

SCIENCE

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THE LESSONS OF THE PANDEMIC

THE pandemic which has just swept round the earth has been without precedent. There have been more deadly epidemics, but they have been more circumscribed; there have been epidemics almost as widespread, but they have been less deadly. Floods, famines, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions have all written their stories in terms of human destruction almost too terrible for comprehension, yet never before has there been a catastrophe at once so sudden, so devastating and so universal.

The most astonishing thing about the pandemic was the complete mystery which surrounded it. Nobody seemed to know what the disease was, where it came from or how to stop it. Anxious minds are inquiring to-day whether another wave of it will come again.

The fact is that although influenza is one of the oldest known of the epidemic diseases, it is the least understood. Science, which by patient and painstaking labor has done so much to drive other plagues to the point of extinction has thus far stood powerless before it. There is doubt about the causative agent and the predisposing and aggravating factors. There has been a good deal of theorizing about these matters, and some good research, but no common agreement has been reached with respect to them.

The measures which were introduced for the control of the pandemic were based upon the slenderest of theories. It was assumed that the influenza could be stopped by the employment of methods which it was assumed would stop the other respiratory diseases. This double assumption proved to be a weak reed to lean upon. The respiratory diseases as a class are not under control. They constitute the most frequent cause of death, yet it is not known how they can be prevented.

Three main factors stand in the way of pre-