CHAPTER I - THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EPIDEMIC

TANAIS AND CAFFA

A place in the East called Tana (Known today as the port of Azov - situated on the eastern edge of the Sea of Azov, north of the Black Sea) in a northerly direction from Constantinople was besieged by a vast horde of Tartars in late 1346 and was in a short time taken. The Christian merchants who were violently expelled from the city were then received for the protection of their persons and property within the walls of the Crimean city of Caffa (known today as Theodosia), where Genoese merchants had built a strong trade center. The Tartars followed these fugitive Italian merchants, and, surrounding the city of Caffa, besieging it also. Completely encircled by this vast army of enemies, the inhabitants were hardly able to obtain the necessaries of life. Suddenly, in December 1346, 'the death,' as it was called, broke out in the Tartar host, and thousands were daily carried off by the disease, as if 'arrows from heaven were striking at them and beating down their pride.

CONSTANTINOPLE

It is from Caffa that it is believed that ships transmitted the disease to Constantinople in the late Spring of 1347. An account of the pestilence at the Imperial city of Constantinople has come from the pen of the Emperor John Cantacuzene, who was an eye-witness of what he reports. The disease according to his account was incurable. Neither regularity of life nor bodily strength was any preservation against it. The strong and the weak were equally struck down; and death spared not those of whom care was taken, any more than the poor, destitute of all help. From Constantinople the Italian trading ships passed on towards their own country, everywhere spreading the terrible contagion. Thus the advent of the plague can be traced in the ports of the Adriatic and Black Seas in the Spring and Autumn of 1347.

MESSINA, SICILY

Of the plague in Sicily there exists a particular account by one who must have been a contemporary of the events he describes. "A most deadly pestilence," he says," sprang up over the entire island. It happened that in the month of October, in the year of our Lord, 1347, about the beginning of the month, twelve Genoese ships, put into the port city of Messina, bringing with them such a sickness clinging to their very bones that anyone in contact with them was directly struck with a mortal sickness from which there was no escape." Seeing what a calamity of sudden death had come to them by the arrival of the Genoese, the people of Messina immediately drove them in all haste from their city and port. But the sickness remained and a pestilence raged in the city from October 1347, to April 1348, as many fell victim to it and were carried off by the disease.

CHAPTER II - THE EPIDEMIC IN ITALY

GENOA & VENICE

The great sickness reached Italy in the early days of 1348. A report of the time indicates that three plague-stricken vessels left the Crimean settlement of Caffa in January 1348—one bound for Genoa, one for Venice, and another to other parts of the Christian world—with a few of the sailors that already infected by the fatal disease. One sick man was enough to infect the whole crew, and the corpses that were carried to the grave brought death to their bearers. Going back to their homes, they in turn soon infected their whole families, who in three days succumbed, and were buried in one common grave. Priests and doctors visiting the sick returned from their duties ill, and soon were numbered with the dead. The terror increased when it was found that even the effects and clothes of the dead were capable of communicating the disease. By early Spring 1348, the plague had taken its toll on the two Italian port cities. At Genoa the plague spared hardly one seventh of the population. At Venice it is said that more than seventy died out of every hundred, and out of four and twenty excellent doctors twenty were soon carried off by the sickness. This pestilence did not cease in the land from February till the feast of All Saints (November 1st, 1348). From these two places the epidemic quickly spread over the entire country. (Muratori, Scriptores, xii, 926.)
FLORENCE

What happened at Florence is well-known through the graphic description of Boccaccio. So terrible was the mortality in that prosperous city that the very outbreak became for a time known in Europe as the "Pestilence of Florence." In April, 1348, the dreaded infection began to show itself. Between March and the July following, it was estimated that upwards of a hundred thousand souls had perished in the city alone. As regards Florence, whilst some few devoted themselves to the care of the sick, many fled from the plague-stricken city. The epidemic raged there from April till September 1348, and it is the opinion of Villani that three out of every five persons in the city and neighborhood fell victims to it. (Boccaccio, The Decameron, Introduction.)

