

years in the galleys for the second offence. Civil, religious, and military authorities shall cause to be burned in civil and military hospitals all linen which shall have been used by phthysical civilians or soldiers.

This reads like a free rendering of sections 26, &c., of our Public Health Act, only the penalties for non-obedience are slightly greater than those prescribed by us. Four years' exile for the medical law-breaker and four years chained to the galleys for less distinguished offenders emphasizes the importance which the authorities two hundred and forty years ago attached to the notifications of consumption and the careful disinfection or destruction of all things which had been exposed to contagion. "*Nihil novi super terram*" would indeed seem to be true. Let us hope that the truths contained in these old-times regulations will not require to be rediscovered another two hundred years hence.

#### PLAGUE.

This disease I regret to say still lingers in Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales : this is as might be expected. Despite the wholesale reclamation and cleansing of the docks and houses in Sydney it was hardly to be expected that a disease which depends so much for its transmission upon an agent so wily as the rat could be effectually stamped out in so short a space a time. Isolated cases are occasionally appearing, but, in view of the measures that are being taken, there is little chance of anything approaching the epidemics of 1900, 1901, and 1902 again taking place.

Against the introduction of this disease we have contented ourselves with careful inspection of all passengers from the infected areas and the rat-guards regulations which were set out in my last report. That we have not been able to entirely exclude the disease is evidenced from the fact that since March, 1903, there has been one case in Auckland. In this, as in every instance where the disease, occurred careful precautions were taken against its spreading; all clothes, bedding, &c., were destroyed, the rooms used by the patients were stripped of everything and repapered or painted, and in no instance has the disease spread. Bearing in mind that plague—saving the pneumonic form of the disease—is spread solely through the agency of rodents, there is little danger of the disease obtaining a foothold in the colony if the regulations suggested in the circular telegram of the 26th April issued by you are carried out. Our only danger lies in the reposeful attitude local authorities and individuals are liable to assume after any energetic effort. What is necessary is a daily wash, a regular clean-up—not the Turkish bath prompted by an illness or the spring-cleaning consequent upon an outbreak. A reassuring feature is that although rats have been regularly examined in all the chief centres only once have they been found plague-infected, and that only in one city. Plague, small-pox, and all such "dangerous infectious diseases" come to us at once in a guise so dramatic and awful that our attention is riveted, and measures more or less halting are insisted upon; but, if we except consumption, it is to "the lesser breeds without the law" that we must ascribe the greatest waste of life, energy, and economic value. Infantile diarrhoea, mostly due to mal-feeding and contaminated milk, enteric fever, and a host of so-called lesser ailments, all preventable, are the main sources of degeneration and loss of wage-earning power. Slowly but surely the lesson is being learnt, but many valuable lives will be sacrificed ere it is borne home in its full significance.

We have but to look at Dr. Ogston's report on the outbreak of enteric fever at Mount Pisa to realise the awful waste which ignorance and carelessness have involved. Out of a community of forty twenty-one workers were required to lay down their tools and cease from labour for a lengthened period, and of that number two ceased to be of further value to the State. A case-incidence of about 50 per cent. and a death-rate for this homestead of 5 per cent. It may be said that this is an isolated instance—and truly it is; that percentages based upon such small numbers are inaccurate. Let us grant all this, yet the fact remains that two units each worth some £300 have been lost to the State from an absolutely preventable cause: as much as plague—prince as he is amongst infectious diseases—has cost us since the year 1900.

Charity it is said should begin at home—had I the readjustment of aphorisms I should translate "charity" into "sanitation." Dr. Valentine showed clearly in his report for the Wellington district last year the salutary effect which efficient drainage had had in Wellington upon the incidence of enteric fever. Some municipalities have yet to learn the lesson of "the hand-writing on the wall," but not less has the individual. Napier and Auckland hold the unenviable distinction of suffering most heavily from this disease. Reclamation is being gradually proceeded with in the city of the east, and it would seem that Auckland has at last seen fit to carefully consider an adequate system of drainage suggested by Mr. Mestayer. Let us hope that the same sane judgment and enterprise may be displayed by the northern capital in this as have been shown with respect to electric trams and the asphaltting of Queen Street.