

MEDICINE

# Head Injuries at Birth Not Cause of Cerebral Palsy

## Abnormality Held Due to Factors Operating During Prenatal Period or Wasting Away of Parts of Brain

**A** NEW and optimistic picture of head injuries at birth was presented by Dr. M. Hines Roberts, Emory University School of Medicine, at the regional meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Edgewater Park, Miss.

Differing from some authorities, Dr. Roberts does not believe that cerebral palsy and similar abnormalities are due to injury of the baby's head during birth. He thinks the cause of these conditions is an abnormality in prenatal development or a wasting away of certain parts of the brain before birth. X-ray pictures of the brains of such patients show tremendous wasting or diminution in size of large areas of the brain, he said. Cerebral palsies rarely occur in Negroes, which might be explained by the fact that this race seems to possess a peculiar immunity to certain common abnormalities of development. This seems to support the view that cerebral palsies are due to developmental abnormalities and not to birth injury.

If a baby with intracranial injury at birth survives four days, his chances are good, Dr. Roberts declared. In a large group of such babies followed for from two to 15 years after birth, Dr. Roberts found that three-fourths of them had developed perfectly normally. Relatively few of the other one-fourth had true cerebral palsies.

*Science News Letter, March 23, 1940*

## Spastic Paralysis Operations

**O**PERATIONS in which nerves are cut, tendons lengthened or bones cut to help children with spastic paralysis were reported by Dr. Lawson Thornton, of Atlanta. This disabling condition, in which the child lacks normal control over his muscles, is, like cerebral palsy, believed by some to be a result of injury to the brain at birth.

Besides the surgical operations, Dr. Thornton stressed the importance of training the mind and will of these children to control the misbehaving muscles.

"The muscles are spastic," he ex-

plained, "either because there is an irritating stimulus in the brain, or that part of the brain that puts on the brakes or inhibits nerve stimulation is out of commission. This disturbance of muscle control must be counterbalanced by the will power, which means concentrated thought. Concentrated thought will in time become habit. Without help, a child would make little progress alone in developing along this line, but with careful training by a conscientious, painstaking teacher or parent, he can in time accomplish much."

*Science News Letter, March 23, 1940*

## From Page 182

Bowl region, who was a census enumerator back in 1920, wrote to Dr. Reed the other day. He said there are exactly three families actively engaged in farming in two whole counties that he could name. When census figures are in, it may be possible to rate the success of new cropping and regrassing schemes and soil conservation practice in Dust Bowl areas where the drifting soil is being stubbornly tamed again.

Over seven million people in the United States run an independent farming business, and there is a vast lot of usable information to be had by asking them about it. Who is growing what, and where? Which crops are profitable? Where are they profitable? Census figures will indicate these points.

Take flax, said Dr. Reed. There is possibility of flax coming back as a fiber. Experimentally, it is being grown in several states, including Georgia and California; and possibly it rates as a commercial crop in California. How new crops such as this are coming along will be checked up, by the census of United States farms.

"We hear a good deal about diversified farming in the South," he continued. "The census will show where gains are being made—which regions of the South now have more milk cows, more poultry, varied crops. That will interest manufacturers who make poultry supplies, and

farm tools, and other goods for which the new crops and stock—and increased income—suggest markets."

Part-time farming is an angle of American economy that Dr. Reed says is worth watching. He thinks the census may show a spread of part-time farming that is very significant.

"People started part-time farming as a depression stop-gap," he explained. "But once started, a good many suburban gardens have been kept up, and the suburban gardens ringing a city may prove to be one answer to America's question as to the future of agriculture. There has been a trend in recent years away from the farm, but part-time farming may reduce that trend."

Determined to get all possible facts about this country's food production, the Census Bureau has divided the United States into nine regions for agriculture fact-gathering. This, Dr. Reed explained, makes it possible to ask New England farmers about their own potatoes and cranberries and other products without bothering them to even look at questions on tung trees or oranges. Dividing the country nine ways, census takers plan to get specific information on such points as how Florida is doing with guavas, papayas, avocados; how the Southwest is doing with different kinds of cotton.

Health, as well as wealth, hinges on the census.

"Vital statistics," Dr. Reed puts it, "are like the reconnaissance wing of an army, pointing where to strike."

The tuberculosis curve, for example, has been down since 1900. Statistics have shown where the disease was most prevalent, and that helps in fighting it.

It is the cities and states, of course, that report births and deaths and causes of death to the Census Bureau. This reporting goes on regularly. But birth and disease and death trends are most significant when told in terms of rates—so many to the thousand or hundred thousand of the people. And that is where the 1940 census comes in. The new census will give the vital statisticians up-to-date figures showing, not merely the entire number of the population, but the numbers of people of different ages, in different states, in counties, and cities.

Life expectancy tables, figured from birth rates and trends, are the basis of life insurance. These figures are important, says Dr. Reed, to sixty-four million policy holders of life insurance and annuities.