SESSION I

Accounts of outbreaks

Chairman: DR A. M. RAMSAY

Chairman's opening remarks

WE have chosen the term 'epidemic neuromyasthenia' for the subject of this Symposium mainly because it is a term that has been used in America for at least twenty years.

An alternative term is 'benign myalgic encephalomyelitis', although it contains two drawbacks. Firstly, in over 50% of cases there is no myalgia. Secondly, the term 'benign', while perfectly appropriate in that the condition does not as a rule prove fatal, hardly applies to those sufferers who are severely incapacitated by the disease, have to give up their occupations and live a very limited type of existence.

Two other terms that have been used in connexion with this disease are 'Royal Free disease' and 'Iceland disease'. Both those terms have the drawback of drawing attention to a particular location where an outbreak occurred. The fact that an outbreak occurred in the Royal Free Hospital, London, in 1955, seems to have prevented the realization that there have been many well documented outbreaks in various parts of the world.

Thus, one of my colleagues had never heard of the big outbreak that occurred in Adelaide, Australia, in 1949 (Pellew, 1951) or that Acheson (1959) had reviewed fourteen outbreaks. I think that this imperfect knowledge is general and this is the reason why we have decided that this morning's session should be devoted to a review of some of the clinical patterns that have emerged during the past 30 or 40 years and have been put on record.

No one knows these better than Dr Gordon Parish. He suffered from the disease himself, has done much research into it and, therefore, it is most appropriate that the initial paper should be given by him.

References

- ACHESON, E.D. (1959) The clinical syndrome variously called 'benign myalgic encephalomyelitis', 'Iceland disease', and 'epidemic neuromyasthenia'. *American Journal of Medicine*, 26, 569.
- PELLEW, R.A.A. (1951) A clinical description of a disease resembling poliomyelitis seen in Adelaide, 1949-51. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 1, 944.