

The Risk of Plague.

Dr. Cumpston, the Director of Federal Quarantine, has issued a very serious warning in regard to the danger of a visitation of bubonic plague from India and other plague-ridden countries. He admits that no case has hitherto been detected in Melbourne, but the risk is there all the same, and a very real risk it is. Recent researches have thrown much light on the epidemiology of plague, and the fact is now established that rats and other rodents act as intermediate carriers, the infecting bacillus being conveyed from rat to man by the flea, the *Xenopsylla cheopis*, or some other rat-infesting flea. It has further been shown that the rat flea does not bite man with that avidity with which the *Pulex irritans* attacks him. Notwithstanding this, the risk attendant on the presence of infected rats and infected rat fleas to man is so great that an outbreak of plague would almost certainly follow on the introduction of these infected carriers. It is further well established that the infection with *Bacillus pestis* from rat to rat is rapid and certain. We have, therefore, all the knowledge necessary for effectively preventing an outbreak in any hitherto uninfected port. That the risk should be tolerated under these circumstances is incredible in an enlightened and prosperous country. Dr. Cumpston tells us, and others equally well informed confirm his statements, that the bonded stores, stables, and other buildings in the city of Melbourne are overrun with rats, and that no efficient measures have up to the present been adopted to deal with this matter. Mere rat-catching, even on a large scale, is not sufficient. It is necessary to render warehouses and other buildings rat-proof, and systematically to make the continued existence of rats in the basements a practical impossibility. The Municipal Councils should have full powers to deal with this matter, as they have in Sydney, and they should be compelled to exercise those powers rigidly. The Quarantine authority is responsible for dealing with ships arriving in harbour. All ships from plague-infested areas should be dealt with by one or other of the rat-destroying methods immediately on arrival. This, however, is not a sufficient safeguard against the landing of an infected rat, and it is

essential that even if such an unwelcome stranger set foot on Australian soil, he should find it an uncongenial place, and die from want of accommodation, without a single comrade to share his troubles with him. We understand that a few years ago a Bill was drafted which was to compel occupiers of premises to keep their buildings free from rats. This Bill, however, was not proceeded with, and as is so often the case, the legislator was content to consider the matter during the lifetime of the scare, and to forget all about the reality of the problem as soon as the first alarm had passed. Municipal Councils have the power to deal in combination, and to enforce measures which would be quite satisfactory, pending the introduction and passing of ad hoc legislation. Melbourne is now face to face with the rat problem, and will have to free herself from this danger. In this instance the medical profession would be lacking in its duty to the public if it allowed the scare to die down and be forgotten before permanent and efficient measures are adopted. It must be remembered that there are some diseases which at the present day can be prevented with comparative ease, and plague is one of these. On the other hand, the experience of India teaches that it is not the same thing to stamp out plague once it has gained a firm foothold. This, too, is possible, but the whole question becomes one of the expenditure of sums of money, which may be so large as to cripple the resources of almost any country. Dr. Cumpston's warning is timely, and should not have to be repeated. Who knows how long it might be before the risk turns into actuality?

THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES AND THE B.M.A.

The "Sydney Morning Herald" of 24th July, 1914, announces that "at last there are prospects of peace between the Friendly Societies and the doctors," and proceeds to point out among other things that "any agreement arrived at between the Friendly Societies and the British Medical Association will not be binding on any particular lodge, for, after all, the medical contracts are really contracts between the private lodge and the individual doctor." The negotiations between the Friendly Societies and the New South Wales Branch of the Association have now arrived at a point when it can