

YELLOW FEVER

And the National Board of Health.



[From the Pensacola Advance, March 10th, 1880.]



Dr. J. C. Le Hardy, of Savannah, Ga., is agitating to limit the powers of the National Board of Health, or rather to prevent their extension or giving "it a political influence that may be used to injure any section of the country." Dr. Hargis having received a Circular and a private letter calling on him to aid in organizing an opposition to a Bill introduced in Congress, by so good a Southerner as Senator Harris of Tennessee, has replied in terms which cannot fail to have full weight with the community. There are sanitarians who have local interests, *near to hand*, and who dread active supervision from without. With these Dr. Hargis has no sympathy. He is doubtless afraid that Dr. Le Hardy's method of stirring up the country, may give a handle to plans and projects which Dr. Le Hardy himself might be the first to condemn. The National Board of Health has no political significance whatever. Such men as Dr. Cabell of Virginia, Dr. Mitchel of Memphis and Dr. Bemis of New Orleans are Southern men. Drs. Billings and Turner belong to no section since they are Army and Navy Officers. Apart from the Solicitor General we know of no member of the National Board who has other than a strong claim as a medical man, and none as a politician, to hold the position to which he was originally nominated. It is well such a fact should be known and widely published, since the prevention of plagues is too important a matter in the South to be made the subject of any angry or senseless discussion.

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA, }
March 8th, 1880. }

DR. J. C. LE HARDY,
Savannah, Ga.

DEAR SIR:—Your circular letter and note have duly reached me, and, I regret you

think that Congress may "infringe upon our country laws which must prove detrimental to the commercial, as well as, the political prosperity of the Republic." I felt reassured, however, when I learned that the indefatigable Chairman of the Senate Committee on Epidemic Diseases—no less a man than Governor Isham G. Harris of Tennessee—had charge of this objectionable Bill.

Within the limits of this reply I cannot pretend to review the operations and the future tendencies of the National Board of Health. You say "now is your time to work for your theory."

I have worked throughout the entire period of my professional career, at the History and Pathology of Yellow Fever, and it will be my earnest endeavour to afford such proofs to the Medical Profession, on the Ship origin of this plague, in the tropical Atlantic, as must, in my opinion, prove convincing. But I have no sympathy with clogging the wheels of Sanitary legislation, for any personal ends or motives of self-aggrandizement.

The National Board of Health has been unfortunate in favoring the view that Yellow Fever is endemic in Cuba. The Report of the Havana Commission must, before another decade is past, meet, as it deserves, with the strongest condemnation. Such is my opinion on this one point. It is difficult enough to get the Spanish Government to do its duty, towards this country, by purifying the Pearl of the Antilles, and how can we hope for their energetic action when an American physician, clothed with all the prestige of authority, assures the world that Yellow Fever in Havana is inevitable?

In this most healthy region, singularly free from contagious maladies, where climatic seasonal conditions, only rarely favor the propagation of imported yellow fever, and where the winter hybernation of the malady has been proved impossible over a period, to my knowledge, of 30 years, how can we throw open our Port to commerce, in the summer and autumn, when a single ship from Cuba having one case of the disease on board, will close all inland communication?

It is, I confess, with absolute impatience that I learn of the continued advocacy of the local origin of yellow fever, either on this Continent or in the West India Islands. The blunders of the Profession are still in striking contrast to the

common sense of the people, on the one vital question of the communicability of this disease. The eloquent teachings of shot-gun quarantine—detestable as every form of real or apparent inhumanity must be—may yet drive home the substantial truths, in relation to the transmissibility of the malady by Railroads and refugees.

When I reflect that a most worthy representative of the Medical Profession in the South, Dr. Cabell, is President of the National Board of Health, and that an old and tried Sanitarian, like Dr. Stephen Smith of New York, is watching the interests of American Medicine, I hesitate to raise my voice in opposition to measures, which, with the engrossing duties of a busy life in practice, it is impossible for me to study closely.

We have a good opportunity, each year, of criticizing the action of the National Board of Health, at the meeting of the American Public Health Association, and I hope we may have leaders of courage to attack and denounce all measures calculated to hurt our Profession or our Country. But let us not keep up *quasi*-political agitations, calculated to interfere with the maturely considered projects of the National Board of Health. How can the Medical Profession expect public support, in matters of hygiene, if continued strife threatens to weaken the position of a Sanitary Council constituted by honorable members of that Profession. This continued cry of wolf, when there is no wolf, can only end by making us look ridiculous.

In conclusion, my dear Sir, I beg to assure you that any request, from the National Board of Health, to strengthen its position by such influences however trivial, that I may use, will be treated with the greatest respect and anxious consideration. The interests of commerce and of the whole world are bound up in the great question which I, for one, am glad to see entrusted for action and deliberation to the National Board of Health. That our colleagues on that Board will not betray their trust, nor act rashly, is universally acknowledged. I am in favor of an extension, and not limitation of their powers, and under the guidance of Hon. Isham G. Harris, State authority never can be forgotten.

I am Dear Sir, Yours Respectfully,
ROBT. B. S. HARGIS, M. D.

