

IX.

Report of the Board of Health at New-York, on the Yellow Fever at Perth-Amboy. Communicated, with a Prefatory Letter, by C. CHISHOLM, M. D. Bristol.

DEAR SIR,

I have lately received from a friend at New-York, a copy of the report of a committee of physicians, ordered by the Board of Health of the State to inquire into the evidences of the existence of yellow fever (malignant pestilential) in the city of Perth-Amboy in New-Jersey, in September last. There are some circumstances in this report of a nature which merits the attention of those who are sedulous in the developement of truth, and whose minds have been directed to the establishment of the fact, of the origin of the pestilential fever of the United States of America, in imported infection. The consideration of these has induced me to believe, that the insertion of the report in the Medical and Surgical Journal may be acceptable to you, and to the description of your readers I have alluded to. I therefore have much pleasure in transmitting it; and I avail myself of the opportunity my doing so furnishes, to take leave to point out two or three of the most prominent of the circumstances which have more particularly engaged my attention. One is the positive refusal of the medical health officers to form a part of the committee, although requested so to do by the Board of Health; and the almost positive refusal of the officer more immediately employed in the preservation of the city of New-York from imported infection, to give the committee that information, which it was his duty to communicate, and which might have so essentially contributed to the welfare of the public. You will recollect, that on an occasion precisely similar, this very physician, Dr Rodgers, conducted himself in precisely the same manner. The motives to this extraordinary conduct, and the pernicious consequences resulting from it, I have stated in my letter to Dr Haygarth, to which I beg to refer. Another prominent circumstance is, the elucidation of the fact of imported infection, obtained through the candour and liberality of gentlemen at Amboy, who, from a correct and judicious performance of their civil and medical duties, had been able to trace the origin, progress, and character of the evil. I more particularly wish to lean on this circumstance, because it points out the eminent importance to a community of possessing men,

men, who from principle will discharge the duties of good citizens; whilst it exhibits the destructive consequences of placing in situations of high trust and responsibility, men who, to serve the sinister purposes of a party, avoid the investigation of truth, communicate false colouring to it, or employ the means of subterfuge and prevarication, to divert the public attention from it. I am not too severe in these animadversions. Severity to the guilty becomes safety to the innocent. And having, on a former occasion (Letter to Dr Haygarth) used full freedom of remark, without, hitherto, any attempt at refutation of the premises on which I founded it, I have a right to believe I acted on sound principle, in relation to the public and myself. Another circumstance deserving particular notice, is, that the locality of Perth-Amboy, excludes all peculiar causes of disease, such as marsh exhalations, reflected heat, imperfect ventilation, &c. In the course of my military medical duties during the revolutionary war in North America, I often resided at Amboy for weeks at a time, and have consequently a perfect knowledge of its situation. The fact of imported infection is therefore the more firmly established.

Before I leave you to the perusal of the report, permit me to inquire, whether you have been in the habit of receiving and reading my friend Dr Hosack's Medical and Philosophical Register of New-York. Dr Hosack, seeing the extremely pernicious tendency of the promulgation of a doctrine, which has for its sole object the exclusion of infection from every instance of fever in the United States of America, whether such exclusion was manifested by truth, or supported by falsehood, determined on diffusing a pure and uncontaminated knowledge of the matter of fact, and by fair and unsophisticated representation, presenting his countrymen with the power and option of acting decidedly and judiciously for their own preservation. By thus withdrawing the mask from the propagators of a most destructive theory—by thus disabusing the honest credulity of his fellow citizens,—it is evident he may be the means, under Heaven, of conveying to them a benefit of incalculable importance. He has entered the lists armed with truth and rectitude of intention, and with a consequent boldness and strength of attitude and feature, that hitherto, as they ought, render him invincible; and every lover of humanity will wish to borrow the sublime imagery of the apostle, that therewith he shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. I remain, &c,

*Bristol, Upper Berkely Place, }
January 10, 1812. }*

C. CHISHOLM.

Board of Health, September 16, 1811.

PRESENT, the Honourable DEWITT CLINTON, President,—*Aldermen*, Mesier, Carpenter, Fish, C. Pell, Cunningham, Buckmaster, J. Pell, Dickinson, Hoogland, Torrey.—*Doctors*, Miller, Bayley, and Douglass.

INFORMATION having been given to the Board, that a dangerous, malignant, and infectious fever now prevails at the city of Amboy, in New-Jersey, it was resolved that it be recommended to his honour the Mayor to issue his proclamation, interdicting all communication between the said city of Amboy and this city.

Resolved also, that a committee be appointed to confer with the Health Officer at the Quarantine Ground, and obtain from him, and from such other sources as they shall judge advisable, information of the existence of the said disease, and other facts deemed necessary by them, and report with all convenient speed to this Board.

