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plague by all means to take courage to themselves, to cherish their bodies, and, so far as lieth in them, to banish excessive fear.

It is perfectly true that many 'wise physicians' did give such advice, though it was not always of a sort that the ordinary citizen could conveniently follow. Nicolaus Massa, for example, makes many suggestions about delightful ways of diverting one's mind from gloomy thoughts of pestilence, but though his recommendations would certainly have appealed to Boccaccio's bright young people, who left Florence during the Black Death and created the Decameron, they smacked too strongly of Theleme to appeal to the Kirk of Scotland in 1644. For its rulers, repentance, confession of sins, fasting and continuous bewailings were imperative.

The 'mediocrity' which Skeldie recommends entails avoidance of all rash and unnecessary exposure to danger and living as quietly as is compatible with doing one's appointed work. During plague one should be more at home than abroad. In particular one must avoid being 'a busie body in other men's matters', for, as St. Peter has said, busybodies are to be classed with thieves and murderers.

What he refers to as 'human preservatives against plague' lie outwith his province. They are useful to the wicked as well as the godly, and should be dealt with by physicians rather than by preachers. Those who wish to study them are referred to 'that worthie treatise of the learned Ficinus'—one may perhaps wonder how many of his congregation had access to the works of that fifteenth-century savant.

Despite his blindness, Skeldie seems to have been a very erudite man, if one may judge by the number of authorities from whom he quotes. Those range from Homer, St. Paul and St. Augustine to Petrarch, Marsilius Ficinus and Erasmus. But to his congregation, threatened alike by war and pestilence, his learning probably seemed of small account compared with his wisdom and courage.

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2. BEZA, T., *De Peste*, 1580.

THE RULE OF THE PESTILENCE

OF the plague that raged through Scotland in 1455 we have no details, and, indeed, no record, save a brief note in the *Scotichronicon*—'Anno Domini MCCCCLV erat magna mortalitas hominum pestilentialis per universum regnum'—but in the following year the Scottish Parliament, impressed, no doubt, by the importance of having rules for the direction of local authorities called upon to deal with such calamities, passed an Act known as 'The Rule of the Pestilence', which is the first attempt by any central body in Scotland to codify the methods of dealing with plague. It runs as follows:

The Clergie thinks that there sould no man to land nor to Burgh that hes gudes to serve himself and his meinzie be put out of his owne house les then he will not remaine nor will not be closed up in his owne house. And gif he disobeyis his nichtbours in that case he sall be compelled to passe out of the towne. And gif there were ony persones that had na gudes put fourth of onie towne, they of the towne sould finde them, and not let them passe awaie fra the place that they were depute to remaine to file the country about them. And gif ony sik put out of the towne wald steall awaie, they of that towne that put him out sould garre

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follow him, and bring him againe, and compell him to remaine and punish him for his awaie passing. And that no man burn anothers house, bot gif it micht be done but hindering or skaith of his nichtbours.

The first sentence makes it evident that by 1456 two methods of isolating infective patients were already recognized in Scotland. The sick man who had means to support himself and his household (*Meinzie*) might be nursed at home, if he so desired, and if he undertook to obey such regulations as were made by the 'neighbours'—a word which, in old Scots, means all the townfolk, and, in this connection, the town council. Unless he was willing and able to fulfil these conditions he must be removed to some place outside the town. Both those means of isolation were used during the whole time that plague occurred in Scotland, though during severe outbreaks the number of people isolated at home was sometimes, perforce, much greater than those removed to the plague camp.

The second sentence of the rule makes it clear that patients who were unable to support themselves during isolation must be provided for at the public cost—'they of the towne suld finde'—i.e. provide for—'them'. This was not altogether a new idea. Public responsibility for persons isolated on account of infectious disease had long been recognized in the case of lepers. A twelfth-century law, *De percussis lepra in burgo*, provides that when an indigent leper is isolated the townfolk must collect twenty shillings for his support. The leper also was allowed, under certain restrictions, to augment his income by begging. This privilege, of course, could not be allowed to the plague-stricken, who were strictly forbidden to leave the place where they were isolated and 'file' or infect the country around. Had they not been supported by the public funds they would have had no alternative but to starve. During the epidemic which spread through Scotland in 1584–88 the spread of the disease in Fife was ascribed to the wandering of infected people through the country which, the Privy Council observe, 'pairtlie proceidis of necessitie throw want of their sustentation'. This may suggest that the local authorities in Fife had failed to carry out a duty whose importance had been clearly recognized by the framers of the 'Rule' 130 years before.

Another point to be noted is that if an isolated person did 'steall awaie' the duty of following and apprehending him lay on the inhabitants of the town to which he belonged. They were not allowed to evade that responsibility by claiming that he was no longer under their jurisdiction. This is a rather important change in early ideas on public responsibility for the control of infectious disease. An Act of the seventh parliament of James I of Scotland (1427). *Anent Lipper Folk* prescribed perpetual banishment from the place where he offended for a leper who broke the law. Banishment, though it was often a convenient way of dealing with the individual who today may be described as a social misfit, was obviously an unsuitable way of punishing a plague-stricken defaulter, and the action taken in his case was the exact opposite of that prescribed for the leper. This is a point of some interest, as practically all early laws in regard to infectious disease were influenced and continued to be influenced long after the middle of the fifteenth century, by the provisions of the Mosaic Code regarding leprosy.

The meaning of the last sentence of the Rule may not be immediately obvious. A recommendation that one should not burn another person's house seems rather superfluous, whether the conflagration cause 'hindering or skaith' to the neighbours or not. The explanation is, of course, that 'burning' here means scorching the internal

walls with flaming straw or heather, which was the usual way of disinfecting houses at the time. It did sometimes result in the house being burned down, to the very real 'skaith' of the neighbours, whose own houses might easily be included in the holocaust.

Compared with some early legislation on plague the Scots 'Rule' shows a definite advance. It does at least recognize that the unfortunate sufferers have some rights and that the governing bodies have some duties toward them. The Ordinances of Barnardo Visconti, for example, which were made in 1374 are concerned only with isolation of the infected, quarantine of contacts, notification (*sub poena ignis*) by priests, and such-like matters. They throw all responsibility on the patient and his friends, the authorities are required only to enforce the rules.

Crude and incomplete as it was, the Rule was the foundation of all later Scots anti-plague legislation while outbreaks of the disease continued to occur in the country. Even when, in 1720, the great epidemic at Marseilles was causing the governments of most western countries to devise precautions in case of a possible recrudescence of plague in Europe the Scottish Convention of Burghs, when advising its constituents, drew their attention to the Rule of the Pestilence. It was evidently regarded as still giving useful guidance, though it had been drawn up 264 years before.

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MRS. JANE SHARP'S ADVICE TO MIDWIVES

THE first English midwife to attempt to enlighten her sister practitioners by publishing a book on Midwifery was Mrs. Jane Sharp of London. Her duodecimo volume of 418 pages was printed in 1671 'for Simon Miller, at the Star at the West End of St. Pauls'. Its title must be one of the longest on record for it includes a description in detail of the six books. Essentially it is called *The Midwives Book or the whole Art of Midwifery discovered. Directing Childbearing Women how to behave themselves in their Conception, Breeding, Bearing and Nursing of Children*.

Mrs. Sharp, who describes herself as 'Practitioner in the Art of Midwifery above thirty years', dedicates her book with becoming modesty 'to her much esteemed and ever honoured friend the Lady Ellenour Talbutt be these my Poor and Weak Endeavours Humbly Presented by Madam, and Admirer of your Vertue and Piety —Jane Sharp.

The Preface is addressed to the Midwives of England:

Sisters. I have often sate down sad in the consideration of the many miseries women endure in the hands of unskilful Midwives; many possessing the Art (without any skill in anatomy which is the principal part effectually necessary for a Midwife) merely for Lucre sake. I have been at great cost in translations for all books either French, Dutch or Italian of this kind. All which I offer with my own experience humbly begging the assistance of Almighty God to aid you in this great work.

Much of the text is sensible. Some of it quaint for she refers discretely to the seeds, the stones within the cods and the man's yard.

There are six parts in Men that are fitted for generation. 1. The Vessels that prepare the matter to make the seed, called the preparing Vessels. 2. There is that part or Vessel which works this matter or transmutes the blood with the real desire for seed. 3. The stones that