

MEDICINE

Grief Is Baldness Cause

► THE POPULAR notion that shock or sudden grief can cause baldness gets medical confirmation in a report from Dr. Charles L. Schmitt of Pittsburgh to the *Pennsylvania Medical Journal* (Nov.).

He reports 50 patients, many of whom lost not only all the hair on their heads but also eyebrows, eyelashes and underarm hair. In almost half the cases, 23 of the 50, there was a definite history of physical or emotional injury.

Typical was a well known American skin specialist serving with the Navy. He was riding in a speedboat that was struck by a tug and cut in half. He did not know the accident was about to happen and was completely surprised when he found himself under water. Exactly 18 days later when he awakened in the morning, he found practically all his hair on his pillow. Only an area about one inch wide at the outer edge of the scalp still had hair.

In about six months, without any special treatment, his hair came back in. Then a few years later, while skiing, he struck a

rock and was knocked unconscious. His hair fell out again 19 days later, in the same pattern, and regrew later.

Women and men are affected about equally, Dr. Schmitt's report shows. One of the female cases was that of a 22-year-old healthy young woman who, nine months after marrying a soldier in the Air Force, received word that he had been killed in action.

Two weeks later she had a nervous breakdown and lost all her hair. Her husband, however, had been taken prisoner. Soon after she learned this, he returned home and all her hair regrew.

She lost her hair again when mother-in-law difficulties occurred. When she moved into her own home a year later, her hair regrew again.

Some of the cases Dr. Schmitt reported were his own patients, some those of other doctors. Reports of such cases in medical journals heretofore, he found, had been few in number.

Science News Letter, December 5, 1953

MEDICINE

Help Cerebral Palsied

► HAND-OPERATED IRON lungs show promise of helping cerebral palsied children learn to talk, Dr. Robert Harrington, speech pathologist of the Orthopaedic Hospital, Los Angeles, reported at the United Cerebral Palsy convention in New York.

The cerebral palsied child has trouble talking because he cannot sustain a tone for even one second, whereas 10 seconds of sustained tone are necessary for intelligible speech.

Various methods, including automatic iron lungs such as help polio victims, have been tried unsuccessfully in the effort to teach the cerebral palsied breath control for speech. The automatic iron lungs failed because the palsied patients fought them instead of breathing with them.

The hand-operated iron lung, or respirator, can, however, be adapted to each patient's needs. It is used by an assistant or therapist and, with its aid, the patient is helped to develop more rhythmic breath control.

Dr. Harrington said this method has been used 90 times on patients between the ages of eight and 28. Results justify continuing the work, he said, although no conclusions as to its final value can be given now.

Promising eventual help to the cerebral palsied also were reports that many parts of the neuromuscular disorder have now been duplicated in monkeys, thus giving scientists a laboratory animal for study of the disease, and the finding of a new drug that can relieve muscle spasms in animals.

It is not yet ready for trial on patients, however.

The monkey research was done by Dr. Frederick A. Mettler, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York. The new drug, derived from beta erythroidine, was reported on by Prof. Stanley Tarbell of the University of Rochester, Rochester, N. Y.

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DERMATOLOGY

Freeze, Brush Off Acne Scars on Skin

► ACNE SCARS and other skin defects, such as smallpox and chicken pox scars, warts, calluses, tattoos and wrinkles, can be removed by a freezing and wire-brushing method devised by Dr. Abner Kurtin of New York.

Successful use of the method on 273 patients is reported by Dr. Kurtin in the *Archives of Dermatology and Syphilology*, published by the American Medical Association. Most of the patients have been followed for at least two years, and some for as long as four years, without recurrence of the defects.

After chilling, cleaning and freezing the skin with a chemical ice pack, alcohol and ethyl chloride, the skin is planed by a small brush made of stainless steel wire, each strand of which is slightly curved. The

brush is attached through a flexible hand piece and shaft to a mounted motor. The motor rotates 12,000 times a minute and is operated by a foot switch permitting variable speed controls.

Following abrasion, a piece of dry gauze is applied to the area. Dressings are changed daily, and complete healing usually occurs within a week.

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Airborne classes are a permanent feature of the *science curriculum* at the University of Paris; they have been found useful particularly in the fields of geography, geology, botany, archaeology and physics.

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