



The South African Medical Journal

100 years ago: Johannesburg Jottings – From our own correspondent

The unfortunate visitation of Plague, which was first discovered on April 18th, is greatly to be regretted. The first cases occurred in the Coolie Location and this was isolated and a cordon drawn round it. A few cases have occurred elsewhere in Johannesburg and the Transvaal, and will probably continue to do so for some time, but the energetic measures adopted to combat the outbreak have had a very decided effect in checking the spread of the disease. In the unfortunate absence from work of the M.O.H., Dr. Porter, due to an attack of Enteric, Dr. Pakes, Government Bacteriologist, is doing the duties of that office. A Plague Hospital has been open at Rietfontein, and also a suspect camp. At Klipspruit a camp has been formed for the inhabitants of the Coolie Location. The Location is at the present time being burned down. Dr. Marais was one of the first to be attacked, with a fatal result. Mrs. Marais and her three children have since died of plague, the fourth child escaping infection. This almost complete wipe-out of the family of one of our confreres is indeed sad. Dr. Marais had been attending some cases of 'pneumonia' in the Location, which were doubtlessly plague, and thus got infected in the discharge of his professional duties. Cases have been reported from Germiston, Benoni and Pretoria, but the local authorities have taken such steps as to make it unlikely that any further spread will take place in these directions.

50 years ago

Many people eat mushrooms and other fungi for the pleasant relish they can add to a meal. Nearly 200 kinds of mushrooms and toadstools are reported as growing within 40 miles of Cape Town alone and of these about 60 are known to be edible.

Poisoning from the ingestion of mushrooms fortunately occurs very seldom. The doctor called in to deal with the emergency has to decide whether to empty the alimentary canal, whether to inject atropine, and whether to take action to prevent or check liver damage. It is important to know which fungus has been eaten; then from a knowledge of the poisonous principles present in that variety the correct therapeutic steps can be taken. The history, the time which elapses before symptoms appear, and the nature of the symptoms will aid in the establishment of a correct diagnosis.

Fungi are sought for food in certain countries with severe winters amongst religious sects where meat is forbidden... and by starving people, as during war. If used as the sole source of protein in the diet, 100 - 200 g dried mushroom a day would be necessary for the maintenance of nitrogen equilibrium. As a rule fungi are rich in ergosterol. They cannot be regarded as a good source of vitamins.