Resolved, that the committee appointed be Dr Joseph Bayley, Dr John H. Douglass, of this Board, and Dr David Hosack of this city, and that the health officer, Dr Rodgers, be associated with them.

Board of Health, September 19, 1811.

PRESENT, The Honourable DEWITT CLINTON, President.—*Aldermen*, Mesier, Carpenter, Dickinson, Cunningham, Hoogland, Buckmaster, C. Pell, and J. Pell.—*Doctors*, Jones, Miller, Bayley, and Douglass.

The minutes of the meeting of the 16th were read and approved.

The committee appointed to confer with the health-officer, and to ascertain the facts respecting the disease prevailing at Amboy, presented the following report, which was approved and ordered to be entered on the minutes.

Report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Health to investigate the nature and origin of the disease, now prevailing at Perth-Amboy, New-Jersey, addressed to the President and Members of the Board;—

GENTLEMEN,

Agreeably to the instructions conveyed by the resolution of the Board of Health, we yesterday proceeded to Perth-Amboy, for the purpose of obtaining information relative to the nature and origin of the disease, at present prevailing in that city. The health-officer, Dr Rodgers, having been appointed with us a member of the committee, we waited on him at Staten-Island, with the hope that, as he had been at Amboy, and had seen some

some of those persons who had died of the disease, he would have had it in his power to furnish the information required, and perhaps rendered our visit at Amboy unnecessary; and in case he should not be in possession of the facts which would be expected by the Board of Health, to request him, as a member of the committee, to accompany us for the purpose of making the necessary inquiries. Upon our arrival at the Quarantine Ground, we accordingly stated to the health-officer, that information had been received by the Board of Health, of the prevalence of an infectious disease at Perth-Amboy, which had excited considerable alarm among the citizens of New-York. That in consequence of this information, the Mayor had thought it necessary to issue his proclamation interdicting the communication between the two places, and that the Board of Health had appointed a committee, for the purpose of inquiring into the facts of this subject: that Dr Miller, the resident physician, had been requested by the Board to be a member of the committee, but, owing to unavoidable engagements, he had declined the appointment: That thereupon they considered it expedient to request the health-officer to perform that duty, and understanding that he had already been at Amboy, and had expressed an opinion of the nature of the disease, they had been in expectation of receiving from him an official statement of the facts that were now sought for—Dr Rodgers replied, “that he did not consider the Board as having any right to expect a communication from him, relative to a fever at *Amboy*.”—We then observed, that as a constant communication existed between Amboy and New-York, and that, as the disease might be conveyed to the latter city, they expected from him, as the sentinel at the out-post, every information in his power to communicate, and that, by a resolution of the Board, they certainly did expect that he would also communicate to us the facts that had come to his knowledge.—Dr Rodgers then stated, “that when this disease might come under his review at the Quarantine Ground, he should consider it his duty to make such communication, but not till then,” and added, “you had better, gentlemen, proceed to Amboy to seek information for yourselves;” that his duty did not permit him to accompany us; that he should go again to Amboy to-morrow, and pay a visit of friendship, as his two former visits had been, but should not go in an official capacity. We then expressed the hope, that if he did not think it proper to accompany us, that he would favour us with his opinion of the nature of the disease, and the facts relative to its origin. This also he declined, observing, “that he was delicately situated, and did not wish to express to us an opinion on this subject.” We then asked him if he had

any objection to give us a statement in writing for the information of the Board, and that we would call for it on our return from Amboy. This he also begged leave to decline, adding, however, that if the Board of Health would do him the honour to address him a letter stating the points on which they wished information, he would answer their questions. We then read to him the resolution of the Board, requesting us to obtain from the health-officer such information as he possessed on this subject; and added, that we considered the application conveyed by the present resolution, as sufficiently respectful and expressive of the wishes of the Board for him to communicate the information requested; he, however, persisted in declining to express to us a committee from the Board, either verbally or in writing, any opinion on this subject, repeating "that his situation was a very delicate one." We then observed, that we had understood he had publicly expressed his opinion, at Amboy, of the nature of the fever prevailing there; he acknowledged he had visited Mr Kearney at Amboy, that he had also seen Mr Compton, and that he did express to the two physicians of that place, and, in presence of a third person, that Mr Kearney's case was that of "malignant fever of the highest grade." As the term malignant fever appeared to us of ambiguous import, we next inquired if he considered the fever referred to as the *yellow fever*: to this question he answered, he disliked the term *yellow fever*, considering it an improper one, but admitted that the disease was such as would by many persons be denominated yellow fever, and particularly mentioned, that the patient had the *glassy eye* and *yellow skin*. We next asked him if Mr Kearney had had the *black vomit*; to this he replied in the affirmative; but that in the other case the stomach was not so much affected: he also stated, that Mr Kearney had been subject to attacks of *bilious fever*, and that, upon this late occasion, had been very much fatigued, and prior to his attack, had been exposed to the sun without an umbrella. We repeated our request, that he would accompany us on our visit, but he again declining to comply with our wishes, we considered our conference at an end. We immediately proceeded to Amboy, and called upon Mr Daniel Perrein, the collector of the port, and Dr Nathaniel Manning, the physician who had attended on all those who had been attacked with the disease. The other physician being out of town, we had no opportunity of conversing with him. Dr Manning informed us that he had lost four patients with a fever which, from its peculiar symptoms and great mortality, he considered to be the yellow fever: that although he had been two years and a half a practitioner at Perth-Amboy, and his partner, Dr Freeman, had practised medicine in the same place many years before him, and both had been familiarly conversant with

