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REPORT OF A SPECIAL COMMITTEE

OF THE

Chamber of Commerce of the State of New-York,

ON THE

RULES AND REGULATIONS

OF THE

HEALTH OFFICER OF THE PORT OF NEW-YORK

RELATIVE TO THE

DISINFECTION OF IMPORTED RAGS.

ADOPTED BY THE CHAMBER, JUNE 3, 1886.

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NEW-YORK:

PRESS OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

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# REPORT.

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*To the Chamber of Commerce:*

The Special Committee appointed to investigate the rules and regulations of the Health Officer relative to the disinfection of rags imported into the Port of New-York, do now respectfully report :

That when regulations concerning the importation of old rags were first adopted by the Treasury Department, in 1884, cholera was epidemic in certain ports of some countries bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, and it was feared it might visit the United States. The regulations, therefore, were made, wholly or chiefly, in reference to that disease. A circular dated November 15th, 1884, prohibited the unloading in the United States of old rags shipped after November 20th, from foreign ports or countries then or thereafter known to be infected with contagious or epidemic disease. France, Italy, and all Mediterranean ports were declared to be infected within the meaning of this circular order. Old rags gathered or baled in infected ports or countries and shipped from other ports or countries, were also prohibited from being unladen in the United States. This regulation is now referred to, because it was in general conformity to regulations adopted by many European governments. Subsequent regulations permitted the landing of rags that had been disinfected before shipment, or after arrival, by either one of four specified processes. On June 10th, 1885, the following Treasury Circular was issued :

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, *June 10, 1885.*

Whereas, it has been conclusively shown to the Department that, under existing laws, no general regulation can be legally

framed whereby the disinfection of old rags can be accomplished in foreign ports to the satisfaction of the several health authorities : Therefore, it is ordered—

I. That all circulars of this Department concerning the disinfection of imported old rags are hereby revoked, and that all old rags hereafter imported from foreign countries shall only be admitted to entry at the Custom House upon the production of permits from the health officers of the ports of importation, duly authorizing the landing of the same.

II. Vessels carrying old rags, arriving at any United States quarantine, will be detained by the quarantine officers, and held subject to the order of the proper health authorities at the port of destination.

DANIEL MANNING,  
*Secretary.*

TO COLLECTORS OF CUSTOMS AND OTHERS.

This order relegated the whole subject to the health officers at the several ports of importation.

At the request of your Committee, the Health Officer of the Port of New-York promptly transmitted a statement of the regulations in force at this port, of which the following is a copy :

*Regulations at the New-York Quarantine in relation to Foreign Rags.*

Old rags from any foreign country are required to be disinfected before shipment, or on arrival at this port.

Proof of disinfection in any foreign port or country is required.

A certificate of an inspector appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury for the disinfection of rags, and authenticated by the United States Consul, that the rags have been disinfected by one of the following processes, is required with each invoice :

1. Boiling in water for not less than thirty minutes and dried before baling, or treated with superheated steam under twenty-five pounds pressure for not less than eight minutes, and in such manner as to be heated to or above 230 degrees Fahrenheit in every part.

2. Exposure to dry heat to 230 degrees Fahrenheit, maintained for three hours.

3. Subjection to sulphur-dioxide, introduced in a vacuum of at least twenty-five inches, continued until a pressure of at least twenty-five pounds is produced, and an exposure to these conditions at least twenty minutes.

The following regulation for the disinfection of rags is one of several processes directed by the Treasury Department of the United States Government, in a circular dated December 22d, 1884 :

“Subjection to the action of confined sulphurous acid gas for six hours, burning two pounds of roll brimstone in each 1,000 cubic feet of space, with the rags well scattered upon racks.”

Shippers of foreign rags to this port have adopted this process to a large extent—nearly or quite six-sevenths of the rags in 1885 having passed the New-York Quarantine under a certificate of disinfection by the above process.

The Health Officer at the Port of New-York felt it his duty to recognize the process directed by the Government, which had been adopted to a considerable degree by the shippers of foreign rags.

Accordingly, a circular, issued by the Health Officer soon after the Government referred the matter to the maritime quarantine officials, gave notice that “rags disinfected by sulphurous gas, as per directions of the Treasury Department circular, will be admitted while there is reason to believe such disinfection is faithfully and efficiently performed.”

Disinfected rags, or those accompanied by certificates of disinfection, properly authenticated, are given pratique without delay.

Rags from infected ports, or gathered in infected countries, are subjected to preliminary disinfection at Quarantine, for the benefit of those portions of the bale (the wrappings) that have been exposed to the filth of the streets and wharves of infected ports. The detention for this purpose is usually an hour, more or less, according to the facilities afforded for disinfecting by the stowage of the cargo.

