

History of Smallpox.

WITHOUT referring to the early writings upon the subject of smallpox, from which, however, it is quite evident the disease prevailed in many parts of Asia and Africa long before the beginning of the Christian era, accompanied with miseries of the worst kind, we will pass on to the year 581 A.D., when the disease was epidemic in southern France and northern Italy, as described by Gregory of Tours, whence it spread rapidly in all directions, invading Iceland in 1341 A.D. During the wars of the Crusades, epidemics of the disease in a malignant form were numerous in different portions of Europe.

It was, perhaps, most widely distributed and malignant in form in Europe during the eighteenth century, when no country was free from the pestilence; at least a tenth of all the deaths occurring at that time being due to it. In France alone 30,000 died annually, and nearly a like number in the Kingdom of Russia. It was the common experience then as now (amongst the unvaccinated) that the disease was no respecter of persons—the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the suckling child and decrepit age, all the groups were called upon to offer victims to this moloch of disease. In all classes of society were found those seared, scarred or maimed for life as the result of it.

It is estimated that during this century only five out of every hundred persons went through life without being attacked by it. The estimated number of deaths in Europe from smallpox (Juncker) were 400,000, while the "Bills of Mortality" for London alone, from 1761 to 1800, show the deaths in that city from smallpox alone to have averaged each decade 19,425, and according to Lettsom, most children in that city had the disease before the seventh year of life.

Many lengthy tables could be given showing the number of deaths which happened yearly in the countries and cities of Europe during the latter portion of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth centuries before vaccination was introduced. They can be found in any standard work upon the subject and will not be given here, suffice to say that their correctness is unquestioned.