

THE DEFUNCT NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH.

It is rumored that there is a project on foot for the resurrection of the defunct National Board of Health. Whether this project emanates from the board itself or from its offspring—the Sanitary Council of the Mississippi Valley—amounts to the same thing. They are auxiliary associations, materially dependant, and a recommendation from one or the other is equally biased.

The public is familiar with the grounds of our opposition to this scheme. From the nature of the case, it is evidently safest to trust, first of all, to the State Board. A National Board could only do two things, (1) prevent, (2) publish the appearance of yellow fever. So far as prevention is concerned, it will be admitted that the State Board, however constituted, would use its best endeavors. Its own reputation would be at stake, and behind it there would be an immense local pressure. The people of New Orleans have most to lose by the occurrence, most to gain by the absence of yellow fever. In recognition of this fact, both the city and the State have gone to the extremity of the law to protect themselves and the valley. They have not only established a rigid quarantine, but have prescribed absolute non-intercourse with infected ports, and they have done so in co-operation with the State Board.

So far, there has been no epidemic fever. New Orleans, Louisiana, and the whole country, have been protected. For six years there has been relief from epidemic, and the just conclusion is that the existing precautions are the best, most efficacious, so far devised.

The policy of concealment has been abandoned. The sanitary condition of New Orleans is faithfully reported at brief, stated intervals, and the whole world is as well informed in regard to that matter as the residents of the city themselves. Every suspicious case has been open to inspection. The assistance of the local authorities is always at the service of the curious and the apprehensive from abroad.

The National Board presumes to act in behalf of the general interest as opposed to a supposed local opposition. It begins, therefore, with a false theory. The sanitary demands of the Mississippi Valley and the city of New Orleans are identical so far as yellow fever is concerned, and their commercial interests are equally inseparable. It has been discovered here that fever cannot be hidden; that rumor is the source of error, and of danger. It is insisted here, most of all, that mortuary reports shall be truthful, and that all necessary steps of prevention shall be taken.

So far as national supervision is necessary or expedient, the Marine Hospital Service meets all requirements. That service is distinctly national. It is under no local influence. It has nothing to make either by concealing the truth or by manufacturing falsehood. The National Board occupies a precisely different attitude. It is by the conditions of its being opposed to repose. Hitherto it has felt that it must either have fever or the suspicion of fever. It has failed to receive or to justify confidence. As a rule, its inspectors have not been men of experience and reputation in the medical profession. They have not been content with reporting facts, but have sometimes manufactured reports to suit the necessities of their patron body. In pursuance of that evil policy they have already unnecessarily alarmed the country and injured commerce.

In protecting herself New Orleans protects the Mississippi Valley. She thoroughly understands this fact, but she does not ask to be believed on her own word. She asks only for the argis of a genuinely national board. She makes that appeal against a clique of local and sectional enemies. In doing so, she refers to her health record for the last six years, and demands the continuance of an experiment that has so far justified existing arrangements.