

EDITORIAL

Encephalitis lethargica (Epidemic Encephalitis) is no respecter of countries or climates. The disease occurs in both sexes and at all ages. This disease has been in the minds of the public and the medical profession for over ten years. The cause of the malady still remains undetermined. Thousands of scientific papers and reports have been published concerning this disease during the past decade. Now comes "EPIDEMIC ENCEPHALITIS"¹ a survey of the disease made by the Matheson Commission. This Commission has taken, through the generous support of Dr. William J. Matheson, an inventory of what is now known concerning the etiology, treatment and epidemiology of the disease. A bibliography containing nearly five thousand references has been compiled, the data have been sifted, arranged in proper place and in sequence, and presented as a fundamental basis for future investigation. The Chairman of the Commission, Dr. William Darrach states:

"A great deal of work has been and is now being done throughout the world on the subject of encephalitis. It seemed worth while for someone to collect and tabulate this work so that the collection would be available to all who are interested. This idea so appealed to William J. Matheson that he generously undertook to make it possible. A Commission was appointed which would represent the laboratory, clinical and epidemiological viewpoints. The actual detailed work has been carried out by Dr. Josephine B. Neal, whose long experience in this and allied fields has preeminently fitted her for the position."

The Matheson Commission report gives a total of nearly 85,000 known cases or deaths between 1915 and 1928. The report shows the disease to have been prevalent from the Philippines to Finland and from Brazil to Russia. The disease is still present in most countries, and cases were recently proved at autopsy in Porto Rico.

There can be no doubt that many cases of epidemic encephalitis go undiagnosed. The actual total number of cases and deaths is probably much larger than given in this report. The writer knows of only three positive cases occurring in Porto Rico during the last few months but without doubt there are other cases in the Island.

¹ Epidemic Encephalitis. Columbia University Press, New York, 1929.

However the disease is definitely far more prevalent in temperate climates than in the tropics. Epidemic encephalitis is still another disease to add to the long list of maladies prevalent in both cold and warm countries.

It is to be hoped that the survey of the Matheson Commission will stimulate a new era of fruitful investigation concerning this disease.