

Dalton (S. W.)

LETTERS OF CENCI,

WRITTEN FOUR YEARS AGO,

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ON THE

SANITARY REFORMS

NEEDED IN NEW ORLEANS,

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1853.

TO THE
COMMON COUNCIL
OF THE
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS,

THESE LETTERS ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

S. W. DALTON, M. D.



PREFACE.

A few years ago, prompted with a hope that I might do some good, make some suggestions, by which the sanitary condition of our city would be improved, I consented to the publication of the series of letters now presented to the public. These letters then appeared in one of our daily papers; and some friends now urge me to allow them to bring those letters before this community in pamphlet form; and although I would have been better satisfied had they agreed to some revisions and additions that might, at this time, be made with advantage; yet I have, without amendment or addition, placed them at their disposal. They seem to think that better results will be obtained by a comparison of past with present opinions, on the important matter of which they, in a desultory manner, but imperfectly treat; and which, at present, so much engrosses public attention. I have therefore yielded, but reluctantly, to their urgent solicitations, and put into their hands the little work. Should it, in any degree, prove so useful as those friends who desire its re-publication believe it will, I shall feel myself more than compensated for any labor bestowed upon it by myself.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
August 3, 1850.

EDITORS CRESCENT: Some months ago I promised to communicate for your paper, a few articles upon the Medical Police of this city; but just at that time a medical gentleman of learning, ability and extensive research, appeared in a cotemporary journal, promising a "series of numbers" on the health of New Orleans, which I presumed would embrace, and in an abler manner, all I could say on the subject of Medical Police, so that I have deferred, under that impression until now, the fulfillment of my promise.

That gentleman has, however, stopped short, I believe, for the present, of the completion of his contemplated "numbers," on the health of New Orleans; for in his last he informed us—"Hereafter I shall enter upon the remote causes—the causes of the causes of death, and shall endeavor to point out the sources of the high mortality of this city and the means of remedying them." Now this is a proposition, if practicable, of vast, of inestimable importance to every citizen of our city—to its future greatness and lasting prosperity. And he who shall successfully demonstrate the practicability of remedying the "high mortality of this city," of removing its causes, will acquire an immortality more noble and exalted than the hero of a thousand battles. And here I must express my sincere regret, the regret of all who know the learned and indefatigable medical philosopher alluded to in connection with this subject, that he did not, before he closed or suspended his interesting "numbers," point out what are the sources of our epidemics and how they may be remedied.* The season of the year, the police condition of the

* Dr. Simonds, now a member of the Sanitary Commission.

to be efficient and useful, should be constituted, with the exception of the presiding officer, exclusively of gentlemen educated and learned in the science of medicine, without which, it seems to my humble understanding, it can neither obtain nor deserve the confidence of the public or the medical profession. What, sirs, could possibly be more absurd and unsatisfactory on the appearance of an epidemic among us, of whatever character, than to read, for example, the *medical opinions* and *advice* of non medical gentlemen upon the connection or confluent relation between an ordinary looseness of the bowels and the primary attack of cholera Asiatica—upon the proper treatment of the algid or collapsed stage, as distinguished from that of the premonitory diarrhœa, or their views upon any general plan of preventive hygienic improvement! Can it be possible that this intelligent community would be satisfied, would be willing to place in such hands, the public health or the public treasury for its amelioration? Surely not—for the reason that the former could not be *understandingly* regarded, nor the latter wisely applied. And yet, such is the composition of the Board of Health established for this city and Lafayette by the Legislature of 1850! I mean to say a majority of that Board are laymen and presumed to be unlearned, unskilled in the nature and causes of disease, and therefore inadequate to the duties imposed upon them, as useless to the Board of Health as a director of our public schools would be to a Board of Examiners who did not understand or speak the English language. But it is urged on their behalf, *that these lay gentlemen would have the health of the city more at heart* than “practicing physicians,” and are, therefore, essential to the establishment of an efficient Board of Health. How ridiculous! As if a man’s heart were capable of taking cognizance of disease, or knew how to remove its causes. It is the head, the well regulated and enlightened mind, sound understanding and discriminating judgment, that give a proper and sensible expression to every feeling of the heart; and without these intellectual endowments and intelligence, a *layman’s heart, however feeling*, would be as useless a piece of muscle, *intelligentially*, as the heart of any other animal. But I am sorry to say that such did not seem to be the opinion of our able and learned representatives in last

