

INFLUENZA : ITS GENERAL FEATURES.*

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Mr. President and Gentlemen :

I TAKE it for granted that the committee, in asking me to open the discussion upon influenza, intended that I should limit myself to a general sketch of the subject ; and prompted by a desire to respect that wish, my paper has become suggestive rather than exhaustive.

Influenza, or the modern plague, as it is sometimes called, certainly is not a modern development. We have descriptions of it from the earliest times. For the past 300 years it has been epidemic in Europe about eight times in each century, and since the year 1173 it has been pandemic fifteen times.

It probably first appeared in America in 1627, when it visited the New England States, the West Indies, and South America. While a moderate temperature, with moisture, would appear to favor the spread of the disease, having become epidemic, it moves on independent of climate, season, or soil, travelling against as well as with the wind. The present epidemic appeared to originate in Bokhara in May, 1889, and reached New York in December of the same year ; since that time it has been more or less constantly with us during the colder months of the year.

For centuries, epidemic after epidemic passed over Europe without leaving any clue to its origin, or the way in which it was propagated. Many attributed it to meteorological conditions, despite the fact that these were different with each epidemic. Others traced it to a miasmatic material in the atmosphere ; but as the number of specific diseases increased and were more closely studied, it was noticed that, like them, the influenza travelled with a velocity that corresponded closely with the rapidity of travel. In Russia and Siberia it moved slowly, but as the network of railways was approached it spread more rapidly, and always along the lines of travel. Like smallpox and diphtheria, it was accompanied by complications and sequelæ which, in the case of these diseases,

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