

GENERAL SCIENCE

BW Charges "Absurd"

Australian epidemiologist, world authority on viruses, scores Communist claims of United Nations' use of bacteriological warfare in Korea.

► ONE OF the world's outstanding scientists, Australian Sir F. Macfarlane Burnet, has labeled Communist claims that the United Nations has engaged in bacteriological warfare in Korea as "absurd."

In an exclusive analysis for SCIENCE SERVICE of the latest so-called scientific inquiry into alleged BW incidents by a six-man "International Scientific Commission," Dr. Burnet said: "At once we come up against the most important feature of the whole propaganda, viz, that the technical evidence provided is completely irrelevant to the charges that germ warfare was used by UN forces."

Dr. Burnet, an epidemiologist, is an outstanding authority on viruses. He is director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne. Now visiting this country, he has just received the Lasker public health award and has given the second of the R. E. Dyer lectures, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. (See opposing page.) He has won world-wide renown for his work on infectious diseases.

Dr. Burnet said that the Communist charges are probably a "means of destroying the tradition in China that the United States has a special generosity and effectiveness in improving the health of the Chinese. There is nothing quite so mean and evil as this attempt by propaganda to destroy the effect of American attempts in the past to bring the benefits of modern medicine to China. The bringers of health are now branded as the disseminators of disease."

Dr. Burnet addressed his remarks particularly to the latest attempts to bolster the charges that the UN has used BW in Korea. This is a so-called "report of the International Scientific Commission for the investigation of the facts concerning bacterial warfare in Korea and China."

The "commission" consisted of six scientists, one of them a Russian, who went to China under the auspices of the World Peace Council. It sets forth their opinion—favorable—of the alleged evidence brought to them by Chinese and Koreans. An appendix sets forth purported statements by captured American fliers alleging that they had been taught BW methods and used them against the Koreans.

Dr. Burnet says of these latter: "They are not a matter of concern to an epidemiologist—perhaps they should be looked into by a psychologist."

Of the technical details in the statement, to which he confines himself, Dr. Burnet also says:

"The technique has been to seize on natural occurrences which can be observed and

appreciated by anyone, a swarm of insects on the ground, an outbreak of infectious disease in a village or some mortality from anthrax in a group of farms. These are without any basis whatever labeled as the result of enemy action and then subjected to more or less competent study by entomologists and bacteriologists. The scientists' findings as reported are just what one would expect from the study of such natural occurrences. To a large extent at least, they are probably correct statements of what was found, but they have no relevance whatever to the charges."

Pointing out that germs and bacteria would be mysterious to uneducated Asians, Dr. Burnet said it was revealing that the Chinese concentrated in their propaganda on insects as germ carriers. These, he said, could be dramatized to the Asians.

"Now the insects pictured as carriers of disease in the Communist publications are almost all types which have no conceivable relation to disease," Dr. Burnet declared. "But they are common types which are or could be made familiar to Korean and Chinese populations. It is utterly unthinkable that such insects would ever be seri-

ously considered by any bacteriologist as a medium of germ warfare. The claim that they were dropped by UN planes is absurd.

"Outbreaks of infectious disease in man and animals," Dr. Burnet concluded, "is an everyday occurrence in northeast Asia. There is nothing in the Communist propaganda to suggest that these were in any sense unusual. Again what is reported of the bacteriological findings is completely consistent with natural epidemic occurrences. It is evidence that has not the slightest bearing on the charges."

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MEDICINE

Dysentery Ameba Needs Bacterial Aid

► THE ONE-CELLED parasites called amebas, which cause amebic dysentery, were unable to destroy living cells when bacteria were absent, Dr. J. G. Shaffer of the Chicago Medical School reported.

Dr. Shaffer told the New York Academy of Sciences' Conference on Growth of Protozoa that he had succeeded in growing amebas in pure culture for the first time in medical history. Up to now, amebas could only be raised in the presence of bacteria or trypanosomes.

The pure cultures of amebas were grown on living chick embryos. Dr. Shaffer said he observed that although bacteria-free amebas were able to enter living cells, they caused no damage until bacteria were added.

Science News Letter, November 8, 1952



WORLD VIRUS AUTHORITY—Sir F. Macfarlane Burnet, Australian authority on virus diseases, at work in the laboratories of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Melbourne, of which he is director. He is best known for his work on the influenza virus.