session of our State Legislature. And to my mind it does appear not only strange and hasty legislation, but invidious and unjust as well as unwise in our law makers to enact a Board of Health, or any other Board, *not one half* of whose members should be capable of discharging its duties—the majority idle “lookers on in Vienna,” wholly unacquainted with the *first lines*, the elementary principles of medical philosophy, and “unconnected till now with the medical profession.” Surely it cannot be seriously urged that such men can have a more *heart felt* and sensible interest in the health of the city, or execute as efficiently the duties enjoined by the statute than eminent physicians whose intimate and scientific acquaintance with their profession, would only, in legislative opinion, be disqualifying, dangerous considerations, and *might, perchance, be employed in the propagation of disease, instead of the preservation of the public health*, unless a system of *espionage* be incorporated in the Board, by the appointment of a majority of “observing laymen” to prevent it! This I denounce as an unjust and hateful calumny upon the medical profession and detrimental to the public health. Physicians only, in all ages, have risked their lives in the philanthropic investigation of the most malignant diseases with which our race has ever been visited. But with this construction of the first section of the act of 1848, still in force, what physician, I would ask, could, with any honor to himself, remain a single hour associated with a Board having a *spy* over his conduct to determine the kind and degree of interest that he should feel in the preservation or retardation of the public health? I hope, I believe there is not one. Then let the Board be remodeled. It must be done before it can ever be efficient and useful or acquire the confidence and support of the public. The whole matter of public health should be under the magisterial control and direction of the ablest, the most experienced and distinguished medical gentlemen of our city, whether “practicing physicians” or not; and furnished with ample means and executive aid to carry their sanitary measures into immediate effect.

From a Board of health thus constituted, incalculable good would certainly inure to this city; and in order to make its actions the more certain and effective, and to give all the needful **information** to the Board, the Health Wardens should also be

selected from physicians residing in the several wards of the city, for which they may be chosen to act; and for the same reasons as already given why the Board of Health should be composed of medical men, which I conceive to be too clear and conclusive to require *re-enforcement* or repetition. I will, however, add in this connection, that besides the duties imposed by the 4th section of the act of 1848 upon the Health Wardens, they be required, under the organization here proposed, to render all necessary medical attention to the really indigent sick of their respective wards, and receive a fair compensation for the honest and faithful discharge of their several duties, which, if diligently performed, will be no sinecure. They are not only onerous, but particularly disagreeable, and will never be properly executed without remuneration. And if the city of New Orleans *really* wish its sanitary condition placed beyond the peradventure of recurrent epidemics—if the Legislature be in earnest about ridding us entirely of annual and semi-annual epidemics, by which the great energies and resources of this great city have been so much prostrated—they must expect to pay for it—would be delighted, no doubt, in doing so, and liberally too, provided they can be well assured of its accomplishment. Every other department of our municipal government is amply provided for, besides *extras*. Were not the iron doors of the treasury thrown *wide open*, most generously, to prevent the overflow of our city and the destruction of property? And will they, can they be less prompt, less liberal in providing means for the certain preservation of their own and the precious life and health of the whole community? I am persuaded that they will not—am satisfied that if the Board of Health and Health Wardens be organized in the manner I have attempted to suggest, and go to work systematically and with spirit in the investigation of this important and interesting task, and let the public see and know what they are doing, there cannot be a question that our enlightened and enterprising public authorities will extend to them a more hearty co-operation—will afford every aid and facility to the Board to enable it to demonstrate the hitherto occult source and cause of our epidemics, and how to mitigate or remove them.

More anon, if the thermometer permit.

Yours, CENCL.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
August 15, 1850. }

EDITORS CRESCENT: In my last communication, published in your paper of the 12th inst., I pledged myself that I would undertake to show that this city is susceptible of being made as healthy as any city in the Union. Indeed, I may say, is and has been, since 1847, even with the imperfect system of medical police now existing, and without the *imaginary* advantages of that commercial incubus, a *quarantine*, the heathiest city of the same population, North, South, East or West. But I am aware that confidence does not, either here or abroad, exist, that such exemption from epidemic diseases can be maintained, unless their causes be entirely removed. But, believing as I do, in its practicability, I will endeavor to show how this paramount object can be brought about.

