Literature of the Plague.¹

IN the year 1884 the late Mr. Cornelius Walford issued for private circulation a small volume entitled *A Statistical Chronology of Plagues and Pestilences as affecting Human Life*. In the appendix, which consisted of a chronological list of all the known plagues that have visited the world, the author inserted the titles of several books that he had met with on the subject, and in acknowledging his indebtedness to previous authors, he used these words: "I have, too, paid very especial attention to the literature of the subject. This literature is very vast, far more so than could at first sight be supposed. The object of incorporating it in its proper place in the table is that future investigators may have the source of more extended information as to particular outbreaks than it is possible in the present paper to supply ready to hand. It is, however, far from complete even yet."

A copy of this work having come into my hands, I proceeded partly out of curiosity, and partly from a love of research work, to see if I could add to the materials Mr. Walford had collected.

I was profoundly ignorant of the subject at the time, and great was my astonishment to find that in a very few weeks I had a mass of literature under my hands such as I never dreamed of. Mr. Walford, indeed, had only touched the fringe of the subject, and I can safely echo his words, that those who have never studied it can have no idea of the extent and variety of the literature of the plague.

The material which I thus collected may be broadly divided into two parts: The one consisting of records, such as documents in corporation archives, some of which are reproduced in various county histories; letters and papers in the Record Office, and extracts from parish registers and churchwardens' books of accounts. The other part consisted of books and documents that have issued from the printing press from the year 1480 to the present time.

¹ Read before the Library Association (Annual Meeting) at Reading, September, 1890.

Interesting and valuable as a catalogue of the records of the plague would have been, to have brought such a work to a satisfactory conclusion would have meant years of labour and entailed great expense, the originals being scattered all over the country. I therefore decided to direct my whole attention to the bibliography of the plague on the lines laid down by Mr. Walford.

The limits of this paper will not allow me to give more than a sketch of the results of my labour ; but I hope it will be sufficient to show the vast and varied character of the literature of the plague, and also its importance to the student of English literature, to the historian, and to the antiquary.

I must first of all point out that the plague in England was not confined to the outbreak of the year 1665. A plague year, as it was called—that is, a year in which the plague was more severe than usual—was said to be due in England once every twenty years ; but statistics and records show that such outbreaks occurred at least every ten years, and that there was scarcely a year throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which the plague was not present in some part of the country.

The chief seaports, such as Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Kingston-upon-Hull, Chester, Bristol, Plymouth, Rye, Dover, and Sandwich, were more than once nearly depopulated through its ravages. The University towns, more especially Cambridge, were frequent and very heavy sufferers. Even remote country villages from time to time lost a great part of their inhabitants, entire families being carried off by the fell disease.

But the city which suffered most of all from the plague was the City of London. Its narrow streets and foul alleys, the large and congested population crowded within its walls, coupled with the almost total ignorance that prevailed concerning sanitary matters, made it at all times an easy prey to pestilential outbreaks.

From the time of the Black Death in the fourteenth century, until the Fire of London in 1666 burnt out the hotbeds of disease in the city, it may with truth be said that the plague never quitted its streets.

Now and again it was quiescent perhaps for five or six years, its victims being only a few score in the twelvemonth ; then it would break forth like a long-dormant volcano, sweeping through the length and breadth of the city and liberties, and slaying the terror-stricken citizens by tens of thousands.

At such times the sights which Pepys recorded during the summer and autumn of the year 1665 were common enough. The

"handwriting of death," as Dekker called it, was to be seen in every street, while the air resounded to the mournful tolling of church bells, and the cry of the bellman, "Bring out your dead!" The sittings of Convocation, Parliament, and the Law Courts were hastily broken up and adjourned. The Court fled to some more healthy spot, and all who could afford to do so followed its example. All amusements ceased, trade was paralyzed, and grass sprang up in what were wont to be the busiest thoroughfares.

Two fierce outbreaks occurred in London during the reign of Elizabeth, the first in the year 1562, by which 20,000 of the citizens are said to have perished. The second occurred thirty years later, by which 15,000 were swept away. The accession of James I. was marked by a terrible plague in London, the death-roll numbering nearly 40,000, and, strangely enough, the same dark herald proclaimed the accession of his son, and demanded a tribute from the Metropolis of 36,000 of its inhabitants.

