



Agriculture Celebrates

THE U. S. Department of Agriculture this week celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding. It came into existence during the stressful days of the Civil War, so that the first Secretary of Agriculture sat in the cabinet of President Lincoln.

From its very beginning, the Department has been an institution of research, its scientists seeking always for new facts, things, and above all for new basic principles, which may be applied through the workings of nature for the improvement of American living conditions.

A mere catalog of its accomplishments would take a thickish book, but a few sample highlights can serve to give an idea of the multiform and far-reaching importance which this department has come to have.

Defeating diseases in animals was an early triumph. Hog cholera has been checkmated, bovine tuberculosis is on the way out, rigid quarantine keeps hoof-and-mouth disease at bay beyond our borders.

One major medical principle, that insects and other small biting things can carry the germs of certain diseases, was first worked out as a veterinary prob-

lem in the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Its application to such scourges of humankind as malaria and yellow fever came later.

The earliest scientific work for agriculture, done long before there was a Department, was the importation of promising seeds and plants by Benjamin Franklin. The Department continues the tradition, searching everywhere for better crop plants and farm animals.

Improvement of what we have through Mendelian genetics is another major activity of Department of Agriculture scientists. This is something that lies very close to the heart of the present Secretary, for Henry Wallace's introduction of hybrid corn into large-scale cultivation while he was still an Iowa farmer-editor was in itself a revolutionary advance in American agriculture.

Science News Letter, November 20, 1937

MEDICINE

Fight Against Heart Disease Chiefly Afflicting Children

WITH less than \$30,000 a year the U. S. Public Health Service is trying to conquer a widespread, usually fatal and always costly heart ailment.

The ailment is rheumatic heart disease. It kills, according to estimates, between 25,000 and 30,000 persons every year. Nearly all of these victims are children or young men and women under 30 years of age. The death figures may be much higher and no one knows exactly how many children and young people throughout the country are living crippled, invalids' lives as a result of this heart ailment.

Heart disease of all forms causes about one-third of all deaths reported in the United States. The size of the problem and the fact that "not more than \$1,000,000 is invested in permanent endowment" for research into the causes and prevention of heart disease is pointed out in *Fortune* (November)

The U. S. Public Health Service has limited its attack on this huge problem to rheumatic heart disease, the kind of heart ailment that strikes down little children and young men and women just starting their careers, because, as Dr. Arthur M. Stimson who is directing the studies explained, this kind of heart disease is the most important from the public health viewpoint.

For one thing, rheumatic heart disease, of all heart ailments, is most costly to the community. It is a long drawn-out malady, which means the cost of treatment and care is high. The victims are chiefly among the poor, which means the community must bear the cost. Death comes at an age, usually before 30 years, so young that the individual cannot make any return to society for the money spent on him.

Measures for prevention and treatment, if discovered, could be applied more successfully in childhood than at later ages.

Still another reason for starting the attack on heart disease with studies of rheumatic heart disease is that most other heart ailments, syphilitic heart disease or heart disease due to thyroid gland disorder, for example, are linked with another disease or else, as in arteriosclerosis, are on the borderline between disease and old age.

No answer to the problem of rheumatic heart disease has yet been found, Dr. Stimson said. The cause has been laid to infection with streptococci, or with a virus; to allergy or hypersensitivity to germ poisons; to dietary lack; to poverty; to cold climate; to glandular disorders; and to disturbed metabolism. None of the theories has been proved correct. Without knowing the cause, treatment can only be to relieve pain and build up strength, and no preventive methods are available.

The problem is still in the fact-finding stage, and finding more and new facts about the disease is what the Public Health Service is at present trying to do. Dr. Stimson and associates at the National Institute of Health are mak-

● RADIO

No Program on Thursday, November 25, Thanksgiving Day.

December 2, 3:30 p. m., E.S.T.

KEEP WELL AT CHRISTMAS—Dr. John A. Skladowsky of the Baltimore Health Department.

In the Science Service series of radio discussions led by Watson Davis, Director, over the Columbia Broadcasting System.

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