with the fevers which ordinarily prevail in that city and its vicinity; particularly the bilious remittent, yet that they had never before the present season, met with any fever attended with the symptoms of that of which their late patients had died, and with which others at that time were affected; and, as further evidence, Dr Manning remarked, that at that very time he had patients ill of both diseases, each exhibiting its characteristic symptoms, and invited us to see them. He also stated, that our health-officer, Dr Rodgers, had visited with him two of the first cases, and had pronounced them as decided cases of the yellow fever, as he had ever seen.

Dr Manning then gave us an account of those persons who, in his opinion, had died of the yellow fever, namely, James Compton, who was attacked on the 7th, and died on the 10th instant.—James Kearney, attacked on the 9th, and died on the 14th.—Joseph Compton, attacked on the 11th, and died on the 15th, and Mrs Crowell, also attacked on the 11th, and died on the 15th. He observed that a Mrs Marsh, an elderly lady, died yesterday morning, the 17th, after a week's illness, but her disease did not appear to be characterized by the same symptoms, that had distinguished the cases of the first persons that have been mentioned. The first four, he remarked, were all seized with severe pain in the head, back, and limbs, attended with a highly inflamed state of the eyes. On the second or third day the skin, especially about the neck and breast, became yellow, which colour gradually extended over the greater part of their bodies; and, in all, the stomach was very much affected with a sense of heat or burning, and rejected almost every thing received into it; which symptoms he had never found associated in the ordinary autumnal, or any other fevers in that place or neighbourhood; we asked him particularly if he had seen Mr Kearney in any of his former attacks of fever, to which he had been subject in the autumn, as before related to us by Dr Rodgers. He replied, he had been his physician in two such attacks, and that his disease exhibited the ordinary characters of our common autumnal remittent fever, and was totally different from the inflammatory symptoms with which he was attacked in his last illness. He particularly remarked, that Mr Kearney threw off a great quantity of black matter, resembling coffee with the grounds, and mixed with other portions in the form of flakes. We next asked Dr Manning for his opinion relative to the origin of this extraordinary disease. He replied that there was but one opinion, either with the inhabitants or physicians, namely, that it was derived from some of the West India vessels, which had been lying at the wharves, observing, however, that the brig Ocean, from St Bartholomews, was the vessel which the inhabitants in general supposed

posed to have introduced it. The town we observed to be remarkably elevated: the soil chiefly composed of sand: free from all lodgments of water; the streets wide, and the houses, for the most part, spacious, and at a considerable distance from each other, and the whole town exhibiting an uncommon degree of cleanliness. Dr Manning also informed us, that there were no local causes to which this calamity could possibly be referred, and that it could only be accounted for as arising from intercourse with the vessels at the wharves, and that the citizens were so perfectly convinced of this fact, that they had ordered them to be removed to the stream. He further stated, that Mr Kearney and the two Mr Comptons had all been frequently on board the *brig Ocean*, and another vessel lying along side of her, the *ship Favourite*, from the Havanna, both of which vessels had come consigned to Mr Kearney.—He also observed, that Mr Joseph Compton had not only been on board of the vessels at the wharves, but that he had sat up with his brother James, during his illness. Mrs Crowell, the fourth person mentioned, was the wife of a ship-carpenter, who resides at the head of the wharf, within 50 yards of the said vessels. Dr Manning also stated, that Mrs Crowell was so near to the vessels, that upon one of them (the *Ocean*) having her bilge water pumped out, she was made very sick by the smell of it, the wind blowing directly towards the house, and into her apartments, and that she herself, during her illness, frequently declared to her physician and friends, that in her opinion she had thus taken the disease. It will be readily observed, that the same wind which blew the effluvia of the bilge water, would also convey the poisonous vapour from the adjoining vessel. Having received this information from Dr Manning, we accompanied him in his visit to five of his patients whom he considered to be the most dangerously ill. We united with him in opinion, in pronouncing three of those, viz. Miss Ann Taylor, Captain James Baynon, and Mr Voorhees, to be *decided cases of yellow fever*. The diseases of the two others, Mr Semple and Mr Kane, were readily distinguished as the *common bilious remittent of autumn*. The alarming situation of Miss Taylor particularly arrested our attention, although this was the second day of her illness; her symptoms (so peculiar are the features of this disease) were of a character, that declared her to be in the most imminent danger, and with all the kind assistance she receives from her amiable sisters, and the skill of an attentive physician, we have too much reason to fear that she must soon be numbered among the victims of this deadly disease. Miss Taylor resides some distance from the source of infection, but, on inquiry, we found that she had been unfortunately in the neighbourhood

