

THE SYMPTOMS OF PLAGUE.

Below are listed the symptoms of the disease that is known as **plague**, that a doctor making a diagnosis in the early eighteenth century would be looking for, as recorded by Dr. Joseph Browne. Set beside them for comparison is a modern diagnosis as published in Manson's *Tropical Diseases* published in 1987.

The order has been changed for ease of comparison, and the specialist medical vocabulary modified.

Dr. Browne, 1720.

Horror, coldness on the extremities, and heat within.

Unquenchable thirst.

Oppressive heaviness of body, lassitude of limbs, and lack of strength.

Headache and syncope (faintness).

Sleep and immoderate waking and a deadly sleep (coma).

Delirium and troublesome dreams.

Pain in the heart and profusion of damp cold sweat.

Frequent vomiting and nausea and abhorrence of food.

Pulse languid and irregular or swift and furious or intermittent.

Urine thick and muddy and ill scented and difficult to pass.

Stinking breath, hoarse voice, difficult breathing, bitterness in the throat or mouth.

Belly swelled and puffed up as in a timpani. Swelling or fullness about the heart or pain in the bowels.

Blood from the nostrils, mouth, stools, or bladder including the stomach, bowel, throat etc.

Inflammation of the liver, pleurisies or frenzy.

Costiveness (constipation) or else diarrhoea or body flux.

Carbuncles seated under the chin, tongue, palate, throat, stomach, breasts, and buboes behind the ears.

Stench and putrefaction great.

Body tinged with a blue dye.

Black, livid, bluish spots or pustules striking inward from the skin to the heart.

Buboes at first livid and lead coloured or reddish brown from black.

Frightful countenance of the corpse.

The body not stiff, soft and yielding, ie. lank as a rag dipped in water.

Manson, 1987.

A feeling of chilliness and aching in the limbs. Temperature rising to 39.4°, 40.0°, or even 41.7°.

Thirst is intense.

Extreme prostration and utter debility.

Intense headache and giddiness.

Coma, convulsions, sometimes of a nature associated with tetanus.

Sometimes delirium or sometimes low delirious muttering.

Palpitation.

Vomiting.

The pulse is at first full and bounding but rapidly loses tone, becoming small, fluttering and intermittent.

Inability to pass urine or urine is scanty.

Sordes (impure matter, crusts or a foul accumulation) form on the teeth and about the lips and nostril. The voice is reduced to a whisper. Coughing and difficulty in breathing.

Considerable swelling around, and usually severe pain around the gland.

Profuse watery, blood tinged sputum.

Extensive haemorrhaging after death from all organs.

The spleen and liver are usually enlarged.

Some patients have diarrhoea. Others may be constipated.

Most (buboes) form in the groin, particularly on the right side, some in the armpit, occasionally under the chin and rarely in the tonsil.

A powerful stench from a burst bubo.

Occasionally there are furuncles (boils), pustules and abscesses.

Dr Richard Meade added that the tumours showed a blackish spot in the centre, which was the beginning of gangrene which spread more and more as the tumour increased.

Manson notes that in a very small proportion of cases, what are usually described as carbuncles are in reality small patches of moist gangrenous skin. Sometimes they slough and lead to extensive gangrene. Should life be continued sufficiently long, the vesicles become converted into pustules resembling smallpox. These observations confirm in a remarkable manner the old writers who described manifestations in the Plague of London of 1665 as "blains".