

MEDICINE

Can Help Mental Defects

➤ MANY CASES of mental retardation can now be prevented or treated, reports to the National Association for Retarded Children, New York, reveal.

There are 5,000,000 retarded persons in the United States today. These retarded persons are of two kinds, Dr. Richard Masland, assistant director of the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Blindness, said.

Some seem in many ways to be like normal individuals. They are borderline in their abilities. There is a strong possibility that something in the environment has kept them from utilizing their intellectual capacities.

The other group are those who have suffered from some damage or injury of the nervous system that has prevented the development of a normal intellect.

Some mental defects are inherited, but in some cases what is inherited is only a susceptibility to disease. When this is combined with unfavorable environmental factors, it may lead to overt symptoms. In this case, a control of the environmental factors may make it possible to prevent the mental disorders.

It has recently been discovered, Dr. Mas-

land reported, that some inherited diseases can be treated by special diet or management so that the individual can lead a perfectly normal life.

In some cases, mental retardation can be caused by what happens to the mother before the birth of the baby. German measles in the mother has been proved capable of producing severe maldevelopment of the child. Research is now in progress to discover what other virus diseases may have a similar bad effect on the mind of the unborn child.

Despite recent improvements in obstetrical care, some babies are still being injured at birth. Research is now going on with a view to reducing further these birth injuries.

Many of the diseases of infancy and childhood can also injure the young brain. A series of severe convulsions in infancy may, evidence suggests, lead to permanent damage of the nervous system. The development of more powerful anti-convulsant drugs and discovery of the mechanism responsible for such seizures gives encouragement that this cause of mental retardation may be controlled in future.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

Nobelists Talk Peace

➤ NOBELISTS, scientists among them, are united in desiring peace and they have about as many suggestions as to how to achieve world peace as there are individuals.

At the Jan. 11 American Nobel Anniversary Dinner and Forum the scientists expressed the same apprehension over the danger of H-bomb war that is felt by people generally. Most advocated an international stopping of nuclear bomb manufacture and testing.

Lord John Boyd Orr, the veteran Scottish food expert and 1949 peace Nobel, puts the blame on the failure to negotiate between the major nations. He suggested ten percent of the defense budgets of the major powers be put into a United Nations fund to aid the under-privileged countries.

Dr. Linus Pauling of the California Institute of Technology, 1954 chemistry Nobel, attributes the lack of progress toward peace to politicians who continue to live in an atmosphere of the 19th century.

A committee of UN experts was proposed by Dr. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, now of Woods Hole, Mass., who received while in Hungary the medicine and physiology prize in 1937. This committee would determine changes that would make existing economic and political structures compatible with the present status of science and how these changes could be achieved to increase confidence leading to peace.

The British philosopher, Lord Bertrand Russell, literature Nobel in 1950, in a

message urged secret top level meetings to find ways of peaceful coexistence and emphasized the need of attempts to diminish the dangers of a more or less inadvertent outbreak of nuclear warfare.

A message from Prof. W. R. Hess, Swiss Nobel in physiology and medicine in 1949, observed "What avails wishful thinking when stern reality is at the door?" and said "The organization of human society is basically a problem of biological order, the solution of which remains a psychological task and rests on a true knowledge of human nature as it is, and not as we would like it to be."

Sir C. V. Raman, of India, physics 1930, in a message said that "common people of all nations" must "assert themselves and resolve that in no circumstances would they be a party to the outbreak of war."

Prof. John H. Northrop, chemistry 1946, presently visiting professor of bacteriology, University of California, said in a message "Reason tells us that history repeats itself, and it is reasonable to suppose it will continue to do so. If this is true, then all attempts to maintain peace by agreement are doomed to failure, in the future as in the past."

Albert Einstein's statement to the dinner of 1945, reiterated this year, included: "... there is no escape into easy comforts, there is no distance ahead for proceeding little by little and delaying the necessary changes into an indefinite future, there is no time

left for petty bargaining. The situation calls for a courageous effort, for radical changes in our whole attitude, in the entire political concept."

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ANTHROPOLOGY

Rare Blood May Show Early Americans' Origin

➤ A BLOOD group so unusual that originally it was thought to be confined to the family of the man in whom it was first found and named after that family "Diego" may be used to throw new light on the origins of some of the early Americans.

New information about the distribution of the Diego blood group and of abnormal hemoglobin E is reported in *Nature* (Jan. 11). Hemoglobin E is one of the blood factors that contribute to the severe Mediterranean anemia.

Two reports contain the new information. One is submitted by Dr. M. J. Colbourne of the World Health Organization's Malaria Pilot Project, Kuching, Sarawak.

This report indicates that the Diego blood group and the abnormal blood factor E, although the first blood factors found to be characteristic of Mongoloid peoples, are absent among some people of Borneo.

The second report reveals that among one small isolated tribe of South American Indians there was found an unusually low incidence of the Diego blood group. It is generally frequent in both South American and North American Indians. This report was submitted by a team of scientists from the Municipal Blood Bank at Caracas, Venezuela. Members of this team are Drs. Miguel Layrisse, Tulio Arends and Johannes Wilbert.

Recent examination of blood samples from the Sea Dyak and Land Dyak peoples in Sarawak, northern Borneo, showed that the former had no Diego blood group and in the latter the group was present in only three out of 61 tested, Dr. Colbourne states.

Hemoglobin E, which is characteristic of the people of southeast Asia, does not occur in these Dyak peoples. All the Sea Dyaks and all but one of the Land Dyaks were found to have the normal adult hemoglobin A.

The reports indicate further study of these unusual blood characteristics may show where the earliest Americans came from and may even give scientists a sort of time table of which peoples migrated from some Mongoloid center first and which came later.

It is important, Dr. Colbourne says, that tests for the Diego blood group antigen be carried out on many more Asiatic and Pacific Island populations as well as on larger numbers of Eskimos from all parts of their territory.

Associated with Dr. Colbourne in the first report were Elizabeth W. Ikin and A. E. Mourant of Lister Institute, London, and Drs. H. Lehman and H. Thein of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

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