

Chaille (S. E.)

Jan. no. 1864  
N. O. Med. & Surg. Jour.

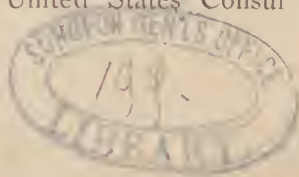
Yellow Fever in Vera Cruz and Colon in 1882, and the  
Louisiana State Board of Health Thereon  
in 1882 and in 1883.

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On April 17th, 1882, the usual annual Quarantine Proclamation was issued by the Governor of Louisiana, and, in compliance with the recommendation on June 8th of the State Board of Health, this proclamation was amended on June 12th. Among other amendments, it was "provided that the port of Vera Cruz, which is known to be at present perfectly healthy, shall be exempt from the effect of this proclamation until the further date of July 1st, 1882."

Notwithstanding the superlative strength of the words, "known" and "perfectly," sanitary authorities, other than the State Board, denied that this Board could have the *knowledge* which it proclaimed and therefore strongly condemned the above proviso as very dangerous. In evidence of this, one report, written immediately after the publication of the above proclamation, maintained the following views: "The history of yellow fever at Vera Cruz justifies the belief that this port is not "*perfectly*" free from the disease and that a thorough medical inspection of its hospitals, etc., would prove that it was not entirely free on June 8th or on June 12th, the dates when the State Board and the Governor's Proclamation published to the world, that "Vera Cruz is *known* to be at present *perfectly* healthy." However, it is well known that, as it respects Vera Cruz and all ports habitually infected with yellow fever, it has always been easy to procure certificates from captains of vessels, merchants, doctors and even from local sanitary officers and United States Consuls to the effect that their port was free from yellow fever, when, in truth, it was only *comparatively* free. Dr. Trowbridge, United States Consul at Vera



Cruz, does not believe that yellow fever can be imported and officers, who thus believe, cannot be expected to be as cautious, skeptical and thorough in inspection as if they did believe in the danger of infection."

Soon after this, another report on the same subject maintained that—"The records of yellow fever prove and experience in Cuba is convincing, that very great difficulty is encountered, even by a disinterested medical inspector, and even when on duty at the very port habitually infected, in determining—at times when yellow fever is not prevalent—that *no cases* exist. Ordinary evidence (from newspapers, merchants, captains, consuls, etc.) does not, in such a case, enable one to "*know*" that an habitually infected port is free from *all* cases of yellow fever, and, still less does such evidence enable one to "*know*" that such a port is free from the danger of exporting infection. In truth, there is much evidence tending to prove that, in habitually infected places such as is Vera Cruz, the poison is ever present; and that, though it may remain temporarily dormant and inappreciable, yet this dormant poison may be exported and, should it elsewhere find the conditions requisite for its revivification and growth, it may give rise to a pestilence even at a distant place."

These quotations will suffice to show the opposing views entertained in 1882 by the State Board on the one hand and by other sanitary authorities on the other hand, and also to show the reasons why the latter distrusted the former in this matter. At last in 1883 conclusive evidence has been presented to prove whether this distrust was well founded or not. In the meanwhile, it should be remembered that the State Board, whose political convictions as to "State sovereignty" rendered the United States National Board of Health very offensive to it, has none the less entered into very close alliance with the United States Marine Hospital Service, and therefore that the evidence of the latter is the evidence of a friend.

The Annual Report for 1883 of this friend contains, on pp. 387-391, a valuable report from Assistant Surgeon John

Guitéras. On duty at Vara Cruz in July, 1883, Dr. Guitéras reported that in 1882 fifty-eight cases of yellow fever were admitted to the Hospital de San Sebastian, which admits *males only*. Of course, many more cases must have occurred in the female population and in those numerous males who never become inmates of a hospital. Dr. Guitéras' report further shows that there were admitted into this hospital actually more yellow fever patients in 1882 than in three other of the eight years, 1875-1883; and he emphasizes the lesson often taught before, yet unheeded by the State Board in 1882, that "in Vera Cruz, as in Havana, yellow fever is an endemic disease; it prevails *every* year, and probably there are cases of the disease in *every month* of the year." Since this evidence renders only probable, but does not prove, that yellow fever was present at the time (June, 1882), when Vera Cruz was "known to be" "perfectly healthy," as alleged by the State Board, it is necessary to present additional evidence.

