

MEDICINE

Mystery Ill Under Attack

► MS stands for multiple sclerosis. The letters could also stand for Mystery Sickness, because the disease is truly mysterious. It has baffled the medical profession for years.

Greatest immediate promise for helping victims of MS comes from the field of physical medicine, Dr. H. Houston Merritt, director of the Neurological Services of the New York Neurological Institute, declared.

This and other phases of the attack on MS were discussed by Dr. Merritt and Dr. Cornelius H. Traeger, medical director of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, as guests of Watson Davis, director of Science Service, on Adventures in Science, radio program presented under the auspices of Science Service over the Columbia Broadcasting System.

A healthy young man woke up one morning to see two tassels hanging from his window shade, two windows, two doorways. A blooming young office secretary found herself staggering and stumbling as she walked to work. Observers dismissed her as an alcoholic. A physical education instructor discovered her right arm was growing numb over night. In the course of a week she could no longer use it.

Those are some of the ways MS affects its victims. The exact cause of the condition is not known. The mechanics of it consist in destruction or dissolution of the myelin which sheathes nerves like the insulation on an electric wire. The myelin destruction is spotty. Many areas are scattered indiscriminately throughout the brain and spinal cord.

Without its insulating myelin, a nerve

cannot properly transmit impulses. If the impulses are stopped completely, paralysis of the part of the body served by the nerve results. If the impulses pass through the nerve in a feeble or changed way, parts of the body function in a disturbed fashion. The victim has speech defects, staggering gait, tremors, and so on.

MS strikes down young people usually between the ages of 20 and 40. Many of its victims face eventual immobility and helplessness which make them dependent on others for even the daily routine bodily functions.

New drugs, electrotherapy, physiotherapy and rehabilitation are now under trial as treatments for MS.

"The greatest immediate promise," Dr. Merritt said, "is in the field of physical medicine, whereby weakened muscles can be re-educated, muscle atrophy from disuse can be prevented, neuromuscular coordination can be restored and patients can frequently be made self-supporting for long periods.

"A young member of the society who was completely incapacitated is now an editor of a small town newspaper, drives his own car and is raising a family."

Science News Letter, January 15, 1949

CHEMISTRY

Patents on Shale-Oil Listed for Specialists

► SHALE-OIL patents issued by the U. S. Government, both to Americans and others up until 1945, are listed, illustrated and described in a new publication of the U. S. Bureau of Mines. The bulletin will be of particular value to scientists, inventors and industrialists seeking the answer of how to get from this mineral the gasoline, fuel oil and organic chemicals needed to supplement petroleum products.

The title of the bulletin is AN INDEX OF SHALE-OIL PATENTS. It was prepared by Dr. Simon Klosky, shale-oil chemist of the Bureau's staff. Copies may be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for 75 cents. It is not available from the Bureau. A companion volume of later patents will be ready in about a year.

The study made in compiling this publication has one special application to Bureau activities. In the Act of Congress, authorizing the construction and operation of demonstration plants to produce synthetic liquid fuels, the Secretary of the Interior is also authorized to acquire technical data, inventions . . . and other rights and licenses under patents granted by this or any other nation.

Science News Letter, January 15, 1949

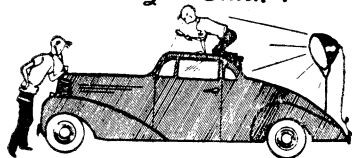
Science Service Radio

► LISTEN in to a discussion on "World Science" on "Adventures in Science" over the Columbia Broadcasting System at 3:15 p.m. EST, Saturday, Jan. 22. Dr. Jaime Torres Bodet, formerly foreign minister of Mexico, new director-general of UNESCO, and Frank J. Malina, aeronautical engineer on leave from the California Institute of Technology who is the American on the staff of the UNESCO natural sciences division, will be guests of Watson Davis, director of Science Service. They and other international specialists gathered in Paris will tell of the world-wide program of science being undertaken by UNESCO. The program will carry the first announcement of a new Arid Zone Institute being established to consider scientific problems of the deserts of the Near East. There will also be news of world conferences on the protection of nature and the conservation of natural resources to be held in the U. S. the coming summer.

Science News Letter, January 15, 1949

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