



Cattle Plague: A History

C.A. Spinage

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Cattle Plague: A History is the most comprehensive general study of the history of cattle plague or rinderpest yet attempted, of which there has not been a book in English since 1866. With its stranglehold on the economy of Europe until the later 19th century, rinderpest has been the most neglected study in history. The most virulent and dreaded animal disease to affect Europe and Asia from ancient times with up to 95 percent mortality of affected cattle; in the 18th century it is estimated to have carried off more than 200 million head of cattle in Europe, exclusive of Siberia and Tartary. Germany alone lost 28 million between 1711 and 1865, 3 in every 4 animals dying. Following its introduction into Britain in 1745, the losses in 1745-57 were estimated at in excess of half a million head. Its introduction in 1865 with a dozen oxen led to the death, including those which were slaughtered, of 278,943 animals, some estimates putting the loss as high as 420,000, representing 7 per cent of the national herd; according to some affecting livestock farming and the meat trade for the next 25 years. It was responsible for a major panzootic in Africa at the turn of the 19th century, devastating domestic and wild animals alike and affecting the ecology of Africa to the present. Confined today to one known remaining focus in Africa, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations hopes to eradicate this disease entirely by 2010, which if successful will be the first animal disease to be eradicated from the world (and the second disease after smallpox) and would be one of the greatest achievements ever in veterinary science.

Cattle Plague: A History is divided into five sections, dealing with the nature of the virus, followed by a chronological history of its occurrence in Europe from the Roman Empire to the final 20th century outbreaks; then administrative control measures through legislation, the principal players from the 18th century, followed by an analysis of some effects, political, economic and social. Then follows attempts at cure from earliest times encompassing superstition and witchcraft, largely Roman methods persisting until the 19th century; the search for a cure through inoculation and the final breakthrough in Africa at the end of the 19th century. The last section covers the disease in Asia and Africa. Appendices cover regulations now in force to control the disease as well as historical instructions, decrees and statutes dating from 1745-1878.

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