

Yellow fever is the disease most dreaded, and the quarantine system has been framed and heretofore administered with reference to its exclusion. The Mexican authorities have cooperated by establishing a quarantine at Bagdad in aid of the station at Brazos Santiago covering the lower mouth of the Rio Grande, and have adopted the same rules and regulations as those enforced at the Texas ports.

An inspection of transatlantic steamers with reference to cholera is now maintained at the six Texas stations and will be continued throughout the winter. As late as November 10th of this year there were several steamers from cholera-infected ports on the Mediterranean detained in quarantine off Galveston. The vessels are not allowed to come to the wharf, but are unloaded and loaded again by lighters.

A communication from State Health Officer Swearingen to the Governor of the State, commenting upon the efforts to establish an international quarantine, incidentally but fully sets forth the principles upon which the Texas quarantine system is based.

"Another very material variance between the authorities of the State and those of Mexico, is the length of time thought to be necessary for vessels from infected places, or places liable to infection, to remain in quarantine before granting them free pratique. The Mexican Congress of Hygiene limits the period to ten days, for what they are pleased to designate 'the rigorous quarantine,' while in Texas twenty days is the universal rule.

"If we had disinfecting warehouses at every port of entry, and steam tugs supplied with powerful exhaust fans that could drive out the impure air from the holds of ships, and immediately after forge into every nook and crevice germicidal gases, the ten days' period of detention would probably be sufficient; but without these appliances of purification, a longer time unquestionably gives greater security.

"In making the above declaration, I do not lose sight of the fact that an infected vessel, without treatment of any kind, at the end of twenty, thirty or even sixty days quarantine, is possibly more dangerous than on the first day of arrival. The history of yellow fever gives abundant evidence that the poison does not retain its infectious quality for a long period when exposed to pure air, and that its proliferous properties are lost. The reverse is equally true. In warm, moist, impure air, its infectious quality seems to have no limitation, and of course such condition must favor its multiplication. With these facts conceded, the corollary is unavoidable, that the number of germs will increase when left undisturbed in the hold of a vessel, where all these favorable conditions are found. Without a warehouse for transferring goods, we cannot, in ten days, by opening every aperture for ventilation, by shifting cargo, pumping out bilge water, and the free use of germicidal gases, so disturb the condition of things as to pronounce the ship, crew and cargo innocuous.

"Again, all persons are not equally susceptible to the poison of yellow fever, and the period of incubation does not usually commence the first day of exposure. If such was not the case every unacclimated person in an infected city would be down about the same time, and epidemics would be confined to a few days, instead of a few weeks. Assuming, then, that the cargo of a ship is infected, and that it will take ten days for the crew to discharge it, the probabilities are that with the majority of them the period of incubation would commence on the eighth, ninth or tenth day, instead of the first, second or third day, after the work of discharging had exposed them to infection. It follows, then, that a ten days' quarantine, when each day brings additional exposure to those who must handle the infected goods, offers every opportunity for the germs of yellow fever to be inoculated before the period of detention expires, and for the denouement to be made afterwards. * * *

"Twenty days quarantine for ships from interdicted places, ten for handling cargoes and ten more to give time for incubation, has been the rule so long governing the ports of Texas that it might be properly classed among the unwritten laws of the State. It is a conservative period, a kind of half way chronological station between the opponents of quarantine on the one side, and the advocates of total non-intercourse on the other. Under that rule we have had no epidemic, nor have our commercial relations been seriously impaired by it. The guarantee given of freedom from infectious diseases more than compensates for the losses sustained by a policy that must necessarily divert certain currents of trade into other channels.