PISA

The same story is told in all the contemporary chronicles of Italian cities. At Pisa the terrible mortality struck in early April and lasted till September 1348, where there were few families that did not reckon two or three of their members among the dead. At least a hundred each week were carried to the grave in the city, whilst those who had been bold enough to watch at the deathbed of a relation or friend appealed in vain to passers-by to aid them to bury the corpse.

SIENA

At Siena, according to Di Tura, a contemporary chronicler, the plague commenced in April and lasted till October, 1348. In May, July, and August so many died that neither position nor money availed to procure porters to carry the dead to the public pits. In Siena and its neighbourhood, according to Di Tura, about 80,000 people were thought to have died in these seven months. All who could fled from the stricken city spread the disease to other areas of the peninsula. (Muratori, Scriptores, xv, 1021.)

ORVIETO

At Orvieto the plague began in May 1348. Some 500 died in a very short space of time, many of them suddenly; the shops remained closed, and business and work was at a standstill. Here it ran its usual five months' course, and finished in September, when many families were found to have become extinct. (G. Gigli, Diario Sanese, ii, 428).

RIMINI

At Rimini it was noticed that the poor were the first to be attacked and the chief sufferers. The sickness first showed itself on May 15th, 1348, and only died out in the following December, when, according to the computation of the chronicler, two out of three of the inhabitants had been swept away. (Muratori, Scriptores, xv, 902)

PARMA

Petrarch, laments the overwhelming catastrophe, as he experienced it in the town of Parma. The measures taken to isolate Parma appear to have been, at least, for a time, successful, as the dreaded plague apparently did not make its appearance till the beginning of June 1348. But in the six months during which it lasted it desolated the entire neighborhood. In Parma many thousands, estimated roundly at 40,000, were carried off by it the plague that lasted till December 1348. (A. Pezzana, Storia della città di Parma, vol. i, p. 12.)

CHAPTER III - PROGRESS OF THE PLAGUE IN FRANCE

MARSEILLES

ALMOST simultaneously with the outbreak of the pestilence in Italy it obtained a foothold in the South of France. According to a contemporary account the disease was brought into Marseilles by one of the three Genoese ships, which had been compelled to leave the port of Genoa when the inhabitants discovered that by their means the dreaded plague had already commenced its ravages in their city. It would consequently appear most likely that the mortality began in Marseilles somewhere about the first days of January 1348. The number of deaths in this great southern port of France fully equaled that of the populous cities of Italy. In a month the sickness is said to have carried off 57,000 of the inhabitants of Marseilles and its neighborhood. From Marseilles the epidemic quickly spread northwards up the Rhone valley, and in a westerly direction. (Labbe, Nova Bibliotheca Manuscriptorum, i, p. 343. & C. Anglada, Étude sur les Maladies Eteintes, p. 432.)
NARBONNE

It commenced at Narbonne in the first week of March 1348, and is said to have carried off 30,000 of the inhabitants. Indeed, so fearful was the visitation, that this ancient city is reported to never have recovered from the desolation it caused. (Martin, *Histoire de France* (4th ed.), v, p. 109.)

AVIGNON

It reached Avignon as early as January 1348. In the first three days 1,800 people are reported to have died. In the seven months during which the scourge lasted the vast roll of the dead in the territory of Avignon had mounted up to 150,000 persons. And it was said that altogether in three months—that is from January 25th to April 27th — 62,000 bodies had been buried in Avignon. (Phillippe, *Histoire de la Peste Noire*, p. 103. and Anglada, *Maladies Etetmes*, p. 431.)

PROVENCE, TOULOUSE, AND BORDEAUX

From its first entry into France in the early days of 1348, the plague was ever spreading far and wide. A letter from Avignon speaks of the ravages of the mortality in the whole of Provence, and of its having, before the end of April 1348, reached Toulouse and Bordeaux on its journey westward. By August of this year (1348) Bordeaux was engulfed in suffering from the disease.

PARIS

Paris was, of course, visited by the disease. Apparently, it was some time in the early summer of 1348 (Around the month of May) when it first manifested itself. In the chronicle of St. Denis it is recorded that "in the year of grace 1348 the said mortality commenced in the Kingdom of France and lasted about a year and a half, more or less. In this way there died in Paris, one day with another, 800 persons. ... In the space of the said year and a half, as some declare, the number of the dead in Paris rose to more than 50,000, and in the town of St. Denis the number was as high as 16,000."

