

CEREBRO-SPINAL FEVER: A MEMORANDUM FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD *

OCCURRENCE OF THE DISEASE.

A memorandum of the first importance upon the incidence of cerebro-spinal fever, its clinical features, and the administrative action that should be taken against its spread, was issued on Wednesday morning by the Local Government Board to the medical officers of health and sanitary officers of this country. The memorandum has been prepared by Dr. Arthur Newsholme, medical officer of the Board, in view of the recent occurrence of the disease in various districts, and is a revision of the memorandum first issued by the Board in 1905 and re-issued in 1910. After a brief resume of the outbreaks of the disease at earlier dates, the memorandum continues:—

Incidence of the disease.—In this country seasonal incidence of the disease has not been marked, but there has been some increased prevalence of the disease in winter and still more in the spring. This has been much more marked in Continental and American experience. Amongst the civil population in this country and in such epidemics in other countries the majority of the cases have occurred in children. During 1912 there were notified in England and Wales 272 cases,¹ during 1913, 304 cases, and during 1914, 310 cases of this disease. It is possible that some of these cases were meningitis due to other micro-organisms than the meningococcus, and that some cases regarded as cerebro-spinal fever were poliomyelitis. On the other hand, it is not unlikely, in view of the difficulty of diagnosing sporadic cases, that unrecognized cases of cerebro-spinal fever may have occurred.

Clinical features of the disease.—The late Mr. Netten Radcliffe described cerebro-spinal fever as “an acute, epidemic disease, characterized by profound disturbance of the central nervous system, indicated at the onset chiefly by shivering, intense headache or vertigo, or both, and persistent vomiting; subsequently by delirium, often violent, alternating with somnolence or a state of apathy or stupor, an acutely painful condition with spasm—sometimes tetanoid—of certain groups of muscles, especially the posterior muscles of the neck, occasioning retraction of the head and an in-

* “The Lancet,” February 27, 1915.

¹ The disease was made notifiable for the entire country from Sept. 1st, 1912. Prior to this it had been notified in a number of sanitary areas.