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adequate National health authority and legislation, and the fact that, in such absence the maritime quarantines are controlled and administered by State and local authorities—resulting in diverse, and frequently conflicting, regulations and requirements and of necessity, in a tendency to limit precautions to their own individual interests, commercial as well as sanitary—which throw upon interior States the responsibility of fully informing themselves of the strength or weakness of these outposts, in order to know where to anticipate danger and how to make their own preparations to meet it.

At its last session, Congress appointed a commission to examine and report upon the measures necessary for the defense of our seacoast against a foreign armed enemy, and a distinguished publicist and statesman, Mr. Tilden, has recently urged this as a paramount duty of the Government. Millions of dollars have already been expended for such defense, and millions more will probably be forthcoming to meet this possible contingency. But the assaults of foreign contagion are not a contingency. They are actual events, and during the past twenty years they have cost the country, an aggregate loss of life only less than that of the great war immediately preceding. Every sanitarian and many of our leading statesmen know that this actual and ever-recurring loss is wholly and entirely preventable by the expenditure of a sum which sinks into utter insignificance before the millions which will be appropriated for the protection of our coasts against a possible future danger.

But thus far neither sanitarian nor statesman has been able to overcome the petty jealousies of individuals, communities, and of States themselves, so as to secure the legislation necessary to remedy even the present confusion. Such sanitary measures as are now enforced by the National Government are based upon authority derived from the act of April 29, 1878, to prevent the introduction of contagious or infectious diseases into the United States. But the late Secretary of State, Mr. Frelinghuysen, and the late Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Folger, both decided that the act in question, having been repealed by the act of June 2, 1879, could not be revived by the expiration of this latter act. The point would have less practical importance if the authority which assumes to act under it can and will furnish the country the necessary protection in the present emergency. Practical sanitary executives are less concerned, just now, as to who exercises the authority and by what right, than in the questions: Is the authority wisely exercised? Is it sufficient? May we rely upon it implicitly? If not, to what extent, and how can we remedy its deficiencies?

It is by no means meant by this that it would not be better that there should be a properly organized National health department, acting under clear and undisputed legal authority, and supplied with funds adequate to its legitimate necessities. The present status of National sanitary legislation and of the National sanitary executive is admittedly defective and unsatisfactory. The history of the recent attempts to control the disinfection of rags; the complications at the port of New York concerning consular bills of health; the strictures upon the inspection service maintained along the coast, and in the matter of inspections on the Canadian frontier during the recent small-pox epidemic; the complaints of various boards of health that they are directed to look to the associated press for information and warning concerning threatened danger from abroad, to their ports and