Then followed the terrible outbreak of 1665, which, as regarded London, nearly equalled in magnitude the Black Death.

Such calamities as these, far-reaching in their results, and affecting even the laws and customs of the country, could not fail to influence its literature. Hence we find that from the year 1480 down to the year 1665, a constantly-growing number of books and other documents relating to it issued from the press. With the cessation of the plague the issue of this class of literature fell to a very low point. But in the year 1720, during the prevalence of the plague in the South of France, so great was the scare in this country, that the number of publications rose almost to the greatest height it had previously attained.

But the danger passed away, and since then the plague has served as a subject chiefly for the pens of doctors of medicine, antiquaries, and compilers of encyclopædias.

The bibliography of the plague may be classified as follows :

1. Proclamations and orders.
2. Medical works.
3. Theological works.
4. General literature, *i.e.*, ballads, broadsides, poems, pamphlets, tracts, and works of fiction.
5. Advertisements and bills of mortality.

I have put the proclamations and orders first, not because of their importance, but because they were issued at the very first whisper of an outbreak. Not only were there regal proclamations issued throughout the realm, but also municipal proclamations

promulgated in the various towns and cities by the commands of the corporations.

In addition to these, orders were issued by command of the Houses of Parliament and by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Unfortunately, this class of document was very quickly destroyed, and few copies of the originals are to be found now. Some are preserved in the collection of Mr. Humphrey Dyson, Clerk to the Parliament, and Public Notary of the City of London, which was published in the year 1618. They all relate to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the earliest being 1562. In the library of Queen's College, Oxford, are two volumes lettered "Proclamations 1500-1640," but there is nothing in them relative to the plague earlier than the eighteenth of Elizabeth. Happily, however, the text of many of the lost documents is preserved in the archives of the City of London and other large towns.

Stripped of their conventional and semi-legal language, there is a good deal to be learnt from these roughly-printed broadsides. They furnish the most conclusive evidence of the prevalence of the plague, when no other testimony is forthcoming; they reflect truthfully the panic that seized all classes, from the monarch on the throne downwards; and they record many strange customs that were in vogue at these times. And what a picture they present to us! Business, pleasure, even individual liberty, fell under the ban of proclamation.

They endeavoured to imprison the infected in their own houses. They forbade all fairs and closed all theatres, thus stopping trade and casting a darker gloom over the plague-stricken locality. They closed the Courts of Law and the Houses of Parliament, and forbade any access to the royal Court, unless the nature of the business brooked no denial. They appointed fast-days and days of thanksgiving.

These proclamations were supplemented by a book of orders, published by royal authority, in which the sanitary measures to be adopted in infected places were entered into more fully. The first edition, issued in the year 1577, bore this title:

Orders thoughte meete by Her Majestie and Her Privy Council, to be executed throughout the Counties of this Realme in such Townes, etc., as are or may be hereafter inflicted with the Plague. Imprinted at London by Christopher Barker. 4to (black letter).

I have not seen this edition of 1577. It is quoted by Mr. Walford, but he did not give the source of his information, and I have been unable to trace any earlier copy than that of the year 1592. These orders were, however, reprinted upon almost every recurrence

of the plague, and they were accompanied by certain advice of a medical character.

The medical works, indeed, constitute the largest, if not the most important, branch of plague literature.

There was an immense demand for these works. The sick were eager to be cured; the healthy were eager to avoid contagion. Doctors were few—so few, indeed, that during the great plague of 1665 there were only four certified physicians for the whole of London. Some fled, and others positively refused to visit infected houses. Quacks and charlatans were numerous enough, and Dr. Hodges in his *Loimologia* has left it on record that they caused almost as many deaths as the plague itself. But the number of qualified medical men was very small, and the people were thus driven to purchase medical writings.

Of these there was no lack. Every successive outbreak was accompanied by a host of such publications. Treatises written by eminent foreign physicians were translated into English and published over and over again. The most skilful physicians in this country, whether they remained at their posts or not, wrote similar works, and every empiric was ready with some "Remedy," "Preservative," or "Preventative," which was eagerly seized upon by the panic-stricken people.

Nor did the publication of this class of literature cease when the plague itself was a thing of the past. During the scare that occurred in this country in 1720, owing to the prevalence of the plague in Marseilles, the subject largely engaged the attention of medical writers, and it has continued to do so down to the present day.

Without attempting a criticism of the opinions and remedies contained in these medical writings, it may be interesting to notice the works that from time to time appear to have been especially popular.

The earliest printed book on the subject of the plague was a medical work. In the year 1480 appeared three small quarto volumes, one bearing the title:

A passing gode lityll boke, necessarye and behovefull agenst the Pestilence.

Who was the printer of this has never been ascertained. The title of the second was as follows:

Here begynneth a litle boke, the whiche traytied and reherced many gode thinges necessarye for the infirmitie and grete sekenesse called Pestilence, the whiche often times enfecteth us, made by the moost expert Doctor in Physike, Bisshop of Arusiens in the realme of Denmark.

This has been ascribed by Dibden to the press of Machlina, and in his edition of the *Typographical Antiquities* he gives an illustration of the type employed by the printer.

The third volume—the smallest of the three, consisting of only six leaves—bears the name of Wynkyn de Worde, and has this title:

Here begynneth a treatise against Pestylence, and of the infirmities.

There seems to be no doubt that each of these was a translation of the same work—a treatise by a certain Danish Bishop named Kamicus, of whom, however, nothing seems to be known at the present day. His work served as the basis of all the medical writings published in this country up till the middle of the following century. Thus one of the most popular works of the sixteenth century—Thomas Moulton's *Mirror or Glass of Helth, for every person to loke in that will kepe their bodye from the sykenesse of the Pestilence*—was nothing more than a compilation from various writers, more especially Kamicus. Nevertheless, it became popular, and was reprinted in 1540, 1541, 1545, 1550, and 1565.

A still more popular work was Thomas Phaer's *Regiment of Life, whereunto is added a treatise of the Pestilence*.

Watts, in his *Bibliotheca Britannica*, gives the first edition as published in the year 1544. The earliest in the Bodleian is dated 1545, and the earliest in the British Museum is that for the year 1553. Subsequent editions appeared in the years 1560, 1565, 1567, 1570, 1596, and 1600.

Its author was a man of considerable parts. He studied law, and wrote a book of precedents. He contributed to that notable work the *Mirror for Magistrates*; and when he finally adopted medicine as his profession, he wrote several valuable works in addition to the above.

I cannot turn away from the medical writers of the sixteenth century without a word or two about William Bulleyn.

In 1558 he published *A New Booke entituled the Gouvernement of Healthe. . . . Whereunto is added a sufferain Regiment against the Pestilence* (N.D., London, 8vo). The British Museum Library has no copy, but there is one in the Bodleian, and some account of the volume is given in Stephen's *Dictionary of National Biography*. A second edition appeared in 1595.

In the year 1564 he published another work, also in the form of a dialogue, entitled, *A dialogue, bothe pleasaunt and pietifull, wherein is a godlie regiment against the Fever Pestilence, with a consolation*

and comfort against death. Imprinted at London by John Kingston.
Small 8vo.

The first edition of this work is rare, only one copy—that in the Britwell Collection—being known. Other editions appeared in 1569, 1573, and 1578.

This book stands out from other medical writings of the period, its prescriptions being wrapped up in a mantle of humorous anecdote and sharp satire.

At the threshold of the seventeenth century stands the name of Thomas Lodge, poet and dramatist, as the author of a medical treatise on the plague—a work by no means the worst of its kind. But the principal writer during the severe outbreaks of 1603 and 1625 was Dr. Francis Hering, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. His *Certaine Rules, Directions, or Advertisements, etc.*, first published in 1603, contained much sound and practical advice regarding the cleansing of the streets and keeping the body free from contagion. To the work was appended "A Caveat to those that weare about their neckes impoisoned Amulets as a preservative from the plague." This caveat, or warning, he followed up the next year by *A Modest Defence of the Caveat given to the wearers of Amulettes*. This practice of wearing amulets was a very common one, and there doubtless should be other writings on the subject; but these are all I have been able to find, though Hering himself, in his *Modest Defence*, speaks of an ancient physician who had maintained his opinions by "public writing."

Of the Great Plague in London in 1665 Nathaniel Hodges' work is the most authentic history. It was first published in Latin in the year 1672, and afterwards translated by John Quiney, M.D., in the year 1720, under the title of *Loimologia*.

It is remarkable not only for its graphic account of the state of the city during that awful time, but for its medical notes, the result of daily contact with the infected; for its author was one of the four physicians appointed by the corporation to attend the sick, a duty which he discharged faithfully and fearlessly.

Dr. Mead's publication in 1720 gave rise to a considerable amount of controversy, his opinions being hotly assailed by a host of other writers, some of whom were medical men, like himself.

At the same time, the work had a large sale, no less than seven editions being printed in one year, and two others subsequently.

Since that time there have been many eminent writers upon this subject—witness the names of Bascome, Hird, Richardson, and Payne—but, naturally enough, their writings partake of a historical,

theoretical, and retrospective character. By the aid of modern science they strive to probe the causes and nature of that terrible epidemic; and assuredly their work is of the greatest value, for it will enable future generations to understand better the diseases which have periodically decimated nations.

Passing on to consider the theological branch of plague literature, we find it running the medical branch very close as regards the number of works issued.

Special prayers, compiled by the Archbishops, were printed by royal command, and circulated throughout the land. The sermons preached upon the appointed fast-days were duly printed, as well as others upon the same subject preached at other times. Earnest treatises were written by eminent divines, both orthodox and Non-conformist, and tracts of a controversial character had a large sale. Besides these, there were a host of minor works, issued with such fanciful titles as "Spiritual Preservatives" or "Divine Antidotes."

The sermons were long and heavy, and the treatises still longer and still heavier. The Divine Wrath theory was the keynote of them all. England's sins were likened to those of the children of Israel in the wilderness, when the Almighty smote them with pestilence, and 14,000 of them died. London was likened to the city of Nineveh in the days of Jonah the prophet. Before human efforts could avail to check the progress of the epidemic, there must be an entire renunciation of sin, and heartfelt repentance must take its place; then only would the plague cease. The people were exhorted to remember former judgments of a similar nature, and to look around them at the desolation on every side, and to amend their lives before it was too late. Such was the burden of the discourses delivered from the pulpit and the treatises displayed upon the book-stalls, with this difference—that the treatises were ten times the length of the sermons. Divided and subdivided into numerous headings, and plentifully garnished with quotations from Holy Writ, these works reached ponderous proportions, and it speaks well for the mental capabilities of the people that they should ever have found purchasers, much less readers. Some of these treatises bore strange and startling titles, as, for instance, *The Arke of Noah*, etc., by James Godskall, 1603; *Solomon's Pest House, or Tourne Royal*, etc., by J. D., 1625; *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, by T. Vincent, 1666.

In this division of plague literature occurs one of the rare instances of a work printed at a provincial press. It was entitled: *An Humilte to be used in the tyme of pestylence*, and was printed at the

press of John Oswen, at Worcester, in the year 1553. Its author, the famous Bishop Hooper, shortly afterwards suffered martyrdom at Oxford.

Here also is a work relating to a provincial plague. In the year 1636 there was a severe outbreak of plague in London, and the contagion was carried, probably by sea, to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where the mortality was so terrible that in a few months no less than six thousand of the inhabitants were swept away. In the following year Dr. Robert Jenison, who then held a living in the town, published a work with the following title: *Newcastle's Call to her Neighbour and Sister Townes and Cities throughout the land*, etc., etc., 1637.

It was a religious treatise of the class already mentioned, but it also contained an interesting narrative of the outbreak in the town, and several useful references to the plague in London in the year 1625.

Another form of religious publication popular in times of plague consisted of broadside sheets covered with prayers and mock prescriptions, and this brings me to the consideration of what is without doubt the most interesting branch of plague literature.

The voice that speaks through it out of the all-pervading gloom is no longer that of the physician, attempting to alleviate the suffering, nor that of the parson, speaking the last words of consolation to the dying, or solemn words of warning from the pulpit. It is the voice of the panic-stricken multitude as they fly hither and thither, seeking a place of refuge; and it speaks in ballad and broadside, in poem and tract, even in fictitious narrative, a grim and pathetic utterance, yet, so strong is human nature, not without a ring of humour in it.

