

PUBLIC HEALTH

Eradication of Syphilis Possible if Openness is Used

Battle Cry Against One of Three Major Causes of Death Sounded by a Leader of Public Health Officers

A BATTLE cry against one of the great killers of man, one of his most dangerous disease enemies, was sounded by Dr. Thomas Parran, Jr., New York State Health Commissioner, at the meeting of the American College of Physicians. It was a stirring "fight talk" from a leader to his captains in the war on disease.

This disease ranks with tuberculosis and cancer as a major cause of death. It causes untold misery; denies many married couples the privilege of parenthood; causes helpless, innocent children to be born blind or deaf; cripples and finally drives insane many of its luckless victims.

The name of this dastardly disease is syphilis, a word that many persons do not like to speak or print or read. Not so long ago there was the same feeling about cancer, tuberculosis, even appendixes and gall bladders. Yet these have become part of everyday speech. Syphilis must also be read about and heard about so that this deadly foe can be vanquished. Refusing to name the enemy ends in defeat, not conquest.

This disease enemy of the unmentionable name, syphilis, can be conquered, Dr. Parran told the physicians. The outlook for the control of syphilis is far more hopeful than for the control of cancer. It is far more hopeful than was the outlook for the control of tuberculosis thirty years ago.

"The practical control and even eradication of tuberculosis in this country is a goal clearly in sight," said Dr. Parran.

"Germ" is Known

By comparison, the job of controlling syphilis should be far quicker, it seems from what he told the doctors. For medical scientists know the "germ" that causes the disease. They can diagnose it as soon as the patient becomes infectious and dangerous to others. They have remedies which will quickly make the infectious patient non-infectious and prevent his giving the malady to others.

The big thing is to think of syphilis as a disease, to think of the person who has it as a sick person whose ailment is catching, but who can be treated so that in a short time he will not be in danger of giving the disease to anyone else. Another hopeful thing about this disease is that if discovered and treated thoroughly at the start, the damage it may do to body and brain and to future generations can be prevented.

Talking to the doctors, Dr. Parran described the splendid record of the Scandinavian countries where syphilis is now rare, and told how the United States could equal this record.

The first step is to have health departments with the cooperation of practicing physicians go after syphilis as they

would an epidemic of measles or smallpox. Report every case, although not necessarily by name. Investigate the source, that is, find out where the patient caught the disease, and what persons he has been in contact with since getting it. The contacts and the original source as well as the patient should be examined and treated, just as the cases of smallpox would be treated and the persons who had come in contact with the disease would be vaccinated, to protect themselves and the rest of the community.

To make this possible, there should be syphilis clinics in all centers of populations. At these clinics, with every provision for privacy, tests can be made to determine whether the patient has syphilis and treatment can be given if he cannot afford a private doctor.

Where these measures have been tried, as in the Scandinavian countries and more recently in Massachusetts and New York State, the syphilis situation has improved. The same can now be done in every state of the country.

"Available federal funds for social security make it possible," Dr. Parran said.

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PHYSICS

Einstein Refutes Attack On General Theory of Relativity

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PROBABLY no field in modern science is attacked more often than the General Theory of Relativity.

In a recent paper to the *Physical Review* (Feb. 1) Dr. Ludwik Silberstein of Toronto, Canada, using a method developed by the Italian mathematician Tullio Levi-Civita, solved the so-called gravitational equation of the General Theory of Relativity for empty space for the special case of symmetry. Dr. Silberstein claimed that the solution which he obtained is "regular," that is, all right, throughout all space except for two special fixed points called singular points. An idea of a singular point may be obtained by analogy with a line. In this case a singular point will be a break or a sharp corner in the line.

In the interpretation of his solution Dr. Silberstein took the two singular points to represent material particles and

reached the conclusion that the General Theory of Relativity predicts no mutual acceleration of the two particles. This, of course, is known to be wrong, as two material particles in free space will attract one another and move accordingly. It seemed therefore that the Theory of Relativity is incorrect.

In publishing their answer to this charge, Prof. Einstein and his young assistant, Dr. Nathan Rosen, say that, in the first place, it is not correct to represent a material particle by a singular point in the Field Theory of General Relativity as did Dr. Silberstein. This makes the latter's premise wrong. In the second place, even granting this premise, Prof. Einstein and Dr. Rosen show that in the solution of the gravitation equation there appear, in addition to the two singular points, other singularities. Therefore, the conclusions drawn by Dr. Silberstein can not, in any case, be made. These facts were pointed out by Prof. Einstein to Dr. Silberstein even