I.
 Sweden, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 222
 THOMSON, J., *see* DELBUE, C., PASSMORE, R., THOMSON, J., and WATT, J. A.
 TREASURE, J. A. P.: A study of the efficiency of groups of ex-miners disabled by pneumoconiosis in light industries in South Wales, 127
 Tuberculosis from milk, in Great Britain, 45
 — mortality, comparative national rates, 221
 Undulant fever, *see* Brucellosis
 United States of America, tuberculosis mortality rates in, 221, 224
 Variations in energy expenditure during walking (C. Delbue and others), 139
 Visual tests of fatigue in operational flying (D. D. Reid), 101
 Walking, energy expenditure during, variations in, 139
 WARNOCK, G. M., *see* KITCHIN, A. H., PASSMORE, R., PYKE, M., and WARNOCK, G. M.
 WATERHOUSE, J. A. H., *see* CAWLEY, R. H., WATERHOUSE, J. A. H., and HOGGEN, H.
 WATT, J. A., *see* DELBUE, C., PASSMORE, R., THOMSON, J., and WATT, J. A.

INDEX TO SUBJECTS OF ARTICLES ABSTRACTED

- Abnormalities, congenital, and maternal rubella, 148
 —, arising from maternal rubella, in children born in 1941, 147
 Abortion as a factor in sterility, 96
 —, criminal, 51 fatal cases of, in Rio de Janeiro, 235
 —, habitual, 149
 —, human, products of, 235
 Absence, sickness, due to peptic ulcers, 154
 Africans, malarial immunity in, 235
 Ageing and chronic sickness, problems of, 231
 Arabia, southwestern, epidemic typhus in, 232
 Cancer, mammary, human, a genetical study of, 95
 — of the breast, statistical report on 2,529 cases of, 95
 Cardiovascular rejectees, 151
 Childbearing in the twilight of the reproductive period, 96
 Childhood, rheumatic infection in, 43, 147
 Children, diabetes mellitus in, incidence of, 154
 Children's hostels in war and peace, 43
 Chronic sickness and ageing, problems of, 231
 DDT residual spraying, filariasis control by, 233
 Diabetes mellitus, etiology of, 154
 —, in children, incidence of, 154
 Diabetic clinic, a Scottish, survey of, 154
 Diet studies in pregnant patients, 149
 Diphtheria, recent trend of, in England and Wales, 98
 —, immunization, results of, with reference to the duration of immunity, 147
 Disabled persons, job performance of in industry, 98
 Dorset, poliomyelitis in, 1947, 233
 Dysentery, notified, enigma of, 233
 Eclampsia, incidence of, in wartime, 149
 Epilepsy, clinical and social problems of, 154
 Erythroblastosis fetalis in negroid infants, 150
 Filariasis control by DDT residual spraying, Saint Croix, Virgin Islands, 233
 Finland, female sterility in, 148
 Flying experience and morale, 151
 Food consumption in various camps of the U.S. Army, 232
 —, of soldiers in a subarctic climate, 232
 Growth failure in children living in an institution, socio-emotional factors accounting for, 97
 — of the pre-school child in London, 98
 Health of Towns Association in Great Britain, 1844-1849, 97
 Immunity, malarial, in Africans, 235

- Industry, physically impaired persons in, job performance of, 98
- Infancy, malarial immunity in Africans, effects of, 235
- Infant mortality, 153
- Infants, premature, physical and mental development of, 97
- Job performance of physically impaired persons in industry, 98
- Malarial immunity in Africans, 235
- Malformations, congenital, causes of, 235
- , effect of smallpox vaccination during pregnancy on incidence of, 234
- Marriages, sterile, statistics of, causes of error in, 148
- Maternal mortality in clinical obstetrics, 149
- Menstruation, early onset of, biological and clinical significance of, 150
- Mongolism, prenatal maternal factors in, 152
- Morale and flying experience, 151
- Mortality, infant, 153
- , maternal, in clinical obstetrics, 149
- , perinatal, observations on, 96
- , tuberculosis, in England and Wales, 153
- Neonatal death, statistics of stillbirth and, 43
- Neurosis in officers of the army and navy, forecasting the incidence of, 151
- Newfoundland, nutrition in, medical resurvey of, 1948, 231
- New Zealand, poliomyelitis in, 232
- Nuclear fission operations, public health problems in, 152
- Nutrition, in Newfoundland, medical resurvey of, 1948, 231
- , in pregnancy, 152
- Obstetrics, clinical, maternal mortality in, 149
- , social factors in, 234
- Penicillin in early syphilis, 150
- , syphilotherapy administered prior to pregnancy, 150
- Peptic ulcers, sickness absence due to, 154
- Perinatal mortality, 96
- Poliomyelitis and the social environment, 155
- , in Dorset, 1947, 233
- , in New Zealand, 232
- Pregnancy, nutrition in, 152
- , penicillin syphilotherapy administered prior to, 150
- Pregnancy, smallpox vaccination during, effect of, on incidence of congenital malformations, 234
- Pregnant patients, diet studies in, 149
- Psychology, social conflict and the challenge to, 43
- Public health problems in nuclear fission operations, 152
- Rheumatic infection in childhood, 147
- , the first ten years of, 43
- Rio de Janeiro, 51 cases of criminal abortion in, 235
- Rubella, maternal, and congenital defects, 148
- , congenital abnormalities arising from, in children born in 1941, 147
- Saint Croix, Virgin Islands, filariasis control by DDT residual spraying in, 233
- Smallpox vaccination during pregnancy, effect of, on the incidence of congenital malformations, 234
- Social aspects of venereal diseases, 96
- conflict and the challenge to psychology, 43
- factors in obstetrics, 234
- Socio-emotional factors accounting for growth failure in children living in an institution, 97
- Statistical report on 2,529 cases of cancer of the breast, 95
- Statistics of sterile marriages, causes of error in, 148
- , of stillbirth and early neonatal death, 43
- Sterile marriages, statistics of, causes of error in, 148
- Sterility, abortion as a factor in, 96
- , in Finnish women, 148
- Stillbirth and early neonatal death, statistics, 43
- Suicide, notes on, 99
- Syphilis, early, penicillin in, 150
- Syphilotherapy, penicillin, administered prior to pregnancy, 150
- Tuberculosis mortality in England and Wales, 153
- , survey of a suspected school group, 153
- , pulmonary, minimal; its significance in relation to the age of the patient, 147
- Typhus, epidemic, in southwestern Arabia, 232
- United States Army, food consumption in various camps of, 232
- Vaccination, Smallpox, effects of during pregnancy, 234
- Venereal diseases, medico-social aspect of, further observations on, 96

