

MEDICINE

# Measles Affects Eyes

Cataracts of a peculiar type and other congenital defects may occur in babies whose mothers have German measles during the first months of pregnancy.

► CATARACTS of a peculiar type and other congenital defects may occur in babies whose mothers have German measles during the first three months of pregnancy. Discovery of this new hazard to infant health was made by Australian medical scientists and has since been confirmed by American scientists.

First to report the matter was Dr. N. McA. Gregg of Australia, who recorded 78 cases of a new type of congenital cataract occurring in babies between December, 1939, and January, 1941. With few exceptions, the babies' mothers had suffered from German measles during the early stages of pregnancy. Most of the babies were small, undernourished and difficult to feed and 44 of them also were born with heart defects.

Because similar cases had occurred in South Australia, five medical scientists of the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science at Adelaide, Charles Swan, A. L. Tostevin, the late Brian Moore, Helen Mayo and G. H. Barham Black, investigated the matter under the auspices of the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council.

All physicians in South Australia were asked to send information about babies whose mothers had German measles or other illness with a rash during pregnancy. As many mothers as possible were interviewed. Information about the illness was obtained, to make certain whether it was German measles, and information about the babies' health was also obtained.

The mothers of 49 babies in this investigation suffered from German measles during pregnancy. In 31 of the babies congenital defects were found. These included cataract, deaf-mutism, heart disease, microcephaly (abnormal smallness of the head), and mental retardation. As the children develop, the doctors state, it is possible that other defects may become evident.

German measles is such a common disease that it is strange, the scientists point out, that congenital defects in offspring whose mothers suffered attacks during pregnancy have not been noted before. It may be, they suggest, that the virus which causes the disease has be-

come more virulent or undergone some more subtle change within the past few years.

The next step in dealing with the problem, they state, should be to isolate the germ that causes German measles with the object of preparing a vaccine against it. In the meanwhile they suggest studying the effects of giving convalescent serum to expectant mothers who have been exposed to German measles and also to all pregnant women who have not already had an attack of the disease.

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ETHNOLOGY

## Figure With Bell Is Modern Maori Art

*A letter to the Editor from Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter H. Buck), Director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii:*

► "ON THE front cover of SCIENCE NEWS LETTER of January 13, there is an excellent illustration of a Maori carved figure with a mouth opening that passes completely through the head and is capacious enough to permit of a bell being suspended from its palate. This unique figure is labeled as an 'Ancient God' (following U. S. Navy photo caption), and the text states that 'American archaeologists say that not much is known to science about these Maori images, and one archaeologist expressed concern that a modern dinner bell has been placed in such an archaeological treasure.' It is evident that the archaeologists consulted know nothing about modern Maori art which is to be expected as the subject does not fall within the field of archaeology.

"The explanation of the figure is as follows. To prevent the Maori craft of carving from dying out, the New Zealand government established a School of Maori Carving at Rotorua (not Rotarua) after 1920. The Maori students were selected from various tribes and they were taught not only to copy old models, but also to adapt the craft to the production of objects which would serve modern requirements. The carved figure in your illus-



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tration was made expressly for the bell which is more of an 'archaeological' object than the wooden stand. Thus, by no stretch of the imagination can the carving be regarded either as an 'archaeological treasure' or as an 'ancient god.' I knew the Maori villages at Rotorua very well indeed and the bell stand was not there when I left New Zealand in 1927. It must have been carved since then and it cannot be older than 17 years at the most.

"The Maoris do not mutilate ancient objects, but they can create new objects which retain the atmosphere of their ancient craft. The bell stand is a fine example of modern art and American archaeologists, as well as your reading public, may enjoy it for what it is without worrying about any additional unsolved mysteries."

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CHEMISTRY

## Bubbles of Carbon Dioxide Used in Floating Soap

► A NEW and very simple method for preparing floating soap is the subject of patent 2,371,175, granted to Charles W. Kelley of Duck Hill, Miss. Most floating soaps have air whipped into them, in larger or smaller bubbles; this requires special machinery. The present invention contemplates the use of bubbles of carbon dioxide. These are generated by the addition to the melted soap mass of a small quantity of sodium bicarbonate, which "fizzes" on contact with the soap's ordinary mildly acid constituents.

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