the year the ratio of terminations under the Act to live births was 1 to 20—an average of three terminations a fortnight per consultant gynaecologist. The report states that the special clinics set up to deal with drug addicts seem to have been successful in at least containing the problem of heroin. The total amount of heroin prescribed to addicts is gradually being reduced, and the number of new outpatients reported by clinics showed a steady decline during the year. Abuse of amphetamines and other “soft” drugs, on the other hand, is a growing problem. Admissions for alcoholism account for 3-7% of all psychiatric admissions, and this figure has more than doubled over ten years. Sir George’s comment that the public must be persuaded “to do without damaging but apparently attractive activities like cigarette-smoking or excessive use of alcohol” will be supported by all doctors.

Clearly the Health Department believes that if the nation’s health is to be improved unification of the N.H.S. must be achieved as soon as possible. Three developments are listed in the report as essentials. These are true partnership of general and specialist medical practice, organized vocational training, and the creation of “a cadre of trained medical administrators and planners.” We might add a fourth—a real increase in the proportion of the nation’s wealth spent on the N.H.S.

**Nobel Prizes**

This year’s Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine has been awarded jointly to Professor Max Delbruck, Dr. Alfred Hershey, and Professor Salvador Luria. Announcing the award, a spokesman of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm said that the trio’s work had resulted in a deeper insight into the nature of viruses and virus diseases, and had made possible the explosive development of molecular biology. Delbruck was trained in physics at Göttingen and in 1937 went to the U.S.A. In 1940 he teamed up with Luria, who had just arrived from Italy. Realizing that virus multiplication and its genetic control is a complex process, they decided to study intensively a relatively simple model system, the replication of T-even bacteriophages (T2, T4, and T6) in the bacterium *Escherichia coli*.

Between 1940 and 1945 Delbruck, Luria, and their colleagues established the main facts of virus replication in this system, including single-step growth curves and factors controlling different stages of virus development and cell lysis. They made use of mutant viruses and host cells in the analysis, and their work provided the model for many later investigations of virus genetics and recombination.

The work of Delbruck and Luria exploited mainly biological techniques, but it attracted the attention of Hershey, a microbiological chemist. Collaboration was soon established, and a school termed the “phage group” grew up round the trio at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York. Much basic chemistry came out of the collaborative studies, including the fact that the phages consist almost entirely of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and protein. In 1952 Hershey and H. B. Chase were able to separate the function of these two major components, using a double labelling technique. Only the nucleic acid entered the bacterial cells, from which it was concluded that phage DNA carries the genetic information required for replication.

The elegant investigations of Delbruck, Luria, and Hershey stimulated much detailed work on the genetics and replication of DNA and RNA phages, and it has played a major part in the spectacular expansion of molecular biology during the past two decades. R. Dulbecco and others extended the phage approach to animal virus systems, and virology emerged as an important branch of microbiology.

**Lichen Planus**

This year is the centenary of the description of lichen planus by Erasmus Wilson, an event that has already been noted by the *British Journal of Dermatology.*

The contrast between the definite clinical appearance of the eruption and its mysterious aetiology is striking. Two causes proposed are an infection or a nervous disturbance. The occurrence of lesions in scratch marks could be held to favour infection. This (Köhnen’s) phenomenon is seen also in virus warts and in psoriasis, a disease which clinicians would be reluctant to account as contagious. There are reports of structures being seen in skin biopsies and interpreted as spirochaetes, bacteria, aggregations of virus, or actual virus particles; and of isolating a virus. On the other hand, L. Fry and M. Withers failed to culture virus or mycelplasma. Clinical evidence of contagion is scanty, but H. W. Barber believed that it was possible.

A nervous aetiologie is favoured by many dermatologists, who find that emotional stress is the only common preceding event, though P. D. Samman relegates this factor to a secondary role. A. Midana and F. Ormea believe that they have histological evidence of a primary neurogenic stimulus. Lichenoid eruptions occur as reactions to drugs—for example, meperidine and amphetamine—and by contact with developers for colour films. For the present it is probably better to regard lichen planus and lichenoid eruptions as a reaction pattern, with the classical disease occupying a special position as a possibly homogeneous entity of unproved aetiology.

Until the corticosteroid drugs were introduced there was no treatment that could be relied on. There is a natural tendency for the eruption to heal over the course of some months, but this is often accompanied by marked melain pigmentaion. Oral corticosteroids, or the fluorinated varieties used locally under Polynhene occlusion, can be expected to induce a remission, while hypertrophic lesions can be treated by injection into the lesion itself. For mouth