In approaching this subject, pregnant as it is with such important results to the future growth and lasting prosperity of New Orleans, I candidly confess that I feel myself unequal to, unprepared for, so imposing a task—the more so, when I consider the great personal influence, the superior learning and ability, the valuable and well digested experience and skill of wiser heads and abler pens than I can command, who should have taken the lead in the investigation of so serious and important a question. It is peculiarly the province, the unquestionable duty of the medical profession, not only to investigate, but to determine and settle whatever may concern the public health; yet none will deny, none can, that while legislation, municipal action and private enterprise have done much for this place, the medical philosopher, the profession of New Orleans generally, have comparatively done nothing to redeem this city from the serious

disadvantages and hurtful prejudices under which it has long, and still severely struggles—of being *necessarily* unfavorable to health, destructive of life! No determined and adequate step taken to show, no attempt made to prove to all concerned—and who is not?—that the fatal epidemics with which we have, in times past, been so severely scourged (and the fearful apprehension of which, still drives away, annually, a large portion of our population) can be exterminated from among us. There is a culpable negligence in this matter, where so much is really at stake, on the part of those whose duty it is, from their position, to guard the public health—to enlighten the public mind on the sources and causes of our epidemics, and direct public opinion to the proper means for their removal. It cannot be alleged, in extenuation of the charge, that there is any lack of facilities in the prosecution of the object; for it is pronounced *ex cathedra*, by a learned teacher in the medical school of this place, that “for the thorough investigation of any medical question, New Orleans possessed advantages unsurpassed by London or Paris.” Yes, the harvest is truly plenteous but the laborers are few. Our advantages are truly great, but where are our Bells and Coopers, our Bichats and our Broussais? Where our medical professors? They should speak, and I hope they will, on this subject. But there are others very capable who seem satisfied with our sanitary condition and decline their aid, but on inexcusable ground—they say that *a good, scorching yellow fever is the best thing in the world for New Orleans! That it is a sort of crucible, a fiery furnace, separating the pure metal from its alloy!* Being impressed, however, as I am and have been, for some time past, with the importance and practicability of the enterprise, I will, notwithstanding the numerous discouragements that environ me, venture upon it, a few brief and desultory remarks. And I do so, more with the hope of inciting the attention of the public, but more particularly the medical profession, to the consideration of the subject, than with any expectation of doing it that justice, or bestowing upon it that attention which its vast and paramount importance demands.

I have elsewhere stated that our epidemics are of local origin, and their remote cause the *unwashed* and *peculiarly filthy* con-

dition of the locality where they first occur. This is their invariable antecedent; and morbid humidity and a *peculiar* atmospheric impurity, their invariable consequent or proximate cause. Now, these causes, and the epidemics arising therefrom, clearly stand in relation to each other, as *cause* and *effect*, and consequently it must follow, that if the cause or causes be removed, the effect must cease. Now, if I can show that this result has been demonstrated in other places of similar latitude and topography to New Orleans, I may reasonably, logically conclude, that by similar means employed under similar circumstances, like results will necessarily be produced; or in other words, that yellow fever or other epidemics, produced by the same causes, in New Orleans, may be prevented as certainly here by the same means, as they are in other places where similar causes and means exist. For this purpose, I need not go abroad for facts or lengthen this article with authorities on the subject. We have enough at home, within our own State, to establish the proposition now under consideration. The first I shall offer as the result of my own observations, is Fort Pike.

This place, as most persons know, is situated on the Pass Rigolets, near the opposite shore of Lake Pontchartrain, surrounded on all sides by an extensive morass, and about twenty-five miles from this place. There, I resided for several years, and every year during that time, the yellow fever raged with great violence here, yet there, though of like, I may say the same latitude and topography, we were entirely exempt from epidemics of every type and character, though numbering in officers, soldiers and accompaniments, about one hundred, and all unattainted! Now, this exemption from epidemics for a series of years, at Fort Pike, was wholly attributed to, and doubtless effected by the most complete and admirable system of discipline and medical police, I have ever seen or even read of. Such perfection of cleanliness, order, regularity and discipline, were nowhere to be found in the United States, and the health correspondingly fine in every respect.

Maj. M., who commanded the Fort at that time, was acknowledged to be the best police officer then in the U. S. army; and I believe if such a man, under the supervision of a competent med-

ical director, could be placed in command of the medical police of this city, New Orleans would, according to the proposition laid down—circumstances being equal—soon be made as healthy as “Petit Coquilli” itself.

I have other interesting facts on this point, which, from the length of this article, I must defer until my next.

Yours, CENCL.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
August 20, 1850. }

EDITORS CRESCENT—*Gentlemen*: If, as assumed in the article which you did me the honor to insert in your paper of the 19th inst., our epidemics are of local origin, and that the cause of the cause must necessarily be the cause also of the thing caused, it would seem to follow, would be logically correct to conclude, that with the removal of the primary cause of causes, its consequent chain of effects must cease. In support of this position, I have already given the result for a series of years, at Fort Pike, of a system of medical police, which, to my mind, argues strongly in favor of adopting a similar system for New Orleans, and from which, I have not a single doubt, if properly executed, similar results will be attained.

To-day I will invite your attention to the consideration of some other plain matters of fact, in connection with the interesting subject before us, which I conceive are still, if possible, more strongly confirmatory of my positions: That New Orleans is susceptible of being made as healthy as any other city of the same population in the United States. And in pursuance of this object, I will next adduce Fort Wood, which is located some twenty-one miles below this city, about mid way between Lakes Pontchartrain and Bourgne on Pass Chefmenteur, and at the extremity of a dense jangle and wood land, connecting that Fort

with this place, and near the mouth of a foul and *fresh water* rigolet, called "Bayou Savage," that subserves imperfectly, the purpose of a sewer to the lower and back part of the city, and discharges its contents into this Pass, on the banks of which the fortification stands. The location and medical topography of Fort Wood, present at once to the eye of the least practiced observer, appearances the most decidedly unfavorable to health—even more so than New Orleans itself—but what is the fact? We shall see. About eighteen years ago I was ordered from Fort Pike to this post, then commanded by the late Maj. R. A. Z——, garrisoned and occupied by about one hundred unacclimated persons, principally from Europe and the North; and during the time I remained stationed there, being some three or four years—the whole command enjoyed a degree of robust and vigorous health, unsurpassed by our healthiest cities. And notwithstanding the yellow fever prevailed with more or less violence every year in this city, and in 1832 raged with great mortality in connection with cholera at the same time, yet Fort Wood remained perfectly healthy. Through a number of years, though surrounded by epidemics and all the *external* causes of disease, it too, like Fort Pike, by a rigidly enforced system of *internal* medical police, was secured the greatest of all blessings—uninterrupted health. This is another link in the chain of evidence, by which, in the end, I shall be able to prove that New Orleans, by the same means, may be made equally healthy.

It will, I anticipate, be objected to these positions, that they possess advantages of salubrity over the city, in having, as is supposed by some, a regular refreshing breeze from the gulf; but this is not so, and especially as regards Fort Wood, which is cut off from that advantage—if it be any—by a vast intervening marsh and wood land. Fort Pike, although it has a more favorable south-eastern exposure, is no better off; for the breeze, coming up from the gulf, traverses such an immense extent of submarine vegetation and marsh prairie of rankest growth and constant decay, that it is often impregnated with an effluvium so offensive, as to be almost insupportable by the time it reaches the Fort—discoloring with a dark, greenish tinge, the painted walls and pillars of the officers' quarters. So no advantage can be

claimed or desired from that source. But even granting the exception, I believe I shall be able to adduce other facts equally conclusive, to which it cannot be taken.

It is a fact well known to myself, and indeed, almost to every one who has resided here as long as I, and who may have paid any attention to the circumscribed movements of our epidemics, that while the yellow fever, for example, has been raging with frightful mortality in different parts of the city, adjacent plantations above and below it, though densely populated, have escaped unscathed by this scourge of New Orleans. I have often known those places sought as a refuge from the ravages of fever in the city. Carrollton, six miles above this place, located on the bank of the Mississippi—a location said by some to be the chiefest source of our epidemics—has long been a common retreat from the yellow fever of this place. But not only are adjacent plantations and towns exempt from *primary* attacks of epidemic fevers, where a high degree of ventilation and cleanliness exists, but even in the *rural* parts of the city itself, the people are more free from them than its *urban* population. It is a well known fact in medical etiology, that in the most densely peopled and compactly built districts of towns or cities, there are often parts of such districts which surprisingly escape epidemics, while at the same time, the remainder may be suffering from their effects. Sometimes their ravages are confined to a single house, to a row or block of buildings, while the opposite side of the street remains free from the prevailing disease. There are very few practising physicians, I will venture to say, in this city, who have not observed this singular—no, this common fact—as yet but little understood or investigated; but whenever it shall be done, I now predict that the primary causes will be found to be a want of cleanliness and free ventilation in the premises, and a disregard for order, regularity and proper discipline on the part of occupants wherever epidemics originate, and the contrary where no such cause exists. In support of this position, I have adduced a number of facts, a chain of evidence drawn from general principles and particular cases, which I humbly conceive, fully establish its correctness and constitute a ratiocination of facts that the whole, as well as any part of New Orleans, may be

made by enforcing a proper system of medical police, perfectly healthy. But I will add one or two more facts corroborative of what has been already stated. By reference to the statistics of the State Prison at Baton Rouge, it will be found that while the late cholera was sweeping off in great numbers, the inhabitants of that place, "not a single person in the penitentiary was attacked by it." Now, every one who knows the admirable order in which that useful State institution is kept, the rigid police and discipline there observed, will be ready at once to account for its exemption from the ravages of that fatal epidemic. Its health is as proverbial, as its superior management, order and medical police are admirable.

The work house in this municipality is another remarkable instance of the sanitary effects of enforcing the same system. While epidemics, disease and death have raged without, its walls seemed to bid defiance to their deadly shafts; and its inmates rejoiced in that security of health which always results from perfect domiciliary cleanliness, a free circulation of air and a rigid personal discipline.

In my next I will endeavor to show how these facts may be made useful in establishing the future health and prosperity of New Orleans.

Yours, CENCI.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
August 26th, 1850.

EDITORS CRESCENT—*Gentlemen*: Having been called to the country for two or three days past, the mercury at 93 deg., and rising, the mosquitoes, like the locusts of Egypt, assailing me the moment I am seated, my time, consequently, so much occupied, action suspended, and patience exhausted, that I have not been able to furnish you with this communication in the regular order of time in which it should have appeared. And even now, after the admirable effort of nature last night, to equalize the excessive heat that had, during the two preceding days, ren-

dered the air too hot for comfortable respiration, one feels more disposed to seek the shores of our Biloxis and Pascagoulas, and there, under those majestic oaks, whose umbrageous and outspread arms invite us to their embrace, enjoy the refreshing breeze, the quiet, sweet repose, the soothing music of the *surgy* wave, which "comes o'er the soul like the sweet South," and whose last faint notes, as they expire on the shelly beach, in Lethean dreams fade away upon the ear, than make a single effort at laborious thought or action. Well, "'tis all but a dream at the best," and we who can't get away to seek enchanting scenes, but must remain pent up at home, dreaming of mosquitoes, hot sultry nights and hard work, would better be occupied at something else, than the *dangerous pursuit of idleness*. So I will, having a leisure hour this morning, resume my remarks on the practicability of New Orleans being made a healthy city.

It may be recollected, perhaps, notwithstanding the time that has intervened between this and my last communication, that I have already clearly demonstrated that places of similar latitude and topographical position, places adjacent to and remote from this city; yea, even parts of the city itself, have been entirely exempt from epidemics by means of an efficient system of medical police, while New Orleans generally suffered, at the same time, from those diseases.

In proof of this position I have cited Fort Pike, Fort Wood, Carrollton, plantations above and below the city, its pertingent or rural districts, and even urban parts of the city proper, etc. All of which, to my understanding, appear substantially, yes, minutely, to establish the fact that New Orleans only demands, only needs the use of similar means to make it equally healthy. Or in other words, the want of cleanliness and free ventilation, are the true sources of our epidemic diseases

Now the only question to be answered is, can "cleanliness and free ventilation" be effected in this city? The work is herculean, yet it can be done—the Augean stable, though foul as that of Augeus itself, which seemed almost impossible to execute, must be cleansed, and the responsibility of the task is devolved upon the Board of Health. And in aid of this arduous undertaking, and to secure its certain accomplishment, I

would beg leave to call the attention of the Board, of the public authorities, to the existence of a most fruitful source of epidemic disease which, as far as I am advised, has escaped their observation. I allude to the pools of stagnant water, which for years lie concealed beneath the ground floors of these numerous little buildings, or rather shanties hastily boxed up without regard to cleanliness or ventilation, for the especial accommodation of the poorer classes, the abodes of wretchedness and misery, which fall to the unhappy lot of the poor and ignorant immigrants who are annually crowding our city, and hence it is, we here find the first and greatest mortality. During the epidemics of yellow fever and cholera in 1847-8, it became my painful duty to look upon the most frightful ravages of disease, apparently from these causes. For the better information of the Board and Municipal authorities, I will give the *locale* of a most remarkable instance in point. It occurred in one of those *nuisant* huts on Circus street, called Fink's Row. The room on the ground floor, about 10 by 12 feet, was occupied—so I was informed by an inmate—by nine grown persons, and about the same number of children, all immigrants. I was called upon, as physician to the Ward, at one or two o'clock in the morning, to visit this pestilent hovel, and upon entering it, the stench was so sickening and oppressive, that I was compelled instantly to retreat back into the yard. Upon calling again, I discovered the mud and water apparently in a state of fermentation oozing up between the planks of the floor, which seemed to have been laid in direct contact with the mud, and from numerous auger-holes that penetrated each board, spirted up, as I stepped upon the floor, in quantity and quality, a sickening feculence which, with the want of free ventilation, was quite sufficient to account for the mortality that soon depopulated this filthy hovel.

This is by no means an uncommon picture! I could present a number such which came under my own observation; and physicians, whose practice calls them to look upon such scenes, can testify to its truthfulness. But revolting as the sanitary condition of this miserable abode really is, similar causes exist in *more stately* mansions, and although not so evident and loathsome, yet as certain and destructive in their consequences. This

row, and all such houses, intended for the occupation of human beings, demand the immediate attention of the proper authorities—they are worse than a nuisance, and should be declared as such. These facts call more imperatively upon the Board of Health for the interposition of their authority for some ordinance, than did the act of Congress of March 2, 1819, regulating passenger ships and vessels, which they have resolved to enforce. If more than two passengers to every five tons be prohibited on board any ship or vessel coming into this port, how many after they have landed, should, according to the same rule, be permitted to occupy a room, say twelve feet square and eight feet high? The fact that immigrants, from a commendable disposition to save, as much as possible, the few dollars they may have brought with them from the "old country," ignorant of the consequences, crowd themselves almost to suffocation into small and ill ventilated rooms is well known, and should be remedied. I cannot enlarge, though much remains to be *said* and *done* on this subject.

Without any intention of being invidious, I have designated a certain locality for the purpose of fixing the attention of the Board upon some tangible point at which the work of medical police might be well commenced. But there are other and numerous sources of our epidemics, and though better concealed by external appearances, are as certain in their deleterious effects upon the atmospheric air, on the purity of which life and health so essentially depend. Many would doubtless be much surprised were I to tell them, that those splendid residences and princely establishments that ornament our city, have often the causes of desolating disease concealed and *festering* beneath the polished floors and gorgeous carpets which cover them: If I were to tell them that the largest number of those long rows of stores and dwellings combine—that even those lovely and picturesque cottages, white as alabaster, with their refreshing green latticed windows and Venetian galleries, shaded with multiflora and evergreen, which so enchant the eye and beautifully fringe the outskirts of this wide-spreading city, were "whitened sepulchres," while beneath them "are rottenness and dead men's bones"—that they inhale with every breath of air they breathe a morbid

exhalation from pools of stagnant water confined beneath their floors, often containing in a state of decomposition, rats, frogs snakes and vegetable matter, constituting, under peculiar circumstances and combinations, the proximate cause demanded by the virus of yellow fever and cholera for their specific developement. If I were to tell them that such is their condition generally, and such their danger, it might not be credited, yet the facts are as stated. It is a well known fact, that whole families, here and there, were carried off in this city by the late cholera, without any one being able to trace it to any evident cause, still none can doubt that some cause must exist, and the one already given, I think satisfactorily accounts for it. But I must stop for the present.

Yours, CENCI.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
September 5th, 1853. }

MESSRS. EDITORS OF CRSECENT—*Gentlemen*: In continuation of the remarks which you kindly published in your valuable journal of the 31st ult., in reference to the existence of certain sources or causes of our epidemics, hitherto unnoticed, I would now invite your indulgent attention to the further consideration of additional facts which, although of remote derivation, are nevertheless pertinent to, and in some considerable degree establish, the correctness of, the views already expressed on this subject.

The Chief of Police, in the city of New York, in his annual report for (I believe) 1849, shows that there are in that city 3,742 cellars occupied as dwellings by persons who have no better residence; that there are in those cellars 8,141 rooms, and that the number of persons inhabiting these rooms is 18,456.—Of these underground domicils, 2,726 are marked down as wanting in cleanliness and ventilation. The population of New York being at that time about 371,223, it would appear that one person out of every twenty in that metropolis, eats, drinks, and sleeps under ground! In a late speech delivered by Mr. C. Cochrane, of London, England, on the necessity of improving

the dwellings of the poor, he adduced a number of interesting facts collected from personal observation. Let one suffice. "In a single room, on the ground floor, 42 feet by 8, he found 26 persons lying on the floor." He contrasted this accommodation with the dens provided for the wild beasts at the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park; which shows that these, the lower order of animals, are better provided for than man. The lion occupies a den 22 feet by 8, and a dormitory 22 feet by 4, being about four times the space in which he had found 26 persons huddled together! The lioness had a day room of 44 by 8; the tiger, 23 by 8; and both, spacious bed rooms!! An Esquimaux dog had a den of 11 feet by 8, with a sleeping apartment besides; and two hogs had a sty 9 feet long by 5, and a sleeping place. At the close of this address, a Dwelling Improvement Committee was immediately formed.