An event so momentous as the plague was certain to become the theme of the ballad-maker. Unfortunately, this class of publication, like that of proclamations, was destroyed in large quantities, so that few have survived until the present day. Indeed, after most diligent search in our chief libraries and careful inquiry amongst those best acquainted with ballad-lore, only two plague ballads have I heard of. These, I believe, are in the possession of the Rev. J. W. Ebsworth, editor of the Ballad Society, but I have not seen them.

Happily, though the works themselves are for the most part gone, the titles of many of them are preserved in the registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers. Yet even these records are incomplete. In no instance is there any clue to the authorship of the ballads entered, and in very rare instances is there a note of the tunes to which they were set. Again, during the most deadly months

of some plague years, all entries in the registers entirely ceased, pointing to the probability that the Hall was shut up and the members of the guild dispersed in consequence of its violence. Nor did death spare the printers any more than other classes of the community, and many businesses changed hands at such times. It is therefore clear that, considerable as the number of entries of these plague ballads is, many more were probably published of which all record has perished. In the absence of the documents themselves, these titles afford the only index to the nature of those old plague ballads. They are twofold in character. Some are unmistakably plague ballads; others can only be so classed upon indirect evidence. For instance, in the year 1593 a license was granted to Thomas Creed, the printer, to publish a ballad entitled: *The Cuntreyman's sorrowe to see the tearme kept at Saint Albons.*

Now, in that year the plague was so severe in London that the Michaelmas Term had been adjourned to Saint Albans. It has already been mentioned that at such times the citizens hastily fled into the country, and it can readily be believed that they were anything but welcome visitors. The "Cuntreyman's Sorrowe," without doubt, arose from past experiences. He knew very well that, if the term was adjourned, the plague must be severe, and that an exodus of people from the city would immediately take place and spread the contagion far and wide. This, then, may safely be taken as a plague ballad. There are instances, however, in which the connection is more remote. Thus in 1583 two ballads were licensed entitled *Remember thy Ende*; and *A Passing Bell to Call us to minde*. The mournful character of these titles, coupled with the fact that the plague had been rife in various parts of England for some months, points to the probability of their having reference to it.

Amongst these extracts from the Stationers' registers will be found three of a unique character, referring to a plague in the city of Norwich in the year 1597, and they are the only instance of ballads relating to provincial plagues.

Of an entirely different character to the ballads just noticed were the old plague broadsides. The student of curious literature may go far before he discovers anything to equal them. Their grim woodcuts and ghastly borders, their doggerel verse, statistics of mortality, their prayers and mock prescriptions and medical remedies, have a fascination about them which it is difficult to resist. The few here noticed are preserved in the British Museum Library. How many more of these extraordinary productions are hidden away in the dusty corners of private libraries?

London's Lord have mercy upon us, etc., published in the year 1636, deserves notice for one or two reasons. To begin with, it is a very good specimen of old broadside literature, and then it has been partially reproduced in the Somers Tracts. Under the title was a woodcut representing a burial-ground outside the city, over which hovers the Angel of Death. In this burial-ground are two open graves, a corpse laid on the ground, and three figures kneeling in an attitude of prayer. In the foreground is what appears to be a coach conveying citizens from the city, but it may be intended for the dead-cart. Near by is a skeleton, holding in its hand an hour-glass. The centre of the sheet is filled up with a poem in rhyming couplets, in which reference is made to the plagues of 1625 and 1630, and to the price of hay in the preceding year, concluding with an exhortation to the citizens to forsake their sins. Beneath this is a lengthy prayer. The outer columns are filled with statistics of mortality in each of the five plagues referred to, and an approved medicine. The whole is surrounded by a black border, wherein are depicted skulls, crossbones, and winding-sheets. At the foot of the prayer are the words "Written by H.C.," but whether they refer to the prayers only or to the whole sheet there is no evidence to show. The initials have been said to stand for Humphrey Crouch, the ballad-maker, but upon this point considerable doubt exists.

This broadside was reprinted with some alterations during the Great Plague of 1665. For "five modern plagues" was substituted "~~seven~~ modern plagues," the sixth in the years 1637 and 1638, the seventh "this present yeare 1665."

In some copies both the poem and the prayer were omitted, but in others the poem was retained with a slight alteration of one line, which in the original ran thus :

"When sixe yeares since a little plague God sent ;"
altered in the 1665 copies to :

"Seventeen years since," etc.

The prayer, however, was generally omitted, its place being filled with additional statistics, a "Remedy," and a "Posset Drink."

The extracts given from this broadside in the Somers Tracts consist only of the statistics. No mention is made of the poem or the prayer, nor is there any hint given as to its authorship.

Amongst the broadsides of a religious character may here be noticed *London's Loud Cryes to the Lord by prayer*, printed in 1665, and remarkable for the more than usually gruesome character of the border that surrounded it. It was adorned with a woodcut similar to that described above, but with one or two additions.

Besides the coach in the foreground, is a sedan chair and two bearers, while in the top left-hand corner are the words, "O London, Repent, Repent." The body of the sheet is occupied with a very lengthy prayer, and statistics of the mortality in various preceding plagues.

But the plague did not serve as a theme only for the ballad-monger and compiler of broadsides. Poets and dramatists wrote of it. Thomas Nashe, usually a humorous writer, wrote in 1600 a play called *Summer's Last Will and Testament*; John Davies, of Hereford, whose lines have long since been consigned to oblivion, described the plague of 1603 in a poem called *The Triumph of Death* published in 1609, and dedicated to two ladies, the daughters of the Earl of Northumberland. The terrible outbreak in London in the year 1625 inspired Thomas Brewer to write his *London like Nineveh in Sackcloth*, and some of the best lines in that poem have been printed in the publications of the Chetham Society.

Another who sang of this mournful subject was John Taylor, the water-poet, to whose pen nothing seemed to come amiss. His descriptions are vigorous if his verse is rude, and his *Fearful Summer*, as he called it, published also in 1625, was sufficiently popular to call for a reprint during the outbreaks of 1636 and 1665. George Wither's *Britain's Remembrances*, 1628, also dealt with the outbreak of 1625, and is well known.

That so serious an event as the plague should have been used as a weapon of satire, or for wits to break their jests upon, might well seem incredible. But amongst the pamphlets and tracts which were issued at those seasons are several that show that such was the case. *The Plague at Westminster* was the title of a satirical pamphlet published during the Civil Wars and directed against the Rump, and it was not the only publication of the kind. At the end of Dekker's *Wonderful Year*, 1603, is a series of tales, designed, as the author tells us, to serve as a "mery epilogue to a dull play." These tales are of a ghastly character, and the humour that Dekker puts into the narration causes a shudder rather than a smile.

But perhaps the most extraordinary work to be met with in the literature of the plague is a little volume printed in 1637, and entitled *London's Vacation and the Countrey's Terme*, by H. C., and preserved in the British Museum. It consisted of a series of short tales or anecdotes in verse, and their character may very fairly be gathered from the following summary :

1. "The Relation of a man buried in S. Sepulchre's Churchyard."
2. "Of the manne that reviv'd again in St. George's Fields."
3. "A True Relation of certain men that rob'd a Hosiers shoppe"

in the new Towne, neare St. Martin's Lane, putting the man's goods into a coffin."

4. "Of three youngsters, that presumed to rob an orchard, and found themselves sick when the master of it came to them. With a moral."

5. "A Strange and true Report of a Gentleman, riding into the Country, finding himself not well, and what chanced to him on the way."

6. "Of one that lost in his Travel two bands wrapped in a napkin."

7. "Of one, that lay unburied four dayes, after he was dead, being of the sicknesse."

8. "The bellman's Call on Thursday morning."

9. "London's Lord Have mercy upon us."

J. P. Collier, who noticed this work in his *Bibliographical Account*, conjectured that the materials of it were hastily collected and hastily put together for the purpose of securing a temporary sale during the prevalence of infection. It was certainly a very curious production, and shows a good deal more humour than Dekker's *Wonderful Year*. It was preceded by a woodcut illustrating most of the scenes spoken of in the work. Collier put the authorship of this work down to Henry Climsell, who, he said, was a well-known writer of ballads in the reigns of James and Charles I. But if this be so, it is a very strange thing that not a single specimen of his work is to be met with in any of our large libraries. On the other hand, there are numbers of ballads, etc., preserved from the pen of Humphrey Crouch, and it is therefore much more probable that he was the author of *London's Vacation*.

