

## CORRESPONDENCE.

*Written for this Paper.*

## THE BLACK DEATH.

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ALL China and the far east are much excited over the terrible plague which has recently broken out in the southern provinces of this empire. It originally came from the interior, but it has reached Canton and Hong

Kong, and the people are dying at the rate of hundreds per day. The big steamship lines which sail from China to Europe are now refusing to stop at Hong Kong, or to take passengers from South China, and the papers of the countries surrounding this part of the world are full of rumors and fears that the plague will be carried to Japan and elsewhere. So far the trans-Pacific steamers are making their regular voyages from San Francisco and Vancouver to Hong Kong and return, but the greatest care is being taken and every preventive is used to keep this terrible epidemic from being carried to America. The disease is practically an unknown one to the physicians of today, but it is said to be the same as that which devastated Europe during the middle ages and which was so awful in its ravages that it got the title of "the black death." It ran over Europe again and again from the sixth to the eighteenth centuries, and it is said to have caused more deaths than any of the great epidemics which human flesh has been heir to. It is the pest which Daniel Defoe describes in his story of the great plague of London of 1665 and 1666, and it has done terrible damage in Arabia and Persia within the past generation. It came a few years ago from China to southern Russia, and the czar stationed troops about the infected districts and in this way kept it from the rest of Europe. The plague that ravaged Europe in the fourteenth century came from China, and it has been known to have existed for some years past in one of the Chinese provinces above the Burmese frontier.

The black death broke out in Canton during the last week in February, and for a time the average of those who died from it was about two hundred per day. This average steadily increased, until in March and April it was five hundred per day, and the mortality at the present time is very large. It is said that the Pearl river, which flows past the city, and upon which hundreds of thousands of people live, contains many floating corpses, and that the undertaker are unable to make coffins enough

to supply the demand. In ordinary times the Chinese spend large sums upon their funerals, and they are more particular as to the styles of their burial caskets than they are as to those of their wedding beds. Coffins cost all the way from a few dollars up to thousands of dollars, and it is not an uncommon thing for a man to buy a coffin and keep it in his house for years, so as to have a first-class article on hand when he dies. Children often make their parents presents of coffins, and they have their mutual coffin supply association, somewhat like our building and loan associations, or like our mutual life insurance societies. Every member of such an association gets a coffin and burial clothes when he dies, and the not having these is considered a greater calamity than death itself. Today the dead in Canton are carted out and disposed of in all sorts of ways, and the greatest trouble is found in getting rid of them. Often the pall bearers who are paid to carry the coffins to the grave are stricken with the dread disease on the way, and of the four who start out with body only one or two return.

There are not coffins enough for the grown persons, and the children are being buried in baskets or wrapped up in pieces of matting. In some places the babies are not buried at all and the baby towers are full. These baby towers you find all over China. They are little buildings, with windows high up near the roof. The babies are laid on the windows and are pushed inside to decompose as they will. I saw, near Shanghai, the bodies of babies thrown out upon the roadside, and such corpses are often left by the poor for the dogs to eat. Today many of the dead at Canton have not a burial plot and their coffins are left on the top of the ground. This, in the case of such an infectious disease as the black plague, cannot but be of great danger to the rest of the people, and the plague is said to be steadily spreading over the surrounding country. Some of the coffins are hermetically sealed by varnishing them again and again with a sort of lacquer varnish, and as the wood is often four inches thick, in ordinary times they do not cause much trouble from their offensive smell. Now, however, the haste with which the dead are disposed of does not admit of such treatment, and the very air about Canton is laden with the pestilence. The richer Chinese of the city have been doing what they could to relieve the distress, and there are a number of charitable associations which are aiding in the disposal of the dead. At one dispensary alone 2,000 coffins have been given away, and it is estimated that up to this time 60,000 coffins have been furnished by such associations.

The sanitary board of Hong Kong visited the plague-stricken parts of Canton some weeks ago, and made a report on the disease and its symptoms. It comes upon one without warning in the shape of a fever, which raises the temperature of the patient in a short time to 104 degrees and upward. There is no chill and no other premonitory symptoms. The patient has a severe

headache, and he shows signs of stupor. After twelve hours the glands of the neck, the armpits or the groin begin to swell, and they soon become as big as a hen's egg. These swellings are hard and exceedingly tender, but they do not suppurate. In some cases a vomiting of blood occurs, and within a few hours the man dies. Some few recover after having been attacked, and if they can keep themselves alive for more than six days after their exposure there is a chance for them. The disease seems to be very infectious, and in those quarters where it is raging it has more than decimated the population. In one small street the sanitary board of Hong Kong found thirty deaths, and in another out of 170 people only forty have survived. At one of the gates of Canton a man took a box the other day and dropped a cash into it every time a coffin was carried out. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon he counted the cash and found he had 170 in the box.

The disease is very sudden in its attacks, and the only safety from it seems to be to get out of its range. For weeks the people have been flying from Canton, and a letter which I saw the other day states that every house seems to have its dead. A few days ago a thief entered a house in which the whole family had died of the plague, expecting to have an easy haul. He was stricken while in the act of robbing the dead, and a day or two later his body, with the booty upon it, was found lying in the house. A curious thing about the plague is that it affects some kinds of animals as well as men, and in Canton it attacked the rats of the city first. Dead rats were found in the drains of the infected quarters, and the rats ran from such places almost as fast as the human species. In every house where dead rats were found it was seen that the people had taken the black plague, and the sign of a dead rat will now cause a family to fly.

The Hong Kong doctors at first said that the disease was not of a parasitic nature, and that it could not be carried to any great distance; but this is thought by many to be a mistake, and it is now said that its germs can be transported in clothing and in other ways, and the Japan Mail is advising the most rigid sanitary precautions against all of the Hong Kong steamers. In one editorial it asserts that even a shotgun quarantine would be justifiable against it, and when it is remembered that every ten days a big steamship from Hong Kong lands at San Francisco and Vancouver it would seem advisable that the greatest care be taken to keep it out of America. It is thought here that the disease cannot get a firm hold of any quarter which has good sanitary arrangements, and so far, I believe, only Asiatics have been afflicted with it. It has attacked Hong Kong, and on the 15th of May thirty-four deaths were then reported. The Japanese papers had reports that there were one or two deaths in different parts of Japan, but these reports have since been denied. The Japanese are much better prepared to suppress such a plague, should it break out, than is China. They are the cleanliest people in the world in regard to their persons, and their towns and houses are models of neatness. China is the filthiest and nastiest country on the face of the globe and outside of the treaty ports there are,