

Medical Matters.

THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PLAGUE.

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UNDER this heading the London County Council has just published a very valuable little pamphlet. Considering how little is known on the subject in this country and how interest in the plague is deepened by its actual existence in Glasgow at present, the following extracts from the pamphlet in question will be doubtless read with much interest by nurses.

The term plague, in former days employed to designate almost any and every epidemic ailment, has in recent years come to mean a specific disease, caused by a definite bacillus, and characterised by signs and symptoms of pronounced clinical features. Of the several adjectives associated with the name "plague," "bubonic" is the one most frequently heard; but our increasing knowledge of plague has justified the recognition of a "pneumonic" and a "septicæmic," as well as a bubonic type, each possessing signs and symptoms of a sufficiently staple pathological character to justify their recognition as true varieties. The different varieties may be classified as follows:—

VARIETIES OF TYPE—CLINICAL.

Common to all varieties of plague there are certain signs, symptoms and post-mortem appearances. When, however, one special clinical feature predominates, it is usual to group the cases in which it occurs under one heading. This is convenient, and although the classification is for the most part based on clinical evidence merely, it serves further to draw attention to the many covert ways in which plague may appear, and the great difficulty in recognising its presence in every case, even when a fairly prevalent outbreak has taken place. In enumerating the types only the distinctive feature of each type is notified.

1. *Bubonic plague* is characterised by the development of a bubo or buboes during some period of the attack. It is by far the most common variety, buboes seldom occurring in less than 70 per cent. of the cases met with during an epidemic.

2. *Septicæmic Plague.*—No bubo occurs in this variety of the disease. During life the glands may be felt enlarged to a small extent in exposed parts, but post mortem examination

shows every gland to be swollen to some extent. Septicæmic plague is very fatal.

3. *Pneumonic Plague.*—As the name implies the lungs are primarily affected, and so far as can be elicited by clinical examination they are the only organs which develop definite lesions. The glands are not enlarged, nor are they found swollen after death. In some epidemics the pneumonic type of the disease is more prevalent than in others. Patients with plague pneumonia seldom recover.

4. *The Nervous Type.*—When delirium, mania, convulsive seizures, aimless wanderings, tremors, deafness, dumbness, etc., constitute prominent features of the attack, they are sometimes referred to as belonging to a nervous type of the disease. Convulsions in children and delirium in adults may usher in the disease. In children this is a fact to be remembered, as the convulsions may continue to occur and the child die before other symptoms suggesting plague have developed.

5. Such terms as *toxic* and *fulminant* as applied to plague, imply a rapidly fatal issue, the patient succumbing within 24 hours; so sudden is the onset and development that the system seems paralysed in its effort to attain a reaction; the pallor of the face, the prostration, the low temperature, and the feeble pulse would seem to indicate that the person attacked is struck down as if by severe shock.

6. Cases of plague are referred to a *puerperal* type, when abortion or miscarriage has occurred. Hæmorrhages from the uterus and appendages, occasionally occur independently of pregnancy. Women in the later stages of pregnancy abort when attacked by plague. After abortion due to plague few women recover.

7. *Pestis ambulans* indicates a mild type of the disease in which the patient may go about his ordinary duties. The buboes may give rise to no inconvenience and no feeling of illness. It is most commonly met in children. Several members of the household may be attacked severely by plague, but one child may escape with a painless swelling merely. This is a very dangerous type so far as infection is concerned and a careful watch must be kept on the possible development of such cases.

8. *Pestis minor*—What is termed the larval or abortive type of plague, but which is perhaps best designated *pestis minor*, is an interesting form of the disease from every point of view. During many epidemics of true plague

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