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FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
STATE BOARD OF HEALTH OF
THE STATE OF WISCONSIN. 1879**

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OF THE
LANE LIBRARY
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OF THE
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1879.



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GENERAL REPORT OF THE BOARD.

STATE OF WISCONSIN,
OFFICE OF THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH,
October 31, 1879.

To His Excellency, WILLIAM E. SMITH,
Governor of Wisconsin:

SIR: In accordance with the provisions of the statute, we present you herewith the fourth annual report of the State Board of Health. For such details of the methods pursued in the performance of the duties imposed on the Board as are deemed of general interest, you are respectfully referred to the report of the Secretary and the papers accompanying it.

The present year has been an eventful one in the sanitary history of the nation. The organization of a National Board of Health has long been desired by sanitarians, and its final accomplishment is due in part at least to their persistent efforts, and to the growth of that enlightened public sentiment "which demands with increasing emphasis the incorporation of sanitary into civil administration." The influence which such an organization must exert in strengthening the hands of the various state boards cannot yet be fully appreciated, but we look to it with hope that in it will be found a power which shall be "for the healing of the nation."

The present organization is temporary, and in a measure experimental, one of its duties being to report a plan for an organization of similar character, which it is hoped will be permanent, and under which will be given opportunity for the study of preventable diseases, and for systematic efforts for their restriction on a scale hitherto impracticable. What has been accomplished during the year in our southern cities by the co-operation of this body with state and local boards, affords an ample illustration of the beneficent

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influence of rightly directed sanitary labor. There is no doubt that the vigorous measures inaugurated and carried out by health boards and sanitary associations have saved the south from a general renewal of a yellow fever epidemic such as it suffered from in 1878, but with which one city only has been afflicted to any considerable extent during the present year. Repeatedly appearing in its own chosen fields, it seems to have been as often met and vanquished by well directed and unremitting sanitary labor. Such results inspire confidence that similar labor will meet with ample reward in the restriction of disease everywhere, but "continued relentless war with filth, and bad smells, and all unsanitary conditions, is the price of such results." Yellow fever, by the fierceness of its contagious character, and by the appalling fatality attendant upon it, has naturally and justly attracted to itself the attention of the nation. Yet it has very recently and very pertinently been said that it is really "one of our minor diseases." Here in Wisconsin we have little reason to fear that it will ever prevail to any great extent, but here in Wisconsin, other diseases quite as preventable have been the cause of a greater loss of life during the present season than has yellow fever in Memphis; nor has Wisconsin suffered in this respect more heavily than many of her sister states at the north.

Another organization formed since the date of our last report, is

THE SANITARY COUNCIL OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

This is a voluntary association, composed of members of State and Municipal Boards of Health in the region from which it takes its name. In view of the severe epidemic of 1878, it was felt that an urgent need existed for co-operative action on the part of those states and localities liable to be visited, or in any way affected by a recurrence of yellow fever, and that some well ordered system of inter-state sanitary police should be agreed upon and efficiently carried out by the representatives of the states and cities in question. While, as has already been said, the state of Wisconsin may have little to fear from this particular form of disease, it is yet favorably situated for the reception of infected persons, both from *its exposed western border*, and from the fact that its agreeable cli-

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mate and many attractive places of resort are annually bringing thousands of people into its territory from the cities and towns along the lower valley of the Mississippi.

In order that Wisconsin might come into harmonious co-operation with other states in the execution of all necessary rules and laws of inter-state quarantine, this Board heartily entered into the plan and organization of the council, the services of which can be made available, with effect increasing with experience, in case of the threatened invasion of any form of pestilential disease.

Our record of diseases is for the year ending May 31, 1879, and embraces reports received from 795 of the cities, towns and villages of the state. We invite attention to the statistics given concerning sickness in the Secretary's report, and to the cost of a few of the most common of the diseases which have been prevalent, as computed from the estimates of a large number of observers.

SMALL POX.

has appeared during the year in eight localities, but has happily been so well managed in each of them as to have been prevented from obtaining any permanent or considerable foothold; the total mortality from it, according to the best and most carefully corrected advices obtainable, has been only 27 cases. For several months past it is believed that it has not existed in the state at all.

DIPHTHERIA,

however, has been of unusual prevalence and fatality. This disease has been emphatically the scourge of the state as it has been of other parts of the country. The deaths from it, so far as they have come to our knowledge, have numbered 1,234 during the year; it is known, however, that more than this have occurred, the fact of their occurrence having been reported, but not their number.

Concerning this disease there seems to be a wide-spread misapprehension of its true nature, and a strange reluctance to accept the teachings of sanitary science with regard to its contagious character and other established facts respecting its causes and prevalence. This Board has persistently sought to instruct and warn the people concerning these matters, and it has evidence that its efforts have been productive of benefit in many places.

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The prolonged presence and unusual severity of diphtheria in one of our smaller cities gave occasion for the visit of a committee of the Board for the purpose of investigating the causes of its long continuance. From a careful study of all the facts, the members of the committee were convinced that it was chiefly spread and continued through personal contagion, the possibility and probability that many obscure and seemingly mysterious cases were to be thus accounted for having been fully demonstrated. Admitting, as probably we must in the present state of our knowledge of this disease, that in any given epidemic there may be a residuum of cases not to be accounted for by contagion or by filth origin, the conclusions arrived at by the committee concerning the epidemic in question are nevertheless so in accordance with sanitary principles of universal application, that we present them here for the wider circulation which this report will give them, in the hope that other localities may be benefited by their lessons.

After expressing the belief that in this particular epidemic a large part of the suffering might have been avoided and many lives saved had there been proper isolation of cases, the report proceeds:

"But though diphtheria may be spread by contagion, there is also to be considered as contributing to its diffusion, the fact that filth furnishes a favorable soil for its development. It is doubtless true that the disease may be of such fearful malignancy as to strike down those whose sanitary surroundings are the most favorable, but there is no doubt that its chief harvest fields are in homes or localities where filth and uncleanness prevail. In view of this fact, we cannot close this communication without particular reference to the neglect of proper precautions that is manifest in your city in this respect. During the period—now nearly three years—that diphtheria has prevailed, the attention of authorities and citizens has been repeatedly called to the existence of filth conditions wholly uncared for during this lapse of time.

"That no public steps have been taken during all this time to remove this evil, is not creditable to the authorities of your city. Against such an epidemic as that from which you have suffered, it certainly would seem to be only common prudence to fortify yourselves by the removal of all that can possibly contribute to, or in