The flight of the citizens and their treatment at the hands of the country, was a constant subject of attack and ridicule on the part of the pamphleteers. The departure of the clergy in particular was severely handled, and one of the tracts published during the Plague of 1665, entitled, *A Pulpit to be Let*, had a very large sale, and is referred to by several contemporary writers.

In fictitious narrative, Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* takes the first place. The work has been frequently reprinted, and is sufficiently well known to make any comment on it here unnecessary. One thing, however, must be said, and that is that its author must have been well acquainted with the literature of the plague. Harrison Ainsworth's *Old St. Paul's* is another work founded upon the plague.

Of recent writings upon this subject the most valuable and interesting are Cornelius Walford's *Statistical Chronology of Plagues and*

Pestilences, 1884; Dr. J. F. Payne's article "Plague" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; and Dr. Jessopp's article upon "The Black Death in East Anglia," published in the *Nineteenth Century* a few years back.

The remaining classes of plague literature—advertisements and bills of mortality—may be dismissed very briefly. Each carries its character written upon its face. The first plague advertisements appeared in the public prints in the year 1665. They were inserted in any part of the paper—very often as part of the news, as, for instance, in the case of Dr. Inard's advertisement, in the month of August. For the most part, these advertisements related to quack remedies, such as sixty years before Dekker had seen posted all over the town, "like a fencer's challenge." They were fantastic in title and exorbitant in price; and although their virtues were set forth at great length, they were unable in the end to save their authors from destruction. Some of these advertisements, however, will be found of more interest—such, for instance, as those relating to the publication of books, the shutting up of inns, and such-like.

Bills of mortality seem to have had their rise from the certificates of health forwarded by the chief magistrates of the principal towns to the Privy Council; and this practice is found in vogue as early as the reign of Henry VII. The printed bills of mortality were issued weekly by the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks. They consisted of a simple sheet, upon which was printed the names of the various diseases and the number of those that had died of each, both within and without the liberties of the city.

The value of these documents, however, is very small; no reliance whatever can be placed upon their figures. In spite of the spirited defence of Mr. Bell, clerk to the said worshipful company, who in 1665 attempted to prove that they were faithfully and truly kept, there is not the least doubt that they were wilfully and systematically falsified. This was done, no doubt, with the best intentions. A rumour that the plague was about was sufficient to empty the town.

To prevent or delay this event was the object with which false returns were issued. But it is altogether idle to deny that they were so falsified; in fact, the system of fraud had been begun as early as the reign of Elizabeth. In a proclamation issued on November 14, 1578, adjourning the term, occurs this passage:

"Her Majestie being also credibly informed that the certificate which Her Majestie receiveth weekely from her said citie of London, is not so sincerely, truely and wholly certified, as in trueth it should be, but the number of those that die of the plague, *is made lesse than*

they are, by the corruption and indirect dealing of some inferior minister, to Her Majestie's great offence, is therefore minded," etc., etc.

Again, Dr. Jenison in his *Newcastle's Call*, speaking of the plague in London in 1625, said: "Before all was done, it became the greatest that any man living could remember, and greater, I take it than their general bill for the year would make it, unless you will allow above 18,000 to die (in plague time) of ordinary diseases in one year."

The fact is that, added to the anxiety of the authorities to make the outbreaks seem less severe than they were, there must have been very great difficulty in getting together any return at all.

So great was the dread of having the "handwriting of death" set upon the house-door, that every possible precaution was taken to conceal the outbreak of the terrible malady in a house. Those who died were sometimes carried out and buried in the fields by night; others were interred in the gardens or yards of the houses. Of these the parish clerk could have no record, and in such an appalling outbreak as that of the year 1665, which must to a certain extent have paralyzed the institutions of the authorities, the number of unrecorded burials must have been very great.

Nevertheless, these documents are not useless. They furnish the historian with an idea of the mortality during the various outbreaks.

In conclusion, I may say that both the British Museum and the Guildhall libraries contain large collections of plague literature, the City library, indeed, possessing many tracts and pamphlets not to be found in the older collections. To the Bodleian I am not indebted for much, possibly because my acquaintance with its treasures is limited to the pages of its catalogue.

Many of my notes are derived from the private collection of Dr. F. J. Payne, of Wimpole Street, to whom my thanks are due for his courtesy in allowing me access to it.

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