CHERBOURG and CALAIS in NORMANDY

Meanwhile the epidemic was spreading northward. The wave of pestilence from Paris seems to have divided. One stream swept on through Normandy towards the coast around Calais, arriving about July or August of the year 1348. It arrived in Cherbourg probably about the feast of St. James (25th July) 1348. It was so horrible that in the towns it attacked more than two-thirds of the population died. For in Normandy, and elsewhere it has consumed, and is consuming, many thousands of men, animals, and sheep. The other stream, checked probably by the autumn and winter, made its way more slowly towards Belgium and Holland. (*Breve Chronicon* in De Smet, *Recueil des Chroniques de Flandre*, iii, p. 19.)

AMIENS

At Amiens, where 17,000 are said to have been carried off by the sickness, it seems probable that the malady arrived in October or November 1348, but was not at its height before the summer of the following year (1349). In the June of 1349 the King granted a petition from the Mayor of Amiens for a new cemetery. (Thierry, *Recueil des Monuments intdits de FHistoire du Tiers Etat*, i, p. 544.)

TOURNAY in BELGIUM

The account of the ravages of this great pestilence in France, as well as its course in the city of Tournay, where it commenced in August 1349, is well given in the chronicle of Gilles Li Muisis, Abbot of St. Martin's in Tournay. From Flanders (in Belgium), where the pestilence was declining in Tournay by December 1349, the epidemic spread into Holland.
CHAPTER IV - THE PLAGUE IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

BARCELONA AND VALENCIA, SPAIN

From Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica the plague was carried around the Northern Shores of the Mediterranean. The scourge fell upon Spain in the early part of the year 1348. It is supposed to have first appeared at Barcelona around February 1348, where whole quarters of the city were depopulated and rendered desolate by it. In May, 1348, it was already raging in Valencia, and by midsummer 300 persons a day are reported to have been buried in the city. King Pedro IV reported that the malady was at its height by September 1348 (Philippe, Histoire de la Peste Noire, pp. 54-56.)

RAGUSA, SPALATRO AND SEBENICO in CROATIA

From North Italy the pestilence soon spread to the country across the Adriatic. The port of Ragusa, in Dalmatia, is said to have been attacked as early as January 13th, 1348, and more than 7,000 are reported as having been swept away by it. At Spalatro, by March 1348, it is known to have raged for several months in the city. Further north again, Sebenico was attacked in the spring of the same year (1348) and probably allowed the plague to spread into Hungary. By May the Count of Sebenico had written a description of the wretched condition and state of the city, by reason of the great mortality in those parts, through which it had been left almost without inhabitants. (Farlati, Illyricum Sacrum, iii, p. 324. and Lechner, ut sup., p. 22. 2 Ibid.)

TRENT in GERMANY and MUHLDORF in AUSTRIA

From Venice the epidemic spread northwards into Austria and Hungary. It passed up the valley of the Etsch and was at Trent by June 1348. Thence it spread quickly up the Brenner Pass, in the Tyrolese Alps, and was at Muhldorf in Bavaria by the first of July 1348. Here it seems to have lasted for a considerable time. One chronicler, writing' of the subsequent year (1349), says " that from the feast of St. Michael, 1348, there perished in Muhldorf at least 1,400 of the better class of inhabitants." (Annales Mellicenses, Ibid., p. 513.)

NEUBERG in HUNGARY

In November of 1348, the epidemic is found in Neuberg, in the valley of the Miirz. The Neuberg Chronicle, giving an account of it, says, " Since this deadly pestilence raged everywhere, cities became desolate which up to this had been populous. Their inhabitants were swept off in such numbers that such as were left, with closed gates, strenuously watched that no one should steal the property of those departed." (Annales Matseenses in Men. Germ., ix, 829.)

LUCERNE AND RUSWYL in SWITZERLAND

It is necessary to return once again to North Italy, from which another wave of pestilence rolled in to Switzerland on the great highway over the Alps through the St. Gothard Pass. From the pass of St. Gothard the epidemic passed down the Rhine Valley, and before the close of 1348 (in December) was in the neighborhood of Lucerne. At Lucerne alone, 3,000 people are said to have died of the disease. From thence the infection was carried up the Rhone Valley over Switzerland, and a second followed the course of the river Rhone. By March 1349, the plague was at Ruswyl.

