

measles. A closer inspection made by Dr. Pollen and myself discovered twenty additional men to be sickening for that disease. Arrangements were accordingly made for fifteen of the worst cases to be taken to the Wellington Hospital, and the remainder to Somes Island, where they were put under the charge of Dr. Purdy.

On the 8th August the troopship "Orient" arrived with 635 officers and men of the Ninth and Tenth Contingents. This vessel was ordered into quarantine on account of a case of small-pox on board. The men were subsequently disembarked on Somes Island, where they were detained for four days. The events following the arrival of these troopships are already matters of history, as the unsavoury details have been duly set forth in the report of the Contingents Transport Commission. The matter would not have been brought up again but for the fact that there is little doubt that the return of the troopers aggravated, if it did not occasion, an outbreak of measles which became pretty general throughout the colony.

From the earliest times returning soldiers have brought back to the countries of their birth diseases that they had contracted when serving abroad. At times widespread epidemics followed their introduction to a new soil. War exacts a penalty in some form or other from non-combatants. Happily the South African War, so far as disease is concerned, exacted no greater penalty from New Zealand than a measles epidemic, and possibly a few stray cases of scarlet fever and typhoid. The details of the measles epidemic will be dealt with in another part of this report.

A portion of the public was of opinion that it was the duty of the Department to quarantine the "Britannic," on account of the thirty-seven cases of measles on board. Was this advisable? Was it possible? In the first place, it must be remembered that measles has been epidemic in the colony since 1847. Moreover, the disease has a long incubation period (from two to three weeks), and quarantine would have necessitated an irksome detention of the troopers for an indefinite period. Lastly, it must be understood that under ordinary conditions measles is attended with a comparatively trifling mortality, but under conditions of want and overcrowding it is a very deadly disease. During the siege of Paris, of 215 of the Garde Mobile who took the disease eighty-six, or 40 per cent., died. The mortality among the "Britannic" troopers was bad enough; but how much greater would it have been if 1,018 men had been pent up on board the overcrowded troopship until arrangements could have been made to accommodate them on Somes Island!

Again, as to the possibility of quarantining the "Britannic," where were 1,018 men to be placed at a moment's notice? At the time there was not house accommodation on the island for 150 men. On the arrival of the "Orient" a week later, with only 380 men on board, it took two clear days to get the island ready. How much longer would it have taken to provide for three times that number? The subsequent events justified my decision to empty the ship as soon as possible; and though there was no doubt that infection was carried on shore, yet the harm done was only a tithe of what would have followed had the ship been ordered into quarantine.

It is to be regretted that in my examination before the Transport Commission I was not questioned as to who was responsible for the sick on the "Britannic" on the night of the 1st August. The Principal Medical Officer had an ample opportunity to do so—an opportunity he very wisely neglected to take advantage of. On the other hand, when that officer gave his evidence I had no opportunity of cross-examining him on the subject, although I asked to be recalled after hearing an account of his evidence. However, the Commission could not see its way to grant my request; otherwise I think I should have been able to prove that there was no misunderstanding as to who was responsible. The officers of the Department had quite enough to do that night without undertaking the medical treatment of the sick. Besides, it is surely not usual for Health officers to take over the medical control of the sick on board of one of His Majesty's ships, or, for that matter, on any ships where there are medical officers specially appointed for the purpose.

As may be expected, the quarantining of the "Orient" occasioned a great deal of work, which fell heavily upon the shoulders of this Department. Somes Island had practically to be furnished throughout. Some of the men were accommodated in tents, and the remainder in those buildings not occupied by the sick. Our difficulties were considerably increased by the lack of discipline on the part of the troopers. There was at first no means of transport. The water-supply ran out on the second day. The officers of this Department are much indebted to the Defence Storekeeper and his assistants for the prompt manner in which they provided the daily necessities.

The months of August, September, and October were almost entirely taken up examining troopers, making arrangements for their examination in various parts of the colony, or attending medical boards at headquarters.

STATISTICS.

It would scarcely be wise to draw deductions by loosely comparing the vital statistics of this sparsely populated colony with those of older-settled communities. It will be many years before the influence of density of population on the mortality-rates is likely to be felt in this country. Nor must the favourable influence caused by the yearly influx of healthy adults to the colony be entirely overlooked.