

ADDRESS

— OF THE —

STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

— AND —

VITAL STATISTICS

— OF THE —

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA,

TO THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

HARRISBURG:

E. K. MEYERS, STATE PRINTER.

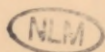
1885.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE
Bethesda, Maryland



ADDRESS OF THE
State Board of Health and Vital Statistics
Of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,
to the People of Pennsylvania.

E. K. Meyers, State Printer.





ADDRESS

OF THE

“State Board of Health and Vital Statistics of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,” to the People of Pennsylvania.

The “State Board of Health,” called into existence by the will of the people of this great Commonwealth, expressed through its representatives in General Assembly met, and approved by its chief executive, enters upon the discharge of its grave duties and the exercise of its important powers, deeply impressed with the sense of the responsibilities which devolve upon it, and reverently invoking the blessing of the God of nations upon its labors. It desires at the outset so to define its position as to lead to the immediate establishment of those friendly reciprocal relations between itself and the public, which can be securely founded only upon a vigilant care for the well-being of the people by the State, on the one side, and “a decent respect for the government by the people,” on the other.

It is not so much to say that the creation of this board marks a new era in the history of the State, since it indicates the recognition by our legislators of the truth, reflected from the minds of the people, once so well formulated by England’s brilliant prime minister, Lord Beaconsfield, that “the health of the people is the first duty of the statesman.” The “DECLARATION OF RIGHTS” which constitutes Article I of the Constitution of this Commonwealth, and is therefore a part of its organic law, proclaims that “all men have certain inherent and inalienable rights; among which are those of enjoying and defending life and of pursuing their own happiness.” It is the conviction of this Board that these necessarily include the inherent right to the enjoyment of pure air, pure water and pure soil, since without them life can neither be enjoyed nor successfully defended and the pursuit of happiness becomes a cruel mockery. It further conceives one of its paramount duties to be to see that no man or combination of men, however rich or powerful, shall be allowed to trespass on these rights of the humblest citizen, whether from negligence, from greed of gain or simply from ignorance. It is no mere empty figure of speech, by which we call disease a public enemy. It requires to be met with organized resistance, and this resistance must be directed by a responsible head. When pestilence invades our borders, that head must be clothed with powers analogous to those of a general when the foe is at the gates. Sanitary law, in place of martial law, is then proclaimed, and what are, in times of general health, recognized as sacred rights of person and property, are sternly set aside. When such emergencies arise, as they inevitably must at some time, and as they possibly may at no distant day, the Board confidently looks to the sound sense and self-control of the people to lead

them to submit cheerfully to whatever temporary inconveniences it may be deemed necessary to impose. The abridgement of the license of the individual—nay, at times, even of his rights—for the sake of protecting the rights of the community, is the very foundation-stone of civilized life. Civil organization cannot exist without it. Hence, restrictions are placed upon certain kinds of business which threaten injury to human beings. We prohibit the merchant from exercising his right of unrestricted barter and sale and storage in the matter of explosives. He is not allowed to keep any considerable quantity of gunpowder, nitro-glycerine or dynamite within certain limits, or within a certain distance of an inhabited house. Every one acquiesces in the justice of this restriction of his rights. But if a powder magazine had exploded in the heart of Philadelphia on the first of January, 1872, this calamity, frightful as it would have been, would not have caused a tithe as many deaths—would not have produced a hundredth part as much suffering, would not have inflicted an approach to as great a pecuniary loss, as did the epidemic of small-pox which was then raging. Thousands of lives, tens of thousands of maimed, disfigured or invalidated persons, millions of money—such was the cost of that explosion of disease. Is it too much to insist that all our citizens shall submit to that slight infringement of their personal rights, which an immense majority voluntarily undergo, in order that another such calamity shall henceforth, forever, be an impossibility within the borders of this Commonwealth?