This has been recently and conclusively presented by Dr. Mainegra, of New Orleans, who was employed for special service at Vera Cruz by the United States Marine Hospital Service, on the recommendation, as I am assured, of the State Board. The proceedings of this Board, as published in the *Picayune* of Sept. 21st, embrace a letter from Dr. Mainegra, dated Vera Cruz, Aug. 31st, 1883, to the President of the State Board. In this letter is to be found the very same lesson taught by Dr. Guitéras and repeatedly by other authorities before as well as since the birth of these gentlemen. It is as follows: "No doubt you are informed of the fact that yellow fever prevails here the year round, and nothing is said about it at all. Last year [1882] seventy-two deaths occurred in this city and port, twelve of these in the month of December, the disease being considered very mild that year." When one recalls the *something*, which, in June, 1882, the State Board "said about" yellow fever in Vera Cruz, Dr. Mainegra's opening phrase, "*no doubt you are informed*

of the fact," presents an unintentional example of sarcasm as amusing as any book of rhetoric contains.

Having returned from his mission, additional evidence of importance was presented to the State Board by Dr. Mainegra. This, as published by the *Times-Democrat* of December 6th and the *Picayune* of December 6th and 7th, reports the following pertinent facts: "The Vera Cruz authorities have heretofore been of the opinion that yellow fever is not contagious, and hence report that there is no yellow fever prevailing." Further, a valuable tabular statement of the yellow fever statistics of Vera Cruz for the years, 1881-2-3, shows, as to 1882, that there were 72 deaths by yellow fever and 133 additional deaths by diseases of which the names are frequently misused to conceal yellow fever; that there were deaths by yellow fever in every month of said year; and that there were more of such deaths in June, the very month when the State Board proclaimed to to the world its *knowledge* that Vera Cruz was "*perfectly healthy*," than in any other month of the year, with only two insignificant exceptions. In June, 1882, there were 11 deaths from avowed yellow fever, and 14 deaths from diseases by which yellow fever is frequently misnamed, thus implying the presence in said month of not less than from 50 to 150 cases of yellow fever.

On the presentation of these facts by a disinterested medical inspector to the State Board the member—who had, in June 1882, moved the dangerous proviso, exempting Vera Cruz from quarantine because "known to be" perfectly healthy—was induced to declare to his erring Board, that "these revelations were startling and important in view of the clean bills of health and favorable statements with which the Board of Health had been *imposed on*."

It has already been shown that, to sanitary authorities other than the State Board, these revelations must have been anything rather than "startling," and that these authorities had not for an instant permitted themselves to be "imposed on." And this fact is but one among many

showing why other health authorities have not given to the State Board that confidence which this Board has so indignantly claimed was unquestionably due to it. Surely he, who declared that an opponent was being imposed on and was thereby imposing on others, is amply justified in his lack of confidence, when his opponent is finally forced by proofs to avow that he was "imposed on."

It is earnestly to be hoped, that no sanitary authority will again permit itself to be thus deceived, by evidence which is easily to be procured—as all who are familiar with the history of yellow fever have long known—from any habitually infected place, and which is so generally false that the health of no community should ever be jeopardized by such evidence.

#### COLON, ISTHMUS OF PANAMA.

In so many other instances, besides the one now stated, has the State Board been just as manifestly "imposed on," that it ought not to be surprised that other sanitarians failed in 1882 to coincide with its President when he stated, that "he was convinced that there was no yellow fever there [viz., at Colon,] at the time the *Ile Marthe* was in that port," p. 328, *An. Rpt.*, 1882. This conviction was based on two consular letters, to which were subsequently added a newspaper extract and letters from one or two citizens. Assuredly there must have been evidence just as strong, and probably much stronger, to induce the State Board to proclaim to the world that Vera Cruz "was known to be at present perfectly healthy;" and, if "imposed on" by such evidence in the one case, then why not in the other?

