

The Nursing of the Plague.

THE arrival home, during the past week, of a Sister of the Community of All Saints, who has taken an active part in organising the nursing of the plague hospitals in Bombay is a circumstance of unusual interest to those amongst us who have, for months past, followed the course of the epidemic, and noticed with regret the terrible lack of an efficiently-organised system of nursing, which the attempt to cope with the plague has revealed. It is not too much to say that, had it not been for the heroic initiative taken by the Sisters of this Community, the loss of life, owing to lack of nursing, would have been even more disastrous than it has been, and it is to be hoped that the silver lining to this dense cloud of horrible suffering still hovering over our Eastern empire, may be the attempt, upon the part of those responsible, to effect the thorough reorganisation of the nursing of the sick in India. Could this great reform be initiated with the direct personal sanction of the Queen-Empress, in commemoration of her Diamond Jubilee year, we believe that the humanising effects of such work would have almost illimitable results for good in the future.

The plague first appeared in the city of Bombay in September, 1896, and was preceded by an exodus of rats from the drains of the Port Trust Estate, near the docks, which we are told died in the houses from the lowest to the topmost floors, on the stairs, in the streets, on the roads, in the gulleys, in their holes in the streets and the walls, on the floors of houses, and even among the clothes lying on the floor—thousands being found dead in the granaries around and between the sacks of grain.

When the sewers became too loathsome even for the habitation of gutter rats, the time had come, we should imagine, for the municipal authorities even of an Eastern city to inquire into the cause. We believe that, upon examination, the drainage of the Port Trust Estate district was found to be in a most deplorable condition, the sewers being blocked with indescribable filth, and containing the accumulated refuse of a quarter of a century. No doubt, with our British love of cleanliness, we are apt to be somewhat intolerant of the Eastern standard of living; but the fact that the natives of India are housed worse than animals at home, calls surely for some effort for reform. Families and animals are herded together in one room, usually without a chimney, where the fuel is composed of the most filthy and unmentionable refuse, and where domestic decency does not exist; in fact, it is only surprising, considering the insanitary condition of Bombay, that the plague has not developed into an even more virulent

type. Religious fanaticism, and the intricacies of caste, are the true reasons for the primitive conditions of native life, and any action taken by the Government to alter these conditions, arouses the keenest apprehension upon the part of the natives.

As Lord Roberts states, after forty years' residence in India: "Cholera, fever, and other diseases, which carry off hundreds of thousands every year, are looked upon as a visitation of God, from which it is impossible, even were it not impious, to try to escape; and precautionary measures are viewed by the natives with aversion and indignation."

For instance, the Mohammedans have their burying grounds in the very centre of Bombay, and here plague-stricken corpses have been buried only three or four feet from the surface. An attempt upon the part of the authorities to insist upon the Mohammedans burying their dead in a different district has aroused the most bitter opposition on their part, to being separated in death from the bones of their forefathers, even to the openly expressed desire to exterminate every Christian in the city. Again, the burial places of the Parsees, the Towers of Silence, are situated on the Malabar Hill, the aristocratic quarter of Bombay, where the dead are exposed as food for the vultures; and as these gruesome birds also defy all sanitary laws, they have been known to convey the half-stripped bones of those dead of the plague, whithersoever they will, even to the extent of dropping their ghastly burdens into the wells, from which the unwary may quench their thirst. The fact will thus be easily grasped that a native Municipal Council composed of men, whose religious scruples compel them to support these atrocities, was not a body in whose hands scientific control of the plague could be safely entrusted. This Municipal Council has proved itself most inefficient, and it is a matter for congratulation that the Government have at last supplemented its efforts by the appointment of a special Plague Committee, upon which Drs. Lowson and Reade have been appointed, to deal with the epidemic and to enforce segregation and treatment. The special plague hospitals in different parts of the city are expected to be nearly eighteen in number.

We have kept the readers of the *NURSING RECORD au courant* with the conditions of the nursing of the plague, and the devoted work of the Sisters of the All Saints' Community is therefore well known to them, but to hear the history of this terrible outbreak, from the lips of one who has taken a personal part in nursing it, brings home to us the horrors of the situation far more forcibly than any description by letter could do.

Imagine the scene which greeted these good.

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