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PUBLIC HEALTH

Love of Pets Chief Obstacle In Conquest of Parrot Fever

Public Does Not Realize Danger and Ease of Acquiring Psittacosis Even From Birds Other Than Parrots

IGNORANCE of the danger and deep-rooted love for pets are standing in the way of the conquest of parrot fever. These two obstacles to control of the disease and prevention of future outbreaks were pointed out by Prof. K. F. Meyer of the Hooper Foundation, University of California, at the meeting of the American College of Physicians.

The public does not appreciate the possible danger of contact with birds, particularly birds of unknown origin, Prof. Meyer said in discussing the disease, which has been a constant menace since 1929 and which claimed ten victims in Pittsburgh last month.

Facts about parrot fever or psittacosis known by scientists but little known by the public were presented by Prof. Meyer as follows:

Actual contact with or possession of parakeets is not necessary to cause the disease. A brief visit in a room with birds or sojourn in a baggage car transporting birds may be followed by disease in persons susceptible to it.

Women are affected by the disease more frequently than men. This is partly because they are either engaged in breeding parakeets for a livelihood or because as lovers of pets they come more closely in contact with the birds.

Not only parrots and parakeets are susceptible to psittacosis, and consequently a possible danger, but also the canary, bullfinch, nonpareil, Java sparrow, cockateel, Bengalese, Pekin robin, and even the chicken.

Young birds are the chief danger as source of the disease. Mature birds, eight months or older, are much more resistant and are seldom if at all involved in human outbreaks. Over 70 per cent. or nearly three-fourths of human cases have been caused by newly acquired shell parakeets.

The disease may be acquired by direct contact through handling the body of a dead bird, by feathers, by excreta, by nasal discharge and through bite wounds. It may also be acquired from virus particles in the air. There is no doubt that droppings or nasal dis-

charges containing the disease-producing virus are readily scattered by the flying motions of the birds.

Psittacosis belongs to the class of filterable virus diseases. The specific causative agent consists of minute particles of living matter that can only be seen through a microscope and which are known as L. C. L. bodies or *Rickettsia psittaci*.

The disease has a high death rate, one out of every four or five cases ending fatally.

Commenting on the difficulty of control in spite of adequate scientific knowledge of it, Prof. Meyer said:

"The majority of bird breeders, pet-shop owners, lovers of birds and even veterinarians still doubt the existence of such a disease as psittacosis. Bird breeders and pet-shop owners whose parakeets have caused sickness and death still declare in 1934 that psittacosis is an imaginary malady and the publicity hysterical propaganda to injure their business."

Science News Letter, April 21, 1934

ETHNOLOGY

Navajos To Build Their Own Capital

NAVAJO Indians are to have their own capital at Window Rock, in Arizona. At the site, designated by Secretary of Interior Harold L. Ickes and Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, the government will construct administration buildings from which the Navajos will direct their own affairs.

Window Rock, a beautiful site in the rocky, colorful mesaland of Arizona, was selected by Commissioner Collier in council with tribal chairmen and a committee. It is accessible to all parts of the Navajo reservation.

The Navajos will hold their own assemblies and have a larger measure of self-rule than they have had since the coming of white men. Indians will build the structures for their capital.

Science News Letter, April 21, 1934