However, whether the State Board was or was not "imposed on" as to Colon, was really immaterial to the issue raised against said Board. To comprehend this issue requires the following brief statement of the pertinent facts: Published information, dated Panama, May 11th, and again June 29th, warned New Orleans that Colon was

infected by yellow fever.\* On June 18th, the Isle Marthe, from this port arrived in New Orleans, and by the 22d its ballast had not only been discharged in a thickly settled part of New Orleans, but was also, until about August 16th, used to repair adjacent streets. In the mean time, the only four undisputed cases of yellow fever in New Orleans, in 1882, occurred and all of them within a stone's throw of this ballast. With good reason, these cases had been attributed to another source of infection; but when, about the middle of August, the attention of sanitary officers was for the first time called to the ballast, I, among others, held that this ballast *might* have been the source of infection; that its discharge at a city wharf should never have been permitted; and that it ought to be disposed of at once. The State Board deemed itself aggrieved and defended itself by declaring that Colon was not infected, and therefore, that the ballast could not be.

Now, I assert again that, while it has never been proved that Colon was not infected, it is immaterial to the issue made whether it was or was not. For, the published information about Colon, its geographical position, its increased number of unacclimated immigrants, etc., were sufficient, in the absence at that time of any good evidence to the contrary, to cause Colon to be treated as a suspected port; in addition and of much more consequence, the Board of Health itself was treating Colon as a suspected port, inasmuch as it was subjecting vessels from there, even the Isle Marthe itself, to detention at quarantine. Hence, the issue really made was as follows:

Any Board of Health, which decides that a port is sufficiently suspicious to quarantine the vessels therefrom, ought, beyond question, to decide that the ballast from such vessels is sufficiently suspicious to require a rigid prohibition of its discharge where any person may be exposed to risk of infection by it,—and its discharge should be

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\* The Annual Report of the Louisiana State Board of Health for 1882 attributes this information (p. 234) to Dr. Nelson, whose veracity is denied on the authority of U. S. Consul Jas. Thorington. It is worth noting, that Dr. Wolfred Nelson of Panama reports in the *Canada Med. Record* 31 cases of yellow fever to November 21st 1883, of whom 22 died.

much more prohibited into such a centre of population as the ballast of the quarantined and therefore suspected *Ue Marthe* was discharged into. This, the only issue ever made, has never been met by the State Board, which, however, has in this instance, as in many others, diverted attention from the true issue by inventing false ones. In part illustration of this fruitful subject, attention is called to two quotations from the Annual Report of 1882.

It is stated, p. 241, that: "Even if the ballast which was *accused* by the representations of the National Board of Health [Drs. Bemiss and Chaillé] and the Medical Director of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association [Dr. W. H. Watkins], of engendering yellow fever in New Orleans in 1882," etc. Now, all three of these gentlemen published reports on the subject, yet no word was ever written nor, as I am assured, was ever spoken by any one of them, very certainly not by myself, to justify this language. No one of us ever "*accused*" this ballast of engendering yellow fever; no one of us ever used language stronger than that *possibly or probably* this ballast *may or might* have engendered yellow fever. Such hypothetical words fail to amount to *an accusation*. What the Board *was* "accused" of was of negligence in permitting the ballast from a vessel, which it had quarantined, to be discharged into the streets of New Orleans. Let it meet this accusation which was and is still made, and not an accusation invented by itself to divert attention.

The second quotation, p. 231, is as follows:

"As the Supervising Inspector of the National Board of Health [Dr. Chaillé] held the position of one of the Vice Presidents of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association, and was present when this *wonderful discovery* of the *dangerous properties* of the ballast *was disclosed*, it was *his duty*, as an employé of the National Board, to have communicated this fact to the State Board of Health;" and, in proof that it was his duty to report, his official instructions are correctly quoted as follows: "In case it becomes proper to notify the health authorities of

Louisiana of any danger to its public health, present or prospective, you [Dr. Chaillé] will do so, in accordance with your previous instructions."

As already stated, neither I nor anyone else ever had or pretended to have possession of any such "fact" as "this wonderful discovery of the dangerous properties of the ballast" disclosed. And, language could not worse pervert the advocacy of the opinion, shared in by sanitarians generally, that suspected vessels contain suspected ballast, and that human life should not be exposed to any risks from such ballast. "Wonderful discovery," in deed! Language so misapplied, so perversive of truth, is enough to sicken the stomach of even a newspaper reporter! Nevertheless, let me get at the issue again invented to distract attention, namely, my failure of duty in neglecting to report the ballast to the State Board. It is true I did not report it to the State Board, yet it is also true that the President of this Board had no reason, comprehensible to me, for charging me with neglect of duty, except to divert attention once more from the neglect of duty of his own Board, as involved in the disposal of said ballast. For, while it may seem incredible, it is none the less the simple truth, that those who first reported this ballast to me did so *after* having given the same information to one or more representatives of the State Board and, when my informants first reported the facts to me, they assured me positively that they had already or would at once make the same report to the State Board. What is to be thought of a charge of neglect of duty in failing to report information which the Board was in possession of before myself? My official instructions were to report certain facts "*in case it becomes proper,*" and most assuredly I did not deem it proper to report superfluous information. Therefore although not my duty, in this case, to report, it was my duty to use my influence in having the suspected ballast promptly disposed of, and I deemed this duty discharged when assured by those whom I trusted, and at the very time when the ballast was first reported to me, that it



would be at once removed either by the State Board or by the Sanitary Association,—the latter to act separately if it failed to secure conjoint action.

In order that the reader may better comprehend the merits of the question, whether neglect of duty was justly chargeable to me or to the State Board, I append the following evidence from the President (in 1882) of the Sanitary Council of the Mississippi Valley and from the Medical Director of the Sanitary Association :

*New Orleans, December 8th, 1883.*

DR. S. E. CHAILLÉ:

*Dear Sir*—Yours of the 8th inst. is at hand. On the same day I communicated to you my suspicion that the Ile Marthe's ballast was the source of yellow fever infection, I addressed a postal card on the same subject to Mr. Ed. Booth, a member of the Conference Committee of the State Board, and furthermore I called upon him. I explained to him my reasons for requesting that said undisinfected ballast should be attended to, and cited the precedent of the ballast of the Valparaiso with its sad results in 1873. Mr. Booth promised me to call the attention of the President of the State Board to the same, and I have no doubt that he did so.

Yours most truly,

GUSTAVUS DEVRON, M. D.

*New Orleans, December 8th, 1883.*

DR. S. E. CHAILLÉ:

*Dear Doctor*—In reply to your note of the 8th, I can state that one member of the Board of Health had information in regard to the presence of the ballast from the Ile Marthe and of its suspicious character, before either you, Dr. Bemiss or myself had any knowledge of it. The suspicious nature of this ballast was brought to light by Dr. Devron, who called to see Mr. Booth about it while the doctor was on his way to the rooms of the Sanitary Association. Soon after this, on the same day, the suspicious facts were reported to me and I at once commenced

an investigation. This same day I visited you for consultation and found that Dr. Devron had called to see you. In returning from your office, I fell in with Dr. R. A. Bayley, sanitary inspector of the Board of Health, and gave him an account of the investigation. He was so much interested that he requested me to stop with him at Mr. Mark's office and to report to him the facts obtained. I went at once with Dr. Bayley to Mr. Mark's office and explained all I knew, concealing nothing from the representatives of the Board of Health. Considering that two of its most influential members, Mr. Booth and Mr. Marks and one of its sanitary inspectors, Dr. Bayley, had all data I could give, I did not trouble myself further.

I am truly yours,

W. H. WATKINS, M. D.

Finally, I had additional evidence that the State Board was as promptly and fully informed as myself respecting the ballast of the Ile Marthe.