

GERM WARFARE -- A Perversion of Science.

by AESCULAPIUS

An international team of scientists and lawyers who went recently to China and Korea found what they considered to be ample proof that the Americans had been engaging in germ warfare against the civilian population of those countries. The Americans have denied the accusation, but have refused to sign the undertaking already signed by all other nations except Japan, not to make use of this method of warfare. They have admitted that they are conducting research into germ warfare. Even if they have not yet actually used this method, therefore, they stand clearly identified with it in the eyes of the world.

The reason why germ warfare has been renounced by all nations except America is, firstly, that it is a completely indiscriminate, uncontrollable method of waging war. Germs cannot be trained to attack soldiers and leave civilians unharmed. On the contrary, a germ attack would most severely affect children, old people and those who are already in bad health. No more savage and cowardly method of attack could be imagined.

Another reason why germ warfare revolts the conscience of mankind is that it cynically abuses some of the most valued discoveries of science -- discoveries which have contributed perhaps more than any other to the well-being of mankind. In the past, each new step forward in the science of bacteriology has been a step towards human happiness. Now each of these discoveries is being monstrously perverted to a new form of barbarism.

The discovery by Pasteur and Lister of the role played by germs in causing disease and infection may be regarded as the beginning of modern medicine. It was this discovery which changed surgery from a desperate and perilous last resort to a safe, scientific process. This discovery, too, made it possible to tackle the causes of disease instead of merely the symptoms. Now this discovery has become the basis of a despicable form of warfare.

The discovery of the existence of germs was, of course,

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only the first step. The next stage was the discovery by Koch that germs could be cultivated in the laboratory. This was important for the study of germs and methods of combating them, and also for the production of vaccines. But today Koch's method is used to produce the germs required for the massacre of defenceless civilians.

The next important advance was the discovery of chemical substances which kill germs. Among the substances are the "sulfa" drugs, penicillin and all the other substances which have done so much for the relief of human suffering. One might think this discovery, at least, to be safe against misuse by the enemies of mankind. Unfortunately, it is not. One of the effects of the continual use of germ-killing drugs is to produce tougher germs -- germs which require larger doses of the drugs to kill them and even germs which are entirely immune. This presents a difficult problem to medical research. But the scientist's difficulty is the criminal's opportunity. By careful preparatory work with the life-saving drugs, the criminals are able to produce germs which will resist treatment with those drugs.

What is the explanation of this horrifying perversion of great scientific discoveries? Now and then we find conscience-stricken Americans or Englishmen suggesting that perhaps science is fundamentally a bad thing. Appalled by the crimes committed by scientists, they begin to wonder whether the remedy is not to call a halt to scientific development.

These people do not understand that science is merely a method, an instrument which society uses to pursue its chosen ends. In a society whose outlook and aims are perverted, a society which needs warfare and armaments to keep itself from collapse, science will become an instrument of terror and death. In a healthy and forward-looking society, science can do only good. The scientist is not free to choose what sort of work he will do. He must do the work which the community requires to be done, otherwise he will starve. The abolition of such savagery as germ warfare can, therefore, only come about through the abolition of the forces which are driving towards war. If the people of the world make it sufficiently clear that they have no use for this kind of barbarism, it will be within their power to put a stop to it.