neighbourhood of the vessels, by frequently visiting a friend in the house adjoining to that in which Mrs Crowell lay ill and died, and that too at the very time of Mrs Crowell's illness. We learned also, that the other persons taken ill, had been exposed either directly by being on board the vessels, or by visiting those who were ill of the disease. Many other persons, Dr Manning informs us, had been just seized with fever, but so recently, that he would not yet undertake to pronounce on the character of the disease. Our attention was also directed to the vessels supposed to have introduced the fever. For this purpose, we applied to the collector of the port, who furnished us with the following facts.—That twelve vessels had arrived at that port from the West-Indies, since the first day of June. That many others had arrived from Ireland, full of passengers, in a most filthy condition, but remarkably healthy. He then informed us that the brig *Ocean*, the vessel at first suspected, arrived at the wharf on the 4th September, from Bartholomews; that she was laden with rum, sugar, molasses and coffee; that four or five days after her arrival she began to discharge her cargo. The master, Captain Sutton, being in New-York, we had no opportunity of obtaining any information from him. The Collector stated, that Mr Kearney, as the consignee, was frequently in the hold of the vessel. Captain Little, a passenger in the *Ocean*, informed us, that her crew had been healthy, but admitted that her bilge water was in a very offensive state, and that, in this respect, she was a filthy vessel, but not more so than West-India traders in general. Mr Perrein next stated, that the ship *Favourite*, James Stuart, master, the other suspected vessel, arrived from the Havanna, and came to the dock on the 30th August, and was also consigned to the late Mr Kearney, and that she, with the other vessels, was removed to the stream on Sunday last; he added, that Mr Kearney, the consignee, and the two Mr Comptons, had been also frequently on board of this vessel. Captain Stuart being in Amboy, we availed ourselves of the opportunity of conversing with him, relative to the state of his vessel. He, with great frankness, gave us every information we requested. He stated, that he first went to North Carolina, from Perth-Amboy; that he next proceeded to Falmouth, (Jamaica), and from thence to the Havanna, and that he had brought the crew all back with him in a state of health; that they had all been several voyages to the Havanna, some three, four, and five voyages, and were all well-seasoned to the West India climate: he also acknowledged *that it was very sickly at the Havanna when he was there*. Upon questioning him relative to his vessel, he also very candidly stated, that his ballast had not been shifted from the time he left Amboy to this day. Such are

are the facts we have been enabled to obtain on this subject, and which we beg leave to present to the Board without delay. As it has been made our duty to express an opinion of the nature and origin of the disease in question, we feel no hesitation in saying, *first*, that the disease, in our opinion, is that commonly known and described as the *Yellow Fever*; and secondly, that it has been satisfactorily traced to one of the two last mentioned vessels, arriving from the West Indies, and that it has most probably been derived from the *ship Favourite, from the Havanna*, which is by all acknowledged to have been a sickly port at the time of her sailing. Nor do we conceive it to be an objection to the correctness of this opinion, that the crew remained healthy throughout the voyage, as it is also stated, that by the several voyages they had made to the Havanna, they had become seasoned to that climate. It will be readily recollected by the Board, that a similar instance occurred in July 1809, at which time two persons from this city, worked on board the brig *Mary*, a vessel from the Havanna, then detained at the Quarantine Ground, and were seized with the yellow fever, of which they died in this city, although the crew of the same vessel had been in perfect health during the whole of her voyage.

We cannot conclude this communication without remarking, that Mr Perrein, the collector at Amboy, and Dr Manning, a physician of the same city, are entitled to our acknowledgments for the very unreserved and candid manner, with which they communicated to us the information they possessed relative to the subject of our inquiries.

We are, gentlemen, very respectfully,

Your humble servants,

DAVID HOSACK,

JOS. BAYLEY,

JOHN H. DOUGLASS.

New-York, September 18, 1811.

To the President and Members of the Board of Health.

Extracted from the Minutes,—J. MORTON, Secretary.

The Board of Health of Philadelphia have issued a proclamation, prohibiting all intercourse and communication between the city of Amboy, and the city and county of Philadelphia, on account of a pestilential disease prevailing in the former city. Persons, after leaving Amboy, must perform 14 days quarantine before they can be admitted into Philadelphia.