Vessels with cargoes of undisinfected rags and general merchandise are given “permit” to discharge cargo, “except rags,” or a “permit to discharge rags for disinfection.”

Vessels with invoices of rags accompanied by properly authenticated certificates of disinfection are given “permit” at Quarantine, “for landing and distribution of the rags.”

WM. M. SMITH,

*Health Officer, Port of New-York.*

If these regulations were applicable only to rags gathered in infected countries and exported to this country, either directly from infected ports, or indirectly, via or from uninfected ports or countries, it is believed that they would meet with general acceptance from those engaged in the trade ; and further, that even no objection would be made by importers if the landing of such rags in this country should be absolutely prohibited during the prevalence of cholera or other supposed infectious or contagious disease, and for a reasonable time after its disappearance. This latter course, as appears from copies of official orders, was adopted in 1884-85 by England, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Austria, when cholera was epidemic in certain parts of France, Italy, Spain and other countries bordering on the Mediterranean ; and if cholera ever has been or can be conveyed in rags, this course would surely seem as effective as any other to prevent it.

Your Committee is informed that at some ports of shipment no facilities have been provided for disinfecting by either of the designated processes, and at some there are no inspectors appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury to certify to the disinfection, as required by the regulation. In such cases the declaration of the shipper that the rags were not gathered in any infected port, district or country, and the certificate of local health authorities or other officials, that the country was free from infectious or contagious diseases, authenticated by the United States Consul, have not been sufficient to exempt the rags from disinfection by a costly process on arrival at New-York. This has occasioned much dissatisfaction.

In December, 1884, a patent was obtained for disinfecting bales of rags by means of superheated steam injected into the bale through perforated screw tubes ; and since January, 1885, this has been the only process, and apparently the only available one, used for that purpose in this port. The usual charge for disinfecting is \$5 per ton, (the ton being considered equal, on an average, to about three bales,) and \$1.20 per ton for lighterage to and from the place of disinfection. On a cargo of 1,000 tons this will amount to \$6,200, and is equivalent to from ten to twenty per cent. of the value of the rags. This heavy tax caused great dissatisfaction among importers and paper makers, and resulted in diverting about one-fourth of the entire importation destined for New-York, in 1885, to other ports where such an onerous regulation and requirement did not exist. Under permits from the Treasury Department, 19,295 bales were reshipped for entry to Portland, 2,500 to New-

London, 4,900 to Philadelphia, and 12,709 to Perth Amboy, from whence they were removed to Communipaw, opposite this City. From these points they have been distributed to paper mills throughout the country without being disinfected, and without detriment to the public health.

The regulation for disinfecting by superheated steam requires that the bale shall be subjected to it "for not less than eight minutes, and in such manner as to be heated to or above 230° Fahrenheit in every part." It is alleged by importers that these two requirements are not fulfilled, and, therefore, that the process, as hitherto applied, has been practically worthless. Your Committee inclines to the opinion that this allegation is not entirely unfounded; that does not, however, affect the merit of the process as a germicide, but rather indicates that it has not been carefully, faithfully and sufficiently applied. It is also alleged that the rags are injured by moisture caused by condensation of the steam, but the Committee has not pushed inquiries on that point.

Regulations which subject rags gathered in healthy countries and ports to disinfecting processes, on the supposition that they may be a medium for conveying cholera germs, do not find support in a general consensus of opinion, nor in facts of experience.

Dr. KOCH, perhaps the most eminent German specialist on the subject of cholera and its germ, at the conference last summer at the Imperial Board of Health, Berlin, said: "We know that hitherto cholera has never come hither by means of goods from India;" and that "it will be found that cholera has never reached us except through human beings themselves." And he further said: "This question of the possibility of infection through rags was discussed in the Cholera Congresses of Vienna and Constantinople, and nobody was able to furnish a single instance of the spread of the disease by this means."

In July, 1884, Sir CHARLES DILKE, President of the Local Government Board said, in the English Parliament: "There was no instance on record of rags having conveyed cholera."

In the same Parliament, in March, 1885, Mr. G. RUSSELL, Secretary to the Local Government Board, in reply to an inquiry by Mr. LABOUCHÈRE, said: "We know of no instance of cholera being imported in rags, and we have allowed such a period to elapse since the date of the last known case of cholera in Europe, as would materially reduce any possible danger. It does not appear that it would be further reduced by any of the customary processes of disinfection in use at English ports."

Health officers and sanitarians in the United States have expressed similar opinions. During the fifty years since 1832 we have had several visitations of cholera, and never had any regulations (so far as known to your Committee) for the disinfection of rags. We believe it is an uncontradicted fact, that there is no record of any case of cholera during this period traceable to imported rags or other merchandise.