Now, I beg you, sirs, to consider these startling facts, and you cannot wonder, that it should be affirmed of these places, "*that there disease takes its rise, creating epidemics which occasionally ravage whole cities.*" These are facts which should teach a salutary lesson to the authorities, to the philanthropic citizens of the city of New Orleans. The contrast, I apprehend, if we had a Cochrane to make, or a Police system to enjoin, a personal examination of the conditions of the dwellings of the poor of this place, would be still more astonishing here, than within New York or London. I have already given an instance where 16 or 18 persons ate, drank and slept on the ground floor of a room not more than 10 feet by 12, and its consequences, in part. For it should be borne in mind that dirt, bad air, and depravity generally go together. Men who breathe a foul air in confined, filthy and crowded rooms or cellars, must, in the necessity of things, be more apt to commit crime, as well as originate and contract disease, than men whose blood is purified and rendered fit for the moral and physical objects of human life, by the constant respiration of a pure and exhilarating atmosphere.

In this communication, it may not be out of place to allude to the condition of even the President's House at Washington City; which from the want of proper drainage and ventilation, it is believed by medical men, originated the cause of that dis-

case, which, in the last few years, has deprived the nation of three distinguished Chief Magistrates. Steps, we are informed, have been taken to remedy this alarming sanitary condition of the "White House;" previous to which, the new President was advised by his physicians not to occupy it.

And now I would ask whether New Orleans does not demand a remedy for similar evils, for causes of epidemics and crime far more aggravated and serious than those alluded to elsewhere?—I would ask medical men, the Board of Health, if, while investigation and every effort is making in other places and cities, to ascertain the existence, and effect the removal of such causes, nothing is to be done for this city? I would appeal to the intelligence, the common sense of the people at large, whether any thing more can be wanting to keep alive and perpetuate epidemic diseases, than the causes which I have pointed out in the foregoing communications? Then let the appropriate remedy be at once applied. We may, in the providence of God—not by any precautionary measures of our own—escape the yellow fever this season; yet a severer scourge may await us, if we neglect that attention to cleanliness and pure air, which all acknowledge to be essential to life and health. We should be prepared then, with every hygienic means within our reach, to meet, and, if possible, prevent it. To wait, though admonished of its approach, as we did in '48, till it bursts upon us, would be criminal neglect. It would then be too late to do any thing to stay its ravages. Time and *lime* would then be thrown away upon "streets and gutters"—parts of the city which least need them. Now is the time—'tis not time enough for the work of improvement demanded by the present sanitary condition of our city.

I urged some time ago, upon the municipal authorities, the importance to the health of the city, of passing some ordinance compelling proprietary builders well and firmly to fill up their lots upon which dwellings, stores, out-houses, etc., are to be erected, and the area on which they stand to be raised several inches above the surrounding level with ballast gravel, well rolled, graded and intersected with permanent gutters; and constructed in such manner as to convey the water rapidly off into the street, from every part of the premises. A gentleman, Mr. J. C. P.,

residing on Julia street, being convinced of the salutary effect of such a measure, has lately taken up the ground floor of his dwelling and commenced the good work ; substituting, however, the Roman or Hydraulic cement, for the gravel, which may be an improvement. But his drainage is imperfect, and may defeat his object ; but the step, and I believe the first, is a praiseworthy one, and deserves imitation. Of course a work of this kind, if compulsory ordinances were adopted by the Council, should be done under direction of the Surveyor and, perhaps, the Board of Health. This will require time to accomplish, time to give confidence in its utility and importance. But when completed, New Orleans will be as healthy as any city in the United States—will be as healthy as it was forty-five years ago, when yellow fever was unknown in the place—clean, airy and healthy.

In my next, with your generous permission, I will endeavor to show its good effects in the permanent prosperity and rapid growth of New Orleans.

Yours, CENCI.

ORLEANS MEDICAL DISPENSARY, }
September 12, 1850.

EDITORS CRESCENT—*Gentlemen*: In the preceding articles which you have deemed worthy of a place in your valuable columns, on the sanitary condition of New Orleans, and how it may be improved, I honestly endeavored to show in a plain and familiar style, and I think, I hope, conclusively: That our epidemic diseases are of local origin—“are native and to the manner born.” I have shown the necessity of re-organizing the Board of Health and establishing an efficient system of medical police for this city. I have shown that other places of similar latitude and topographical position to this place, have remained or been rendered perfectly secure from those diseases, by a sensible and

rigid application of this system. I have shown, that adjacent and pertingent villages—that even the rural and urban portions of the city itself—are preserved from our most fatal epidemics by cleanliness and free ventilation—while, at the same time, other parts of the city where these important hygienic measures were neglected, disease and death prevailed. And finally I have pointed out some startling facts in relation to the sanitary condition of our dwellings, stores, etc., generally, but especially in the dwellings of the poor; and that their condition, heretofore unnoticed, is amply sufficient to account for the perplexing origin, and sometimes, isolated character, of our epidemics.

