

The Suppression of the Bubonic Plague

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WMJ, March 1906; 612-613*

The following report, reprinted from the U.S. Consular Reports, is such a signal triumph for preventive medicine, and of such great interest the world over, that we publish it in full:

“For several years past the government of India and many of the physicians of that country have been trying to get the entire population of infected districts to submit to vaccine inoculation as a preventive of plague. At first there was but little, if any, real objection to it among the people, but just about the time it was needed the worst to stay the awful ravages of the plague, through the carelessness of some one, a lot of inoculated patients died of tetanus, and this gave it such a setback that for some time the people would have nothing to do with the remedy, and many even asserted that it was not a preventive. But since then the government has provided a specially instituted laboratory at Bombay, where this vaccine is prepared and where it is impossible to become contaminated with outside poison. Again strenuous efforts are being made to get the people to submit to inoculation, as from experience and results this seems to be the only remedy that in any manner diminishes the ravages of this disease.

Major Prall, the surgeon in charge of the medical corps during plague at this place, resorted entirely to the use of the vaccine virus in making a fight against the disease, and it is not too much to say that his efforts and that of his assistants have met with the most gratifying results. This experience will doubtless go far toward softening and clearing away the prejudice of the people of India against the inoculation theory, and will strengthen the inoculation campaign that is now going on for the suppression of the plague. Major Prall's report embraces three distinct communities. The first of these includes the general population of the Crater (old Aden) with its large proportion of coolies, earning from 6 to 10 annas (12 to 20 cents) per day, so poor and ignorant as to be beyond the control of ordinary sanitary measures. The people were induced to be inoculated by the offer of a reward, and between

the middle of December and the end of January 8,000 persons, representing one-half of the population, were inoculated. The results are best given in Major Prall's own words: “Within two months the deaths fell off nearly one-half, and within four months the plague had ceased, the last two months of its life being attended by an insignificant mortality.

CAMPAIGN OF INOCULATION

It is instructive and most convincing to examine the results of the inoculation campaign in the Crater upon the admission to the plague hospital. Between December 19 and April 30 there were 363 admissions with 163 deaths of uninoculated persons, and 21 admissions and 7 deaths of inoculated persons. Now one-half of the Crater population had been inoculated. Consequently if the vaccine exercised no protective effect, the ratio of cases among inoculated and uninoculated would have been equal. Instead we find that out of an inoculated population of 8,500, only 21 cases were treated, and of these 14 recovered.

In the case of the Aden prison the results are even more striking. The presence of infection was evident by the frequent discovery of dead rats. The only preventive measure adopted was the inoculation of all prisoners and wardens. Yet only 2 cases of plague developed. One was that of a man who declared that he had been inoculated, but probably had not; the other, through negligence was not inoculated until eleven days after admission and after he had developed plague.

Finally there was the Aden troop at Khore-Macksar, where the epidemic was arrested almost immediately by the adoption of systematic inoculation. The figures given in Major Prall's report by no means cover the entire plague reports of Aden during the time it was infected, but only two districts. The total number of plague cases reported for the whole locality embraced as Aden were 2,287 and 1,977 deaths, but throughout all the sections of the place inoculation was practiced by the doctors and nurses with the same good results as attended the efforts of Major Prall at the Crater.”

Wisconsin Medical Journal

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