Heretofore it has been only a straggling, desultory warfare which has been waged against preventable disease within our borders. Isolated health-boards and solitary sanitarians, here and there, have carried on a gallant fight, but against great odds, because lacking the element of intelligently combined action which is essential to success. A prominent English Medical Review in speaking of our fragmentary and disjointed system of hygienic administration, if system it can possibly be called, says: "There is much good work done under a species of semi-authority and sufferance, and by volunteer exertion; but the plaint is the lack of a central authority and administrative power to make sanitary supervision an effective reality. The water supply of a considerable portion of a great city is abominably polluted, but no sufficient authority is found to remedy it; there are numerous and deplorable nuisances but no efficient inspectors, there are many factories and work-shops, but no laws to secure their hygienic condition or the physical well-being of those employed in them; there is evidence, unmistakable, of the sale of unwholesome and adulterated food, but it is nobody's business to meddle with it and protect the public, there are on all sides complaints of building operations in defiance of sanitary laws, and no one with authority to attend to them and take action against them, and lastly intra-mural interments stand condemned in all civilized communities but the public authorities of the American cities have no power to stop them." It will be the business of this Board to see to it that this stigma upon our civilization is removed; to collect and co-ordinate these scattered forces, marshalling them into a regular army of well-drilled sanitary troops, armed and equipped with all the appliances that modern science can suggest for stamping out pestilence and conquering contagion; to strengthen feeble organizations, and to establish new ones where none exist, until there shall not be a hamlet in the entire domain of the State without its regularly constituted health-officers in direct communication with the central head.

Where the hygienic interests of different sections appear temporarily to conflict, the Board will use its best efforts to harmonize them. It often happens that the sanitary undertakings of one city prove the opposite of health-giving in their results in regard to another. The towns and cities which line the Schuylkill, for example, meritoriously wash themselves in that limpid stream, and so far do well; but unhappy Philadelphia, with the typhoid virus creeping through her veins, shudders as she unwillingly drinks their defiled washings. That they do this at their peril the story of afflicted Plymouth only too clearly demonstrates, for let it not be forgotten that Philadelphia sowed the seed from which death has just reaped so fearful a harvest in that far off mountain village. Hence the necessity for the consideration on the part of the central sanitary authorities of the difficult problem afforded by "the pollution of rivers," in a broad, generous spirit, with a view to determining methods whereby one community may improve its own health conditions without impairing those of a neighbor.

In an immense territory like our own, larger than that of most of the nations of Europe, with its great diversity of surface, its lofty mountain ranges and its immense forests, wonderful opportunities exist for sanitary engineering on an immense scale, determining in what directions water-sheds shall be encouraged and in what diverted, to what extent private corporations are to be allowed to jeopardise the health of large sections of the country by obstructing natural water-courses, for the purposes of manufacture or navigation; deciding how far certain forests act as natural barricades against devastating winds and should therefore be left untouched by the axe, in order to maintain a permanent average rain-fall, and thus avert droughts, cyclones and floods, and how far others interfere with the circulation of healthful breezes, and may therefore be with benefit removed.

With a rapidly growing population, and the frequent development of new centers of wealth and industry, much effective sanitation for the future can be accomplished in supervising the laying out of new towns. No village must be allowed, from this time forth, to take the simplest corporate form without laying before this Board a carefully prepared plan of its sanitary provisions. Inquiry will be made into the character of the soil, the quantity and quality of the possible water supply, the width and inclination of its streets, whether its projected system of sewerage is wise and scientific, whether its surface drainage takes advantage of the natural water-courses, its regulations in regard to habitations, the space of ground allowed to each, and the space required in each in relation to the number of occupants. All these are points which enlightened sanitary science demands should be arranged, with a wise prescience, in advance, and not left to settle the selves hap-hazard as emergencies may arise, after fearful sacrifices of health and life, and at an immense outlay of money—as our older cities are finding out to their cost.

The Board must also consider the relations of the country to the city as a purveyor. The supply of fresh vegetables and fruits, and pure milk and other dairy products to large communities, is of the utmost importance, and every effort will be made to require and ensure it. The transportation of live stock for food needs to be very carefully watched and regulated, both that none but healthy and therefore wholesome meat may be exposed for sale, and that infectious and epidemic diseases may not be introduced among our native herds and flocks from other localities; and although this subject has not been neglected by a co-ordinate branch of governmental supervi-

sion, the Board feels assured that any assistance which it may render in so important a matter will not be considered as impertinent.

But to attempt to briefly indicate, even, all the directions in which this organization hopes to add to the welfare and prosperity of the State, would be to write a volume, instead of carrying out its intention, simply to speak a word. The intimate connection between a high standard of public health and material prosperity cannot be gainsaid. A human life has an actual cash value to the community as certainly as that of a horse or a cow. Fifteen million dollars would not cover the loss to this State from preventable disease in a single year. Hence, the money spent in sanitary precautions and improvements, is repaid with compound interest in the longevity and productive capacity of the population. Its disbursement is economy of the wisest kind, worthy of the most sagacious statesman.

But while it is true that the subjects confided to the consideration of this Board involve the profoundest problems of political economy and the most intimate researches of scientific investigation, it is not less true that every home and every hearth in the Commonwealth is deeply interested in the practical results to which it shall attain. Every vacant chair by the fireside, every empty place at the table, whose beloved occupant was snatched away by the ruthless hand of contagious or preventable disease, is a mute appeal for more searching inquiry into the causes and means of prevention of such diseases by the health authorities, and more general interest in their labors, and readier acquiescence in their decisions, by the community at large and its individual members. The Board therefore earnestly invokes the conscientious co-operation of every householder to the extent of keeping his own home and other buildings of which he may have supervision in a healthful condition.

Especially does it desire that the women of the State should take an active and intelligent interest in the practical solution of the problems of home hygiene and sanitation. The establishment of the first State Board of Health in the United States was effected by the efforts of a woman. Reference is made to that Board whose work has been so effective and thorough, that it has been looked to as a model by other similar organizations—that of Massachusetts, now in the sixteenth year of its existence. The ancients were right in making the divinity of health a goddess rather than a god; for woman, as wife, mother, nurse, has for her special function that daily ministry to the bodily welfare and daily necessities of offspring and of husband, that constant presence in and care of the home, which are such essential promoters of health in the individual, in the family and in the community. The Board is especially urgent, then, that the mothers of the land should attentively study the leaflets and tracts which it will from time to time issue, giving plain, practical advice as to the best methods of preventing the spread of infectious diseases, and of making their homes the abodes of health and therefore of happiness.

The Board proposes to indulge in no display of sanitary pyrotechnics in order to dazzle the public and create for itself a factitious importance, but rather by quiet, steady, carefully considered work, to organize sanitary effort, to acquaint itself with the health conditions of every quarter of the State, and to diffuse information which shall develop an enlightened public sentiment in regard to both rights and duties from a sanitarian standpoint. Especially will it recognize the necessity for moving with caution where the interests of trade, manufacture or commerce apparently conflict with

those of public health, aiming always to protect the latter with the least possible interference with the successful promotion of the former.

But, on the other hand, if the Legislature of this Commonwealth, acting with its usual wise conservatism, has been slow in establishing this safeguard to the lives and health of the people, the latter may congratulate themselves that a much stronger law has now been enacted than could possibly have been passed when the first application for such legislation was made. Instead of being only a statistical and advisory body, as must then have been created, the present Board has been endowed with ample powers to enforce its regulations for the protection of the public, and this grant imposes a responsibility which the Board recognizes and will not hesitate to assume if occasion demand.

The Board cannot find more fitting language in which to conclude this address than that employed in a recent admirable circular issued by the board of health of the city of Philadelphia "for the guidance of citizens in the management of their dwellings and for personal application." It is as follows: "While the health of the community depends in great degree upon a rigid observance by officials of all the laws of public hygiene, it is no less dependent upon the faithful application of the principals of hygiene on the part of individuals. To accomplish the best results, the earnest and cheerful co-operation of the people with the health-authorities in all matters pertaining to the general health is absolutely indispensable."

ED. WM. GERMER, M. D., President.

PEMBERTON DUDLEY, M. D.

J. F. EDWARDS, M. D.

DAVID ENGELMAN, M. D.

RUDOLPH HERING, C. E.

J. H. McCLELLAND, M. D.

BENJAMIN LEE, M. D., Secretary.

OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH. }
HARRISBURG, *July 3, A. D. 1885.* }

