

this figure can be understood when it is said that in Bombay during one of the most virulent epidemics of plague, the proportion of live rats found in the proportion to the plague-stricken rarely reached six per cent.

The theory is that the infected rats which caused this trouble were thrown on the English coast from a wrecked vessel from India. Owing to the peculiar conditions of the country where they landed, the disease has not yet spread very far. Inasmuch as the pneumonic plague can be caught from the breath of a patient, the possibility of damage in the thickly populated districts of great cities like London and New York, where the rats in the dock area swarm by the million, is as hideous as can be imagined. Apart from the danger to human life, the consequence to trade of any city from an outbreak of the plague is beyond calculation.

The Government knows that each rat costs at least a dollar a year for the food it steals and the property it destroys; when to this is added the possible danger from death and the loss to business, the necessity for considering plans to guard against rats, which not only carry plague but other diseases which can be spread by animals, is apparent. San Francisco has had its little scare and found it economy in making buildings rat-proof.

"Specialism."

A contemporary, in discussing the habit which many physicians have acquired of devoting their attention to some special branch of the medical profession, remarks that one of the most striking features in regard to the development of the healing art at the present time is the increasing tendency towards "specialism," and there are indications that the present year may witness the initiation of a professional movement which may place the various "specialties" on a much more independent basis than they have been before. It seems quite clear that the public will be pleased with this, for, according to the opinions of many general medical practitioners, patients in this country have never before been so anxious to consult specialists, a very good thing for the latter, no doubt, but rather hard on the family physicians, who have to bear the chief responsibilities of illness at ordinary times.

It can scarcely be said, however, that the remarkable growth of "specialism" in recent years has only served for the relief by "specialists" of minor disorders of the throat, nose, ear, eye, and so forth, which used to be very well treated by the family physician, but rather that the rapid development of technique and new methods of treatment during the past decade has made it practically impossible for the family physician to deal with more than a limited number of disorders of special organs in an up-to-date way. Subsequently the number of men who have particularly studied the affections and treatment of particular parts of the body, and so become "specialists," has steadily increased. And one of the most remarkable of the later developments of this movement has been the establishment of what are practically specialties within specialties; thus an ear specialist, for example, may devise a means of successfully treating one particular disorder of the ear, and soon confines his practice to that only; sometimes he soon has no time to do anything else. In addition, it must be remembered, a number of quite new principles of treatment have come into use within the last few years, each requiring considerable special skill and knowledge. Of these, perhaps, the best known are medical electricity, X-rays, and the radium treatment.

Thus it is obvious that an increased "specialism" has been forced on the medical profession by necessity of circumstances arising from within, whilst the movement has been aided from without by the discovery of the public that, as a specialist can be obtained for almost any disorder nowadays, the individual patient can make his own selection as to what authority he will consult directly without going first to his family adviser. As a matter of fact, medical opinion in this country in the past has been strongly against the assumption of a "specialty" by men of first-class standing, but specialism had to come, and now is in some danger of advancing to an absurd degree unless it is controlled by new professional regulations.

It is recorded that in ancient Egypt there was such a craze for specialists that each physician treated one disorder only, and was subject to penalties if he went beyond his clearly-defined sphere of activ-