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The American Association for the Advancement of Science:

On Poisons and Disease and Some Experiments with the Toxin of the Bacillus Tetani, II: DR. JOHN J. ABEL 121

Organized Industrial Research: DR. W. D. COOLIDGE 129

Obituary:

Memorial to the late Thomas William Salmon; Recent Deaths 131

Scientific Events:

Stratosphere Flights; The Second Joint Expedition of Yale University and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution; Award of the Gold Medal of the American Institute; Nomination of Officers for the American Institute of Electrical Engineers; Officers of the Washington Academy of Sciences; The Geological Society of America 132

Scientific Notes and News 135

Discussion:

Nomenclature for the Isotopes of Hydrogen (Proto- and Deuto-Hydrogen) and Their Compounds: PROFESSOR WILLIAM D. HARKINS. *Isotopic Nomenclature:* J. B. FICKLEN. *Reaction to Mosquito Bites Following Treatment for Cold in the Head:* PROFESSOR G. ALLEN MAIL. *Mortality among Tropical Fish:* J. I. SPIRA 138

The American Association for the Advancement of Science:

The Work of the Press: AUSTIN H. CLARK 141

Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:

Preparing and Stenciling Topogeologic Models: EDWARD J. FOYLES. *A Method for Concentrating and Fixing Free-living Protozoa on Cover Glasses:* J. T. BALDWIN, JR. 142

Special Articles:

The Incidence of the Protozoan Amoeba (Endamoeba Histolytica) in Freshmen and its Significance: PROFESSOR D. H. WENRICH, R. M. STABLER and J. H. ARNETT 143

Science News 5

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ON POISONS AND DISEASE AND SOME EXPERIMENTS WITH THE TOXIN OF THE BACILLUS TETANI.¹

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II

EXPERIMENTS WITH THE TOXIN OF THE BACILLUS TETANI²

I MAY now be permitted to give a brief account of some experiments with the causative principles of the disease known as tetanus or lockjaw, a truly frightful disease of the central nervous system terminating in exhausting and fatal convulsions. It is fortunately one of the rarer diseases of man, but in time of war and on certain occasions, such as Fourth of July celebrations, it occurs more frequently. It has long afflicted the race, and historians of medicine find it

described in the Hippocratic writings and other early sources of medical knowledge. Of all our domestic animals, the horse is more subject to it than we, and the loss of these animals from tetanus, more especially in tropical countries, is considerable.

Until 1884 the cause and true nature of the disease remained unknown. In that year two Italian investigators demonstrated the transmissibility of the disease to animals by injecting them with a little purulent material from a small lesion of an individual with a fatal attack of tetanus. In the years 1884-1890, bacteriologists definitely established the infective nature of the disease by isolating the causative organism in pure culture. One ordinarily speaks of this organism as the bacillus tetani, but it is known to the specialist as clostridium tetani, one of the family of

¹ Address of the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boston, December 27, 1933.

² This part of the address was not presented in its entirety.