On the other hand, there have been several opinions expressed in this country that it was possible that cholera germs might be conveyed in rags, and a case is cited in support of it. In 1867, when the cholera was epidemic in many parts of Switzerland, and especially at Zurich, it is reported that a number of cases occurred among workwomen engaged in a paper mill in a village about fifty miles from Zurich, and on investigation it was said to be found that rags went to the mill from Zurich and cholera houses.

The protection of the public health by the adoption and enforcement of proper maritime quarantine regulations to prevent, if possible, the introduction from foreign countries of infectious or contagious diseases, is, and should be, paramount to all merely commercial considerations; but, at the same time, no unnecessary burdens, restrictions or obstructions should be imposed on commerce, trade and manufactures, and especially if they are confined to only one or two ports, instead of being general to all, for in that case trade may be diverted from one to another without accomplishing the end desired, namely, protection of the public health; for it would seem futile to expect to shut out a possible danger by closing the main door of the house and leaving the windows open.

This makes it highly important that quarantine sanitary regulations, so far as they are deemed necessary or expedient, should be alike at all ports of entry; and if this desirable uniformity cannot be acquired through voluntary, harmonious action of the health authorities of the several States having seaports, then, as Congress has power "to regulate foreign commerce," and "to provide for the general welfare," and inasmuch as quarantine regulations are connected with foreign commerce and the administration of our custom houses, and as protection of the public health is of importance not only to particular localities, but is of equal and general concernment to all inhabitants of the country, therefore, in the opinion of your Committee, if existing laws do not, as stated in the Treasury circular of June 10th, 1885, give the National Government sufficient authority to fully control and regulate, as may be expe-

dient from time to time, the whole subject of quarantine, Congress should be asked to enact such laws as may be necessary for that purpose.

Your Committee cannot refrain from also calling attention to the fact that, according to the census of 1880, the quantity of rags used at the paper mills in the United States was 187,917 tons, and that of this quantity more than one-half were domestic rags, *i. e.*, rags gathered in our own country, and under circumstances and conditions not unlike those attending the gathering of old rags in foreign countries. Almost the only contagious disease that has ever appeared at paper mills in this country, and been attributed to the handling of old rags, is small-pox, and the cases of this, fortunately, are quite rare, and, in a majority of instances are said to be traceable to domestic rags. None of our domestic rags are subjected to disinfection, or to any quarantine regulations whatever. A requirement that all persons engaged in paper mills should be vaccinated, would probably be as sure a protection against small-pox as the disinfection of rags.

The fear of danger from imported rags as being a medium for conveying contagion, and especially in relation to cholera, is probably far greater than the facts of experience justifies; but so long as such fear exists in the public mind, and in deference to it, your Committee believes it expedient that such reasonable restrictions should be imposed upon their importation as will abate that fear, and yet not to be too oppressive to the large industrial interests connected with that branch of commerce and the manufacture of paper.

This Chamber, in a resolution adopted June 4, 1885, expressed its opinion that invoices of rags accompanied by a certificate of the United States Consul that the rags were all gathered in a country free from contagious or infectious diseases, did not require to be disinfected; and in relation to all other rags, that the proper disinfection at the place of shipment will cause the removal of all germs of disease and unhealthy consequences from the importation of rags into this country, and that the Chamber would recommend such action on the part of our Government as will require such disinfection at the port of shipment of every invoice of rags, and that the same shall be accompanied by the certificate of the United States Consul setting forth the fact.

As has been seen, on June 10, 1885, the Government revoked all its circulars and relegated the whole subject to the health officers of the several ports of importation.

In view of the present condition of the matter, and the difficulties and discontents that have attended it, your Committee, after hearing and reading much testimony, upon mature reflection has decided to present for consideration and action the following resolution :

*Resolved*, That it is the opinion of this Chamber—

I. That invoices of rags accompanied by a certificate of the United States Consul that they were all gathered in a country which at that time was, and for at least six months immediately preceding had been, free from cholera, or other contagious or infectious epidemic diseases, should not be required to be disinfected either before shipment or on arrival. In the absence of such certificate, rags coming from a port or country claimed to be free from such diseases should be disinfected on arrival.

II. That rags gathered in any port or country where such diseases then were, or had been prevalent at any time within six months immediately preceding the shipment thereof, and whether such rags are exported direct, or via any other port or country, and whether landed or stored therein, or transhipped overside to another vessel for re-export, should be prohibited from being landed in the United States so long as any prohibitory order, published by the Government or health officers, remains in force ; nor when the order is rescinded should such rags be landed until disinfected on arrival.

III. That quarantine regulations in relation to rags or other merchandise, or the disinfection thereof, should be uniform at all ports of entry in the United States, and should be under the sole control and management of the United States Government.

Respectfully submitted.

(Signed,)

DANIEL DRAKE SMITH, } *Of Special*  
CONSTANT A. ANDREWS, } *Committee.*

NEW-YORK, *June 1, 1886.*















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