

**SECOND BIENNIAL REPORT  
OF THE BOARD OF  
HEALTH OF THE STATE OF  
DELAWARE, JANUARY, 1883**

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Second Biennial report of the Board of Health of the State of Delaware, January, 1883 by  
Various

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## REPORT.

*To His Excellency,*

*JOHN W. HALL,*

*Governor of Delaware.*

The second biennial report of the Board of Health of the State of Delaware is herewith submitted to your Excellency, in the hope that, if any part thereof or in its entirety it should meet your approval, you will urge upon the Legislature the necessity of taking action upon the vital questions presented, and ask of them increased means for the furtherance of their special functions as sanitarians. Indeed the whole people unitedly and determinedly must unite with the professional sanitarian in any effective movement improving the public health. By himself, the hygienist is almost powerless. In presenting the same, we desire to congratulate you, and the citizens of the State, upon the general healthfulness which has characterized the State during the period which has intervened since our last report, in December, 1880. With the exception of Small-Pox in the City of Wilmington, which at one time threatened to become an epidemic, and a number of cases of Diptheria and Typhoid Fever in various localities of our State, no disease or diseases of a virulent character have generally prevailed; indeed, the events of the past two years, in regard to the average condition of the public health throughout the State, have varied but little from the ordinary incidents of previous years; the most noteworthy feature being the prevalence of Small-Pox in the City of Wilmington, which at one time threatened to become an epidemic. From Registrar Frazer's report of the City of Wilmington, on vital statistics, which furnishes tables of the births, marriages, and deaths for the year ending December, 1881, we learn how carefully and elaborately he has worked them out. These statistics are classified and tabulated in condensed form, and, in addition, tables and summaries are given with comparative results for six years past, with comments. The Secretary of the Board of Health for the

State has not been so fortunate, however, in presenting his report on vital statistics for the whole State, by reason of the fact that so many physicians and midwives in the two lower counties have failed to make their returns to the Recorders promptly. The positive value of vital statistics must depend upon the fullness and accuracy of the registration returns by the physicians of the entire State, and we hope for increased promptitude in the future. Vital statistics is of such importance that registration of marriages, births and deaths, and the causes of the latter, demand the attention of the legislator, as it is the basis of all sanitary work. Without a knowledge of the death-rate of different localities, and the diseases which produced it, we are unable to investigate the sanitary relations which one part of the State bears to the other; we should learn the casual or local relations associated therewith; we should know where disease prevails in order to know what means or measures to be adopted to abate it; we must know the ratios of births to deaths in every part of the State, in city, town and in the rural district, to know whether we are keeping up the population according to the normal law of increase or retrogression. This can only be done by rigidly enforcing the statute. If we are to judge from the data at our hand, it would appear that the deaths are in excess of the births, and yet we know this is not true.

The subject of vaccination, which has engaged the attention of the Board of Health since its organization, has lost none of its interest, and the Board again reaffirms and reindorses the wisdom of its conclusions heretofore expressed, believing that of all sanitary measures this is the most striking illustration of what can be done by the use of the well-known and thoroughly tried prevention. It is one which the people at large understand, and the value of which is so patent as to be appreciated by many who do not recognize the importance of other means as preventive of some other diseases. The world's judgment holds to the protective power of vaccination against a disease which is not only widespread, but fatal, and we believe it should not be left to the discretion, whim, or choice of individual citizens, whether they will avail themselves of its protective power, but the



duty of the State to protect the innocent and helpless against the ignorant or indifferent.

The law-abiding citizen is protected by law against the incendiary and the murderer, while freedom is permitted the infectious and contagious patient to roam at large and scatter broadcast an element far more dangerous to society than either. During the prevalence of Small-Pox in the City of Wilmington, Del., from which disease alone there occurred 120 deaths, as reported by the Registrar, we are to learn of the paramount necessity of enforced general vaccination, and this Board fully coincides with our honored President when he says that "some means of preventing Small-Pox being introduced into our public schools should be taken," and they, therefore, by a resolution passed at their meeting held in Dover, December 12, 1882, respectfully suggest that the Legislature pass an amendment to our health laws, making it obligatory upon every child and teacher, on entering our public schools for the first time, to produce satisfactory evidence either of vaccination or of having had the Small-Pox; and we believe our Legislature would be endorsed and supported by the professional judgment of every physician in the State.