INDEX TO AUTHORS OF ARTICLES ABSTRACTED

- Allen, D. I., 232
- Ash, R., 43, 147
- Aykroyd, W. R., 231
- Baird, D., 234
- Barros, P., 235
- Beckette, E. S., 149
- Benda, C. E., 152
- Brown, H. W., 234
- Buckatzsch, M. M., 154
- Chang, R., 147
- Consolazione, F. C., 232
- Dancis, J., 234
- Davis, M. E., 96
- Dick, W. P., 153
- Dieckmann, W. J., 149
- Doll, R., 154
- Eaton, J. C., 154
- Felton, J. S., 98
- Fenn, G. K., 151
- Fitzpatrick, W. H., 232
- Forman, J. B., 149
- Fried, R., 97
- Galloway, T. McL., 148
- Garnham, P. C. C., 235
- Gilloran, I. L., 233
- Glen, A., 154

- Glover, J. A., 233
Gore, A. T., 98
Gorman, A. E., 152
Greenberg, M., 234
Grossnickle, K. B., 149
Guerrero, C. D., 148
Harnett, W. L., 95
Henderson, P., 154
Hertig, A. T., 149
Hill, A. B., 148, 155
Hill, A. J., 149
Hirschl, D., 97
Hobson, W., 152
Jolliffe, N., 231
Kaeser, O., 235
Karn, M. N., 95
Kerr, W. J., 151
Koehn, C. J., 232
Kohler, C. E., 233
Krugman, S., 234
Lautmann, —, 43
Levy, H., 97
Levy, R. L., 151
Lévy-Solal, M., 43
Lewis, F. J. W., 152
Litvak, A. M., 97
Lowry, O. H., 231
MacFarlane, W. V., 96
Mackenzie, H. J., 95
Martin, W. J., 98, 153, 155
Mastboom, J. L., 149
Mayer, M. F., 97
Mayer-Gross, W., 151
Meiller, E. J., 149
Merrell, M., 150
Money-Kyrle, R. E., 43
Moore, J. N. P., 151
Moore, P. E., 231
Munro, H. N., 154
Natrass, F. J., 154
Nobile, T., 96
O'Connor, W. A., 99
Osborn, J. J., 234
Palmer, W. T., 98
Paschla, G., 147
Paterson, R. G., 97
Patrick, P. R., 147
Penrose, L. S., 95
Petrie, P. W. R., 232
Pottinger, R. E., 149
Priddle, H. D., 149
Rider, R. V., 150
Roe, J. T. N., 153
Savage, L. J., 149
Schor, H. C., 232
Schumacher, E. M., 149
Sebrell, W. H., 231
Seski, A., 96
Shank, R. E., 231
Slater, P., 151
Stafford-Clark, D., 151
Stocks, P., 153
Straube, M. T., 149
Stroud, W. D., 151
Swain, H. L., 232
Thompson, A. W. S., 232
Thomson, A. P., 231
Tietze, K., 150
Tisdall, F. F., 231
Toth, F. M., 232
Tucker, H. A., 150
Turner, D. F., 149
Vácha, K., 96
Vehaskari, A., 148
Wall, R. L., 149
Ward, R. S., 234
Wexler, I. B., 150
White, P. D., 151
Wiener, A. S., 150
Wilder, R. M., 231
Williams, R. W., 234
Winnicott, D. W., 43
Wolfhagen, O., 149
Wolman, A., 152
Woodman, D., 152
Yankauer, A., 234
Zamecnik, P. C., 231

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