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DIPHTHERIA IMMUNISATION

Reply to Dr. Turbott

Sir,—Dr. H. B. Turbott takes exception to an advertisement published by the Auckland branch of the British Union for Abolition of Vivisection. The advertisement was the society's answer to an advertisement issued by the Health Department on January 31, claiming complete safety and world-wide success of diphtheria immunisation for children. Dr. Turbott states that our advertisement is misleading, and our statements untrue. Let us examine the statements.

The Health Department advertised that wartime Britain had treated 4,000,000 children in three years; very few were upset for even a single day; not one mishap occurred in that huge number. In our advertisement, figures were given from the House of Commons showing that there had been 9500 cases during those three years, and at least 41 deaths in 1942 and 21 deaths in the first six months of 1943, in fully immunised children in Britain. Is the British Minister of Health wrong, or are these not mishaps?

We can substantiate our statement by other records of reactions and mishaps. Five doctors in the British Medical Journal, March 7, and 14, 1942, wrote on this question:

"There is little doubt, however, that a certain proportion of reactions do occur." In 1940, Dr. Tudor Lewis, deputy Medical Officer of Health for Croydon, admitted he had 35 mild and eight severe reactions.

Dr. Turbott says: "The statement that there has been loss of life is untrue in our time. There has been no trouble anywhere in the world with modern materials and techniques." We definitely challenge that statement. At Ring College, County Waterford, one girl died and a number of other children developed serious illness with tubercular symptoms, after inoculation against diphtheria, in 1937, not so long ago! On May 27, 1943, the case of a boy five-years-old was brought to the notice of the British House of Commons owing to severe reactions after immunisation by school authorities without parent's consent. On November 24, 1942, an inquest was held at Coventry concerning a child of five years, who died following inoculation against diphtheria. Failure of immunisation in a German town was reported in the *British Medical Journal*, June 25, 1938, Dr. Reinhardt admitting that 28 children in a convalescent home at Lubeck developed diphtheria though immunised under the best conditions.

Our own mail and personal contacts tell us that it is too sweeping a statement to say that in New Zealand thousands are being protected each year, without trouble of any kind. Statistics show that not more than 10 per cent of children ever contract diphtheria even in epidemics, so 90 per cent, in any case, are naturally immune. The latest figures published, 1941, show the total deaths for the whole of New Zealand to be 17, whereas deaths from cancer and heart disease run into thousands. On March 7, 1943, the

(continued on next page)