

THURSDAY, JULY 9, 1885

THE INTERNATIONAL SANITARY
CONFERENCE IN ROME

THE late Conference in Rome, which for some unknown reason stands adjourned for the present to reassemble again in November, has arrived at certain results, the details of which are not published yet, and until the full and authenticated report is at hand it would be unjustifiable to subject them to criticism. But as far as the gross results achieved and the methods followed by that Conference have already become known through the reports sent to the daily papers, there is no reason for viewing those results with any peculiar satisfaction. As far as we can follow the proceedings of the Conference, its achievements cannot be considered an advance on those of its predecessors held in Constantinople in 1866 and in Vienna in 1874.

During the present century Europe has been visited six times by cholera, and after the second visitation (1847-50) the first International Sanitary Conference was convened to Paris in 1851, in order to arrive at some common understanding as to quarantine, and to discuss various questions of hygiene, as well as the etiology of the disease.

Between 1852-56 Europe was again visited by cholera (England in 1853-4), and very important knowledge was then gained as to the intimate relations existing between general insanitary conditions and the spread and severity of the disease. After the next visitation of Europe by cholera (in 1865-6) the second International Sanitary Conference met at Constantinople (in 1866). The results of the deliberations of this Conference have been in many respects important. The Conference agreed, with few dissentients, that cholera has for its starting-point India; that its invasion into other countries is effected by human intercourse, including linen and wearing apparel; that its spread depends in a great measure on general insanitary conditions of habitation, air, water, and food. In order to avert and check the invasion of Europe by the disease, the Conference agreed to a certain complicated system of quarantine both by land and sea, which embodied and enlarged on the scheme laid down by the preceding Conference of 1851, but which had been found incapable to avert the introduction of the disease in 1865-6.

Next cholera appeared in Europe in various countries between 1869-73, and after the epidemic came to an end another International Conference assembled in Vienna in 1874. This Conference, while confirming the results of the deliberations of its predecessors, arrived at certain important conclusions as to the value of disinfection and quarantine. As regards the latter the Conference agreed that all measures of quarantine, as far as they are practicable, are fallacious and incapable of averting or checking the introduction and spread of the disease; that all measures of land quarantine are to be condemned; and that maritime quarantine is to be replaced by competent medical inspection. Cholera appeared next in Egypt in 1883, and from here was introduced into

Marseilles, where it assumed, in July 1884, alarming proportions; thence it spread into Toulon, the south and north of France, into Italy and Spain, raging everywhere with great severity. If at any time land and maritime quarantine had a fair trial it was in 1884 in France, Italy, and Spain. Every one remembers the dictum of M. Fauvel, then at the head of medical affairs in France, that the disease that broke out in 1884 in Marseilles and spread thence into Toulon and other parts of France could not be Asiatic cholera, because quarantine, after the appearance of cholera in Egypt in 1883, had been very perfect and had been carried out in French maritime ports with great rigour. Every one remembers also that, in spite of all the measures of land quarantine practised in France, Italy, and Spain in 1884—and at the present moment practised in Spain—its lazarettos, fumigations, and military cordons with its attendant troubles, miseries, and cruelties, cholera spread and raged with great severity in France and Italy, and is at the present moment assuming alarming proportions in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Spain; while, on the other hand, this country, without any maritime or land quarantine, but with an efficient and competent medical inspection of all shipping in its maritime ports, has remained free from cholera in 1884 and hitherto, notwithstanding its vast communications with Egypt, Italy, and Spain. Maritime and land quarantine have had a repeated and fair trial, but have been found utterly wanting, and countries like France, Italy, and Spain placing the utmost faith in them have dearