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What Medicine Knows To-Day

THE BUBONIC PLAGUE.

(Copyright, 1907, by J. W. Muller.)

This and the other articles to appear in this series have been prepared by specialists and medical men of wide reputation. Each contributor stands high in his field. Professional ethics prohibit them from attaching their names; but every statement is made with the highest authority.

The bubonic plague, which recently re-appeared upon the Pacific Coast, is an acute infectious disease caused by a minute organism called the bacillus pestis. The disease itself has been known since the time of the patriarchs, and one authority estimates that it has killed fully two billion human beings in the past 2,000 years, but it was not until 1894 that the organism was discovered.

The discovery was made simultaneously and independently by two noted pathologists, Kitasato and Yersin, and since then the latter has perfected an immunizing antitoxin. There is also a preventative vaccine of another sort. Both the antitoxin and the vaccine have been used extensively and with good results, but the bubonic remains a violent and virulent plague. It is epidemic in India year in and year out, and along the China coast, in Central Asia and in the East Indies and South Sea Islands it is ever present.

Bubonic is one of the most deadly maladies known. All authorities agree that the mortality is usually more than 50 per cent, and in exceptional cases it sometimes closely approaches 100 per cent. During the Hong Kong epidemic in 1894 nine-tenths of the Chinamen attacked did not recover. In India, despite the valiant efforts of the British doctors, the death rate is commonly from 60 to 80 per cent.

The symptoms which give the bubonic plague its name is the appearance of huge boils or buboes upon the neck and groin and under the arms of the patient. The period of incubation is from the three to seven days, and after that, for a day or two the patient has chills, fever, headaches, nausea, and a few other customary signs of an acute infection.

At the end of this time the buboes begin to appear and the patient grows very ill. If he is able to walk at all he staggers like a drunken man. His temperature rises to 104 degrees or higher and his pulse beats rapidly and strongly. His tongue is dry and yellow, and he can scarcely speak.

After the third day the temperature usually falls a bit, but it is only temporary. When it rises again it remains at 104 or 105 degrees for a week. During this period collapse and death often put an end to the patient's suffering. If he is fated to escape, his temperature gradually falls.

But even under the most favorable conditions the exhaustion following an attack is severe, and the patient may die suddenly of heart failure. Again, peritonitis may set in, or jaundice, or pneumonia, or the buboes may suppurate and form huge running sores. In any case, the disease is painful and dangerous, the death rate is high, and recovery is uncertain and slow.

There are a great many other forms of bubonic plague, but the one described is by far the most common. Nearly always there is some trouble

some complication. When this takes the form of lung infection the disease is sometimes called pneumonia plague. The investigations of the Japanese pathologists and of the British and Americans in India, the Philippines and along the China coast have proved beyond a doubt that bubonic is most commonly transmitted from man to man by rats. The large rats which infest all ships and seaports are very susceptible to the disease, and when it breaks out among them they die by the hundred thousands.

Even when human beings do not come into actual contact with these dead rodents they may be inoculated through the medium of flies, fleas and other insects. A special rat-flea called the pulex cheopis carries the germs from rat to man—upon its feet or in its jaws.

Bubonic plague is an extraordinarily infectious malady. The germs may enter the body through the lungs—in dust for instance—or by way of the mouth—in food that has been contaminated by fleas or flies. Some of the Japanese experts are of the opinion that the organisms may even enter through the skin. The most minute scratch or cut is sufficient to give them a lodgment and in a few hours they swarm in the blood.

In the tropics white men usually escape the bubonic for the simple reason that they live cleanly and take proper precautions against infection. In the native quarters of tropical towns, where rats are numerous and insects are legion, it often happens that two-thirds of the population is infected. Indeed, in India it has been found necessary at times to burn down whole towns before an epidemic could be got in hand.

Drugs are absolutely useless in the treatment of bubonic. When once a case develops, in fact, little can be done to halt or modify its course. But preventive measures are very often remarkably effective. They may be divided into two classes; those which contemplate the isolation of patients and the destruction of rats and insects, and those which involve the employment of the serum and vaccine mentioned above.

A rigid quarantine is necessary to keep patients from infecting other persons. All rats and other small animals must be killed, and efforts must be made to destroy all roaches, fleas, flies and bed bugs. The bodies of the dead must be burned, all sick-rooms must be disinfected with formaldehyde, and chloride of lime must be used lavishly in all drains.

The burial of any man dead of the plague is a crime against the human race. The body is alive with the organisms, and these will remain alive for an almost incredible period. Months afterward they may reach the surface of the ground and begin extensive journeyings—in the bodies of rats or upon the legs of insects. The result will inevitably be a fresh outbreak of the malady.

Even convalescents are extremely dangerous to the community. The Japanese investigators have found that a patient's blood swarms with plague germs for nearly a month after he has apparently recovered. It is obvious that he may thus unwittingly

infect all who come into contact with him.

Indeed, bubonic is such a virulent disease that, in the past, the military power has often had to come to the aid of those fighting it. Very often martial law alone can insure the proper destruction of corpses and the proper isolation of patients.

Yersin's anti-bubonic serum is made by inoculating healthy horses with virulent plague bacilli. The blood of the horses begins at once to combat these bacilli—by producing substances which paralyze them and neutralize their toxins, or poisons. By and by this blood is so full of these substances that plague bacilli cannot live in it. Then some of it is drawn from the horse's veins and injected into the veins of human patients. It retains its power of combatting the bacilli, and so confers immunity to the plague. Unfortunately this immunity is not permanent. Experiment tends to prove, in fact, that it lasts no longer than two weeks. Therefore, a man exposed to bubonic infection should be immunized anew every fortnight.

Haffkine's prophylactic plague fluid consists of a dead culture of dead bacilli. These bacilli, of course, are inert themselves, but their toxins, or poisons, are unaffected by the means employed to kill them. When a dose of the fluid is injected into a man's veins their toxins stimulate his blood to produce antitoxin, and the blood, after having produced enough to overcome the toxins, keeps on. The resulting surplus of antitoxin that may make harmless any bacilli that may wander in subsequently, and thus this man is rendered immune to the bubonic.

There is a difference of opinion as to how long this immunity lasts. In many cases, however, it undoubtedly lasts a good while—perhaps several months. In consequence Haffkine's fluid is extensively used in the tropics to immunize white men who are exposed to plague infection. Lord Curzon, when he was viceroy of India, submitted to inoculation, and thus set an example which bore good fruit.

It is probable that if all of the inhabitants of India, for instance, were thus immunized, the bubonic would soon die out. But the ignorant natives, like ignorant people everywhere else, are opposed to inoculation, and it is difficult to make them submit to it. In addition, the fluid is rather expensive and it would take a hundred thousand dollars to inoculate all the people in India within a reasonable time.

Besides that, there are very serious practical difficulties. For one thing, during a few days following inoculation the Haffkine fluid makes the person inoculated, more, instead of less susceptible to infection. For another thing, if it is employed after a person has become infected, but before the symptoms of the disease have developed, it is apt to produce a serious and perhaps fatal attack. Only with proper precautions is its use advisable.

Despite the popular idea, bubonic plague is not a malady peculiar to the tropics. During the middle ages it frequently ravaged Europe, and in recent years it has appeared in New York City, Bremen, Hamburg, Gilsow, San Francisco and other seaports of the temperate zone. It is most common in tropical countries because the people live with least regard for hygienic safety.

The present epidemic in India began in 1896. It spread rapidly in the United Provinces, Bengal and the Punjab, and by 1900 the number of deaths reached more than a million. From January to August, 1902, the mortality was 600,000. Since then it has been increasing rather than fall-

ing. In 1904, 838,010 deaths were reported, and in 1905 more than a million.

Rufus of Ephesus, a physician who lived long before the beginning of the Christian era, was the first skilled observer to describe the bubonic plague. A fragment of his work on the subject, still preserved, says that the malady in his time, was epidemic in Libya, Egypt and Syria. It raged in Africa for centuries, but as far as is known it did not reach Europe until the sixth century of our era.

When it once got a foothold it spread rapidly, and soon it began to have victims in all the cities of the continent. In the year 543 it killed 10,000 persons in Constantinople, and in 590 it raged in Rome. In the fourteenth century, under the name of the Black Death, it devastated the whole of Europe. There is some doubt as to whether all of the epidemics ascribed to the mysterious Black Death were really due to bubonic, but it is plain that most of them were.

In 1664 the great plague of London, when 70,000 persons out of a population of less than half a million died, according to some authorities the disease was introduced, by way of Holland, and the Levant. No doubt the active agents were ships' rats.

In modern times there have been many great epidemics. In 1803 Corsicans lost 150,000 of her people, and a year later there was another outbreak with a mortality of 110,000. The next year the bubonic appeared in the Balkans, and the ensuing epidemic continued for no less than 27 years. Meanwhile, the infection spread to Greece and Italy.

In 1877 a few cases were observed in Astrakhan, Russia. Within a few weeks there were thousands of cases and whole provinces were well nigh depopulated. This epidemic is thought to have been caused by fleas and other insects introduced from Persia. The number of deaths is not known, but it is thought that it reached 2,000,000.

In China the bubonic has been prevalent for at least 1,000 years. In the fourteenth century there was a terrible epidemic and millions died. It spread to all the islands of the China seas, and when the Japanese annexed Formosa they found many cases there.

CONFESSIONS TO SHOOTING.

Insurance Man Says He Plugged Negro Who Was Threatening His Life—Story of Negro Entirely Different.

Greensboro, Sept. 28.—An insurance man here by the name of W. H. Cable went into police headquarters yesterday and said that it was he who shot the negro Archie Williams Thursday night, at the same time telling his story of the affair, which is entirely different from that told by Williams. Cable says that he called at the house of a woman to see her about an insurance policy and was attacked by Williams, who followed him up the street and threatened to kill him if he could get out his knife. Cable broke loose and started to run up the street with the negro behind him, and he wheeled around and informed the negro if he approached farther he would shoot him. When the negro refused to stop Cable drew his pistol and put a bullet in the negro's hip. The negro's story of the shooting is that he was met on the street by two white men who asked him for some whiskey and when he replied that he was no blind tiger the men became angry and shot him. Cable was bound over to court for carrying concealed weapons. Just what will be the outcome of the affair cannot be said until Williams recovers sufficiently to come before the mayor for a preliminary hearing.

TALKS BY QUEEN CITY MEN

DANVILLE, VA., LEARNS OF B & L.

Messrs. D. A. Tompkins and S. Wittkowsky, on Special Invitation of Danville Commercial Association, Address Citizens of That Place on the Building Loan Association as it Works in Charlotte and North Carolina—Future of South Lies in Her Manufactures, Declares Mr. Tompkins—Many Courtesies Extended the Visiting Men by the People of Danville.

Special to The Observer.

Danville, Va., Sept. 28.—Messrs. D. A. Tompkins and S. Wittkowsky, of Charlotte, N. C., were guests here today of the Danville Commercial Association, which organization invited them here for the purpose of explaining the modus operandi of the building and loan association in Charlotte and other North Carolina towns in which they are interested and which has been operated with wonderful success. The visit of the Charlotte gentlemen was fraught with highly satisfactory results and they were voted many thanks by the commercial association and the citizens present at a mass meeting to-night, for the valuable information furnished and the suggestions they offered.

The Charlotte visitors arrived in the city early this morning and were driven about Danville by President A. B. Carrington and Secretary W. C. Rierman, and a special committee from the commercial association. To-night they were tendered a reception by the association at the House Rock Country Club, where an old-fashioned Virginia supper was served them. The supper was attended by twenty-five or thirty of the leading and most influential citizens of Danville.

MASS MEETING OF CITIZENS.

To-night a mass meeting of the citizens to hear addresses by Messrs. Tompkins and Wittkowsky on the building and loan project was held at the municipal hall and was attended by a representative gathering of citizens. President Carrington presided at the meeting and explained that its object was for the purpose of getting information regarding the formation of a building and loan association in Danville for the interest of all persons, both rich and poor, and especially for the working man. Former State Senator R. A. James, the editor and owner of The Danville Register, introduced Mr. D. A. Tompkins as "one of North Carolina's broadest and most liberal citizens and one of the capitalists of the South."

Mr. Tompkins spoke of the ups and downs of prosperity in the South and how this section had always in spite of handicaps worked out its own salvation. "The future of the South," he said, "lies in her manufacturing enterprises, which should be fostered and encouraged." Mr. Tompkins declared that the South needed desirable immigrants and that the way to get them and to keep them was to devise a plan whereby they could be their own home-owners and could therefore have an individual interest in the building of the cities in which they resided. He cited Philadelphia as one of the best examples where the working men owned their own homes and were law-abiding and respectable citizens.

B & L PROJECT OUTLINED.

In North Carolina, he said, has been remarkable and it had met with abundant success on all sides. Mr. Wittkowsky clearly and forcibly elucidated his ideas and at the conclusion of his address stated that he was open to any questions which might be asked him. Several in the audience questioned him regarding points that they had not fully understood.

At the close of the address a resolution was unanimously adopted that the commercial association of Danville endorse the building and loan project as outlined by the Charlotte visitors. A committee will be appointed to carry the resolution into effect.

Messrs. Tompkins and Wittkowsky were the recipients of many congratulations.

Missouri Railways Figure Losses of \$1,500,000 in Three Months.

St. Louis, Dispatch, 26th. Missouri railroads have lost \$1,500,000 in the last three months through the operation of the new two-cent passenger fare law, according to statements compiled by the officers of the various roads. With the issuing of these statements will come the announcement that the railroads will contest the further enforcement of the statute upon the ground that it is confiscatory.

The roads that have joined in fighting the measure are the Chicago & Alton, Missouri Pacific, the Washburn, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and several other trunk lines. Under an agreement with Attorney General Harloy the railroads were to reduce their rates in accordance with the requirements of the law and test the result before taking any action. They will now file a complaint with Federal Judge McPherson at Kansas City asking an injunction to restrain the State from further enforcing the measure.

Equitable Sermonets

Text: "For who hath despised the day of small things?"

—Zachariah 1:5.

It is a mistake to wait until you can carry a large policy before insuring your life. Begin by taking a small one with a moderate premium, increasing the amount as your income warrants it.

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