ZURICH AND CONSTANCE in SWITZERLAND

It must have remained about the neighborhood of the Lake of Geneva for some months, for it was not until September 1349, that it is known to have manifested its presence in the high and healthy valley of Zurich; and Constance some time during the winter (December 1349 – January 1350). (Dlugoss, Historia Polonica, in Philippe, ut sup., p. 94.; Kalendarium Zivetlense, in Man. Germ., ix, 692.; and Annales Matseenses, Ibid., 829.)

STRASBURG AND COLOGNE in GERMANY

The wave of pestilence which passed up the Rhine Valley appeared in Strasbourg in July 1349. At the end of the same year, about December, it had reached Cologne. (Chronicon Pragense, ed. Loserth (in Fontes rerum Austriacarum, Scriptores, t. viii) p. 603.)
Meanwhile the wave had divided lower down the valley of the Rhine, for in the summer of 1349 the plague was raging at Frankfort. "In that year," writes Caspar Camenz, "from the feast of St. Mary Magdalene (July 22nd, 1349) to the feast of the Purification following (February 2nd, 1350) the universal pestilence was at Frankfort. In the space of 72 days more than 2,000 people died. Every second hour they were buried without bell, priest, or candle. On one day 35 were buried at one time." During 1349 and 1350 the pestilence was rife in the towns and country places of Prussia. In the latter year (December 1349) it attacked Bremen in the far north, and in the following year the authorities of the city took a census of the numbers that had been carried off by it. "In the year of our Lord 1350," the account says, "the plague had gone round the world and had visited Bremen. (Chronicon Pragense, ed. Loserth (in Fontes rerum Austriac-arum, Scriptores, t. viii) p. 603.)

CHAPTER V - THE PLAGUE REACHES ENGLAND

The Plague first attacked England in the autumn of 1348. The summer and autumn of 1348 were abnormally wet in England, and the chronicles record that from St. John the Baptist's Day (June 24th, 1348) to Christmas it rained either by night or by day with hardly an exception. In such a season, naturally unhealthy, the sickness, of its own nature most deadly, found every condition suitable for its rapid development.

MELCOMBE

In the year of our Lord 1348, about the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas (July 7th)," writes the author of the chronicle known as the Eulogium Historiarum, who was a monk of Malmesbury at this time, "the cruel pestilence, terrible to all future ages, came from parts over the sea to the south coast of England, into a port called Melcombe, in Dorsetshire.

SOMERSET and BATH

The (plague) swept over the southern districts by October 1348 and destroyed numberless people. The months when the pestilence was at its height in the county of Somerset would appear to be from December 1348 to February 1349. The mortality was apparently highest about Christmastime 1348. The region around Bath suffered under the scourge as early as January 1349. (Chronicon Galfridi le Baker, ed. Sir E. M. Thompson, p. 98.)

LONDON

London, in constant communication with other ports, is said by one contemporary to have been attacked by the epidemic as early as September 29th, 1348, whilst other authorities fix it on All Saints' day (November 1st) as the date when the disease declared itself in London. It lasted in the city and its neighborhood till at least the months from February to Easter (April). During the time almost every day there were 200 bodies buried in the new cemetery, over and above those buried in other cemeteries of the city." (Eulogium Historiarum (Rolls series), iii, p. 213. 3 Annales de Bermundeseia in Annales Monastics (Rolls series), iii, p. 475)

WORCHESTER AND CAMBRIDGE (LONDON)

the city of Worcester, as early as the middle of April 1349, experienced difficulties as to the disposal of the bodies of the dead. As a result, the highest number of losses in the county in any one month was in July, whilst each month from May to November gives indication of significant losses. The epidemic was at its height in the East of England in the summer and autumn months of 1349, and the deaths in the ranks of the clergy were very alarming. In this single year 800 parishes lost the majority of their members. The University town of Cambridge did not escape. On May 24th, 1349, the church of St. Sepulchre's fell vacant, and already in July several of the churches were without members. By late September 1349, most of the people in the vicinity of Cambridge had died due to the plague.