Now, sirs, if these things be true, and this is tacitly acknowledged, they are truths of paramount importance to the people of New Orleans—to its rapid growth and lasting prosperity, and should demand the first place in the councils of our legislative and municipal authorities. It is idle, it will be vain to appeal to men of fortune to invest their money in any useful, extensive and durable enterprise in, or even permanently connected with New Orleans, until it establish an entire exemption from the recurrence of annual and sometimes semi-annual epidemics. Till this be done, all labor and preaching are vain. Till this be done, even the powerful arguments, the stirring and persuasive eloquence of an able cotemporary (on the importance of immediate action on the part of our capitalists, to save New Orleans) will be casting pearls and sparkling gems before swine: for all know that one sweeping yellow fever, like a tornado, would soon scatter to the winds the brightest hopes, the fairest prospects of the future. Let this scourge be prevented, let its causes be removed from among us, or it may be well said, that “in the past, New Orleans has seen her best days.” But should this matter be properly, seriously regarded, the prospects of the future would soon be so brilliant as to cast a shade over the brightness of the past. New Orleans would then, soon become one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the United States, second only to New York. Instead of an unsettled, floating population, with no substantial moral or political identity of interests among us, of perhaps 120,000, we would soon have a well settled, steady, robust and vigorous population of more than double, yes, a trip-

lication would not exaggerate the numerical strength of our population, in less than fifteen years. Not a population of *absentees*, of migratory commercial adventurers, of *timid* home or foreign capitalists—or, if it may be allowed the metaphor, a *feathered population*, which, on the *wing* of fortune hunting, hie themselves away to the sweet South, to bask in the sunshine, the generous hospitality and fortune of our Winter Solstice, and like wild ducks and geese of Northern regions, fly back again upon the approach of Summer. It would not then be said of New Orleans, “that it is merely a *hibernal city*, fit only as a place of *Winter quarters*! No, it would be the permanent residence of an industrious, enterprising, rich, healthy and overflowing population.

But under existing discouragements, we ought not to complain of the migratory habits of some of our Northern citizens. They have their families to care for, to rear and educate, and naturally, properly seek those parts of the Union where these objects of interest, can be most safely and best accomplished—where disease and death, like a mid-night assassin, will not assail them—’tis we, not they, who are to blame. Let them be assured of the enjoyment of health, that *Yellow Jack*, the terrible Lafitte of New Orleans (whether it be present or not), has been arrested and chained down, that, Sampson-like, he has been shorn of his desolating powers, and lies harmless at our feet: let them, in addition to all this, feel satisfied that they can well and safely rear up and educate their children; let these things be done, and “’twere well ’twere done quickly,” and it will soon be seen that they will make this, at least during their present mode of existence, an abiding city. A city, that would then, from its incomparable advantages, attract not only large capitalists from distant parts of our own country, but also from foreign countries—capitalists who would invest *permanently* their money, not as formerly, in abstract speculations or in transient and uncertain commercial pursuits alone, but to a great extent in mechanical and manufacturing enterprises; and upon the success of which, beyond an economical doubt, the rapid increase and permanent prosperity of all large maritime cities depend.

Then, I repeat, let the way be prepared, "let the crooked be made straight and the rough smooth," for this grand development of our crippled resources, and the population of New Orleans in a few years will be swelled up to 300,000, with constant and profitable occupation the year round, for labor and money—not at the usurious rates we now have to pay; all classes of business would become easy, uniform and steady. The discordant note of hard times, high taxes and hibernating citizens, would no longer *crash* upon the ear and make men feel that they had better never have been rich, than to be reduced to poverty by taxation upon their fortunes, their business or their little property. There would then be no longer any controversy upon the causes *that have, that may or may not ruin the credit of the Municipalities, no legislative speculation* on the advantages of "consolidation," or whether a unity or a trinity would be the better form of government for our city. These perplexing and visionary schemes would all be thrown aside and forgotten, as a feverish dream, under the prosperous and invigorating auspices alluded to, and New Orleans then, by its renewed energies, would so rapidly develop its natural, its immense resources, that no opposing obstacle, no rival interests could prevent or longer delay its onward and upward march to that greatness and lasting prosperity, so eminently within the reach of the enterprising population that would then rush to this great emporium of the South-Western world.

These are the blessings, the delightful consequences which some day will, I hope, result from the sanitary measures that I attempted, but imperfectly, to lay before the public. It will remain for others to complete the work. I am done. Adieu,

CENCL.