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Centenary of Anæsthesia

On October 16, 1846, W. T. G. Morton, a dentist of Boston, Massachusetts, successfully administered ether to a printer named Gilbert Abbot during an operation, performed by J. C. Warren, for removal of a tumour from the neck; and this date has just been celebrated as the anniversary of the first practical application of anæsthesia for the purpose of abolishing pain during a surgical operation. An editorial article in the *British Medical Journal* (p. 546, Oct. 12, 1946), and six other articles in this issue, mark this centenary and give an epitome of our knowledge of anæsthetics. Dr. J. H. Burn and H. G. Epstein discuss theories of anæsthetic action, Dr. C. Langton Hewer discusses the remarkable recent advances in anæsthetic practice, A. C. King contributes an illustrated article on the history of anæsthetic apparatus, and Dr. E. Ashworth Underwood, director of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, discusses, in another illustrated article, the history of man's knowledge of the use of substances for the purpose of abolishing pain. This latter article, which is a valuable contribution to the history of medicine, begins with a reference to the neolithic age, when unknown substances may have been used for the purpose of abolishing pain during the operation of trephining the skull, which appears to have been performed quite often in those times. The controversies which raged around the work of Clarke, Wells, Morton, and the others, and their experiences with nitrous oxide and ether, are here discussed. Chloroform, first used by James Young Simpson in Edinburgh, came a year or so later. Thereafter, the stage was set for the remarkable subsequent development of what Sir William Osler has called "medicine's greatest single gift". These developments are the subject of an exhibition at the Wellcome Historical Museum, which was opened by Lord Moran on October 16.

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Research in Chronic Rheumatism

As a result of investigations begun so long ago as 1922, the Medical Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Health recommended in 1945 that a number of diagnostic and research centres should be established for the study of chronic rheumatism and for the improvement of existing facilities for diagnosis and treatment; and it was proposed that the special centres should be located in university medical schools and teaching hospitals, where resources are available for a combined attack on the disease in all its forms. A rheumatism centre of the kind envisaged by the Ministry is to be established at the University of Manchester, with the assistance of a grant from the Nuffield Foundation of £100,000 spread over ten years. In broad outline it is proposed to establish a diagnostic and research centre at the teaching hospital, the Manchester Royal Infirmary, to deal with short-stay in-patients and out-patients. For long-stay in-patients there will also be a clinic at a base hospital near the centre, provided by the Manchester Public Health Committee, and a second base hospital, the Devonshire Royal Hospital at Buxton. At the base hospitals lengthy investigations will be carried out, and problems of rehabilitation and resettlement will be studied. At the centre the work will cover two main fields: the clinical, sociological and industrial aspects of the disease, and the fundamental study of the disease process by pathological, bacteriological and biochemical methods. The clinical work will be under the direction of a physician who will have the full co-operation of the Departments of Orthopædics and Physiotherapy of the Manchester Royal Infirmary as well as of the University Dental School. The social aspects of the disease, and its industrial implications, will be studied in co-operation with the University Department of Industrial Health. Fundamental research into the causes of diseases of the bones and joints will be under the direction of a whole-time pathologist who is an expert in this field.

National Laboratories in India

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