

ist. Mrs. Piper is the only famous medium of her time against whom no charges of fraud were ever brought.

Today, in a quiet Boston backwater, Mrs. Piper lives with her youngest daughter, Minerva. At 91, Mrs. Piper is in surprisingly good health, although quite deaf. The amazing woman who could hear unvoiced thoughts thousands of miles away in languages she never knew,

now hears little of the outside world. Her address is kept secret and her telephone has an unlisted number. Few in the comfortable, old-fashioned apartment house know that the very old lady who occasionally goes out for a stroll with her nurse or gray-haired daughter, is the simple Yankee housewife whose work once convinced leading scientists of two countries that there was indeed life after death.

## UNDERTOW

BY ALICE CRAIG REDHEAD

Who has yet seen the undertow,  
Felt its smoothly silent flow,  
Lifting tentacles in space,  
Slyly subtle, full of grace,  
Strong and fluid as a hound  
Whose muscles glide and bound.

Talons clutching like a vine,  
Elastic, pulsing as old wine,  
Unseen, unsought, without a rule  
But using strength as ready tool,  
In merciless determination  
The undertow finds consecration.

Who has *seen* this mystery?  
The labored breath, the agony,  
High-slashing waves that pull one down,  
Engulfing till all senses drown —  
Cruel and fearful in its power,  
Dark signatures of final hour.

# THE MYSTERY OF INFLUENZA

BY JAMES FULLER

**M**OST of the mid-century tributes to modern medicine's conquest of disease have, oddly enough, ignored a skeleton at the feast. Perhaps this oversight is Freudian. For the stark fact is that the third greatest pestilence in human history — some authorities put it second — took place in our lifetime. Only the great plague of Justinian in the sixth century and the Black Death of 1348 rank as calamities with the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19, which killed twenty million people in a few months and sickened half a billion more.

So far, no scientific explanation of this massacre meets the simple test of credulity. Ordinary notions of infection and man-eating germs are easy to accept in localized epidemics, but in the world-shaking, whirlwind sweep of pandemic influenza, the  $x$  factor is still unknown. Even the theory of person-to-person contagion, from a mythical first case, fails to hold up — particularly when all attempts have failed to reproduce influenza in man

by experimental contact of the healthy with the sick. For all our knowledge, and our happy scorn of man's plague-ridden past, we are probably as defenseless against a recurrence of this catastrophe as the world was in 1918 — or 1580.

Take one mystery at random. Why, at the height of the 1918 epidemic, did Philadelphia have a flu death rate four times as large as that of Milwaukee? Why was Pittsburgh's rate twice as high as Cleveland's? After careful study of all factors, Professor Raymond Pearl, from Johns Hopkins and the National Research Council, decided that only one was significant. That was the weather. Dry air and a drop in temperature seemed to go with a lower death rate. But meanwhile, Dr. C. M. Richter was reporting in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* that temperature and humidity were *not* primary factors at all. He showed that for the last 120 years influenza and pneumonia have flared up only during periods of high atmospheric

---

**JAMES FULLER** is a free-lance magazine writer whose medical articles, often written in conjunction with his wife, Peta Fuller, have appeared frequently in the *MERCURY*. Their last work together, "The Other Side of the Wonder Drugs," was published in the October 1949 issue.