

Holt (you)

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## Prevention of Yellow Fever.

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The following letter is an epitome of the reasons demanding an immediate and thorough investigation of a subject which involves the social, industrial and commercial prosperity of an immense territory embracing some of the fairest and richest portions of the Union.

A favorable solution of the question will throw open to capital and emigration vast fields of enterprise from which both must otherwise be diverted.

NEW ORLEANS, Dec. 31, 1885.

GEO. M. STERNBERG, M. D., Major and Surgeon, U. S. A. :

*Dear Doctor*—Your letter, just received, is confirmatory of the lively interest you feel in the subject of an investigating commission to determine the feasibility and value of inoculation with the causative agent of yellow fever as a preventive of that disease. I am glad to see that you fully understand the proposed commission as unrestricted in the scope of its observations, with liberty not only to investigate the claims of Freire and Carmona, but also to push to a conclusion, if possible, the principles and methods of Pasteur, Koch and others in the special application of them to yellow fever.

The terms of the bill creating this commission were carefully stated with an express view to untrammelled action in the field of discovery; any addition to present knowledge is in the line of its duty.

Whatever the crudities that may obscure the work of the

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Mexican, Central and South American observers, it is certain that they are attacking the yellow fever problem in a direction heretofore untried, but in line with inoculation and vaccination against small-pox, and Pasteur's wonderful methods of protecting flocks and herds against charbon, domestic fowl against chicken cholera, and now, as this great and benevolent scientist proclaims, the human being and animals against hydrophobia.

Surely the protection by inoculation against yellow fever, which is typically a disease of one attack, would strike the mind of any one as far more reasonable than to suppose the efficacy of such a method in granting immunity from hydrophobia.

So far from anticipating the possibility of such protection, the latter disease is about the last physicians would have expected of being amenable to a measure akin to vaccination.

When we look back upon the appalling calamity of 1878 and consider what an immense territory was invaded by yellow fever, the dreadful mortality, the incalculable commercial and industrial loss, together with the severe check upon the progress of the material welfare, indeed, of all the elements of civilization in the South, it matters not if Carmona and Freire had never existed; it is still imperative that a commission should be sent into the breeding places of that scourge, to apply there the startling discoveries revealed in Europe; to test the possibility of yellow fever being no exception to what seems now to be a natural law of infectious diseases, and to give to our country as quickly as possible whatever benefits may be derived from the latest developments of modern science.

The field of Bacteriology is being opened to the adventure of genius in the discovery, not only of the causes of pestilence, but, above all, of the power of limiting and suppressing it.

It offers a hope, and a brilliant one, of putting into the hands of our people the means of self-protection.

Until that field has been exhaustively cultivated, so far as relates to yellow fever, neither health authorities nor the general government dare assert that all that can be has been done, no measure of relief left untried!

As to the possible results of investigation in this field, the utterances of any man affirming or denying are equally valueless and without the slightest weight, inasmuch as the truth is not ascertainable except by direct experiment.

The question is not one of opinion, but, like any other problem in physics, is one of fact, and the necessities of an oft-afflicted and profoundly injured people demand a demonstration.

The appointed guardian at the gateway of the Valley of the Mississippi, the Board of Health of the State of Louisiana is compelled by every sentiment of humanity, by every appeal of duty and of prudence, to rise above the doubts and objections urged by personal bias of opinion, and to move forward with persistent energy in the execution of a plan which offers the possible emancipation of the American people from the dominion of a pestilence which has cost too many tens of thousands of lives and hundreds of millions of dollars to allow of computation here.

If we fail, my dear doctor, we fail in a glorious effort, sustained at all time, whether in success or in failure, by the consciousness of duty earnestly performed. In either event we feel assured of your entire sympathy. With New Year congratulation, I remain yours very truly,

JOSEPH HOLT, M. D.,

President Board of Health, State of Louisiana.

1885