In health, the citizen or even whole communities are so indifferent and careless of any duty, or prospective danger, as to omit any means of protection against disease, and in consequence the State is being increased in an element of unprotected of all ages, who only await the sojourn of a case of Small-Pox among them, or the introduction of infected clothing, to overwhelm them with fear, and, too often, sweep away entire families. Under improved sanitary surroundings, the plagues which once devastated the earth, have nearly ceased to exist, and vital statistics establish the fact that the average duration of life has been prolonged. To public hygiene are we indebted then not for greater freedom from disease, but for lengthened life also. It has been left for this age to extend the knowledge of hygienic laws to the people, to so surround and indoctrinate them with wholesome sanitary laws that we may be said to have entered into a new era of medicine, "its highest and most beneficent development." People

are beginning to learn the grand fact that underlies "State Medicine," viz: that disease is in a great degree preventable. For this reason it is, that nearly every State in the Union has its "Health Board," and general sanitary associations. The effort of the physician is to cure disease when established, if possible, but how much greater the function of the sanitarian who seeks to prevent its inception, nay, stamp out the very causes which, once set in motion, have a potency and far-reaching effect, far beyond all human calculation. In this, his is a higher work, and one which gives greater promise of good to the world at large, dealing, as he does, more with communities than with individuals. Nor does his influence stop in the promotion of physical good to his fellow, for it must not be forgotten that the same means which promotes his physical, also promotes his moral and social status. Locations unhealthy, rooms overcrowded, foul-air, impure drinking water, neglect of personal and public cleanliness, insufficient appliances, intemperance, habits of impurity, these are not only factors of disease, but of moral debauchery and degradation also. To eradicate these fungi on the body politic is therefore to elevate man morally and intellectually, and to place him in the sphere designed by his Creator. We think it needless here to refer to the work accomplished by the different State Boards of Health since first organized in this country about fourteen years ago, first by Massachusetts, and subsequently by Michigan, which latter State has perhaps done more for sanitation than any other single State; nor to England and Prussia, which have derived incalculable benefit as conservators of the best physical interests and real blessings to their people. On other than grounds of humanity alone are we to estimate the wisdom of these organizations, for we believe that there is "nothing so costly as sickness," whether of the individual or of communities. That "public health is public wealth," is an aphorism, and anything which contributes thereto increases the happiness and the wealth of the State.

Perhaps it is not too much to affirm that the pecuniary loss to the State by preventable sickness, annually, is sufficient to defray all the necessary expenses incurred in its government were we to ignore

no higher motive or argument in favor of such organizations as health boards. If, by its investigations into the causes of disease, and timely notice and advice given, it shall save the life of but a single citizen, then should the State consider itself amply repaid for the cost of its health board, and humanity demand a liberal allowance for its sustentation. If the object of legislation be to "secure the greatest good to the greatest number," then may we not expect of our General Assembly abundant provision for carrying forward the sanitation of our State.

Not only should we look to the spread of contagious, infectious, and epidemic diseases, but domestic sanitation be encouraged through our local boards by a spontaneous compliance, instead of a reluctant yielding to plain hygienic laws.

#### DRAINAGE.

By an intelligent and skillfully planned system of drainage of our marshes, low-lands and swamps, thousands of acres of our most productive lands may be reclaimed that to-day remain more or less submerged and unproductive except of malarial fevers. The President of our State Board, in his paper on malaria, conclusively shows that by drainage, diseases of a zymotic origin have decreased in our State in proportion thereto. In his condensed report, he concludes that the proportion of cases of malaria to all other diseases in Kent and Sussex Counties is 37 per cent., and that it is now less than 35 per cent. than a few years ago; and this he attributes to drainage, better living, better sewerage, better drinking-water, and the use of lime as a fertilizer. If then it be "honorable to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before," how much more so by proper sanitation to prolong life by making it more healthful and enjoyable.

The subject of sewerage, while it is of vital importance to the denizens of Wilmington and our larger towns, and one which to-day confronts them, and must be met, it is not my purpose to discuss nor to offer any opinion, since these belong to the department of the engineer; but to call attention to their importance from the fact