

looked in that direction, and there was a silence which was followed by a shower of bad language from those that were held responsible for the task. "You fools, hurry on; what are you gaping at?" A few more similar sharp exclamations made the men to advance. A sharper voice, more laboured, more anxious, and with a note of warning, "You know not what you are doing. Retreat, or there is danger." This encouraged the officers to hurry the men on. They mistook the warning of the unknown person for anxiety for the safety of the treasure. Men began to work hard, huge stones followed by huger ones were all removed in haste. A careful dome of pure brickwork making its appearance, the joy of the men saw no bounds. It was a matter of a few minutes. The massive dome crumbled down under the iron strokes of the miners, and an urn of brass, sealed with utmost caution, on which were carved cabalistic figures of rarest design and effect, came to view. Eight stalwart soldiers, picked up from various companies, were ordered forward to dislocate the urn and carry it to the open air. A thundering voice, full of despair, hatred, and a touch of malice, came ringing from the same corner: "You are intoxicated with your apparent success; you expect great things, but you will be rewarded with equivalent evil; do not disturb the tranquility of a priestly nation and the peace of this ancient land. Retire with contentment, and leave the urn in its place of safety."

This warm pathetic appeal fell foul on the multitude, and the coveted urn was carried away to a maidan, and a well-mounted guard formed a square around it. Officers of every grade and costume came cantering about in eager expectation; skilled artificers with their fiery tools stepped forward to commence their work. The lid was removed and below it there was a bright copper plate on which were engraved figures of hideous shape. Before one of the men could take his tool to the plate it disappeared, and a noise like that of thunder was heard, and the air was filled with an aroma sweet, yet sharp.

Once more from the corner the familiar voice was heard, now not one of command, nor of advice, but of despair and disgust, saying:—

"Reap, wretched people, the fruits of disobedience; and enjoy the gain earned by avarice. I pity the innocent scattered abroad in this vast continent who should now share with you. Fate, cruel fate, Narayana, Narayana.*

Out of an army of nearly 30,000 men, nearly 10,000 fell as if shot by hidden guns; their weapons, both of war and peace, fell to the ground. The mounted dropped like plumb-lead from their saddles. There was a groan of distress in every mouth, and there was a

sign of anguish in every face. They could not move; pain in every joint, excruciating pains, exasperated by the least movement. Oh, what voices of agony, what high fever!

The native soldiers ran mad in confusion, as some of them actually saw Egatha* appearing in the sky with an air of contempt and scorn and an attitude menacing cruelty; almost all the soldiers were attacked in turn. Mariatta thus having escaped from her long confinement, took her vengeance in every land and clime.†

In 1874 the devil dancers and magicians of Travancore spread the above story, which was listened to with credulity. Intoxicated with their easy success in duping the people, they enlarged their tale. They added that the goddess generally made her appearance at midnight, and knocked at the door three times, and everyone who heard the noise would succumb to the malady. There was a great concern and confusion among the people, and they ran to the magicians for advice and sympathy. They pretended to be equally anxious. They comforted them by saying that the disease was still at a distance from the place, and before long, in consultation with the demons below and the goddesses above, they would prescribe nostrums effective and healing.

After three days' pretended absence these savants assured the superstitious public that they had a message from above, and it ran as follows:—

"A black goat should be purchased. It must be killed between 12 and 1 at midnight in lamp-light in a closed room. The dung must be carefully removed and made into boluses. They should be dried in the midday sun. As soon as they hear that the goddess has made her appearance in the vicinity, the villagers should each take a bolus before they retire to bed. Even if the goddess should hammer at the door with vengeance there will be no danger, as the inmates had already been immuned against death and danger by the magical boluses."

Many were the goats that were sacrificed. The magicians made a lot of money. I was then a boy of about ten years, and was taken to one of the rooms where a slaughter of a black goat was arranged. As it was considered a bad omen if the goat bleats, every precaution was taken to gag its mouth. The ceremony was simple: a few mantrams and a stroke with a sharp knife finished the goat, and the prescribed caution was scrupulously kept in procuring the contents of the intestine.

I need not say that the dengue made its appearance in due time. Every one, immuned and non-immuned, suffered. I saw sometimes coolies in the streets dropping down without the least premonitory warning, the attacks were so sudden and sharp.

The dengue of Madras, as observed by me, can be divided under the following clinical headings:—

* Goddess presiding over epidemics.

† By the excavation to remove the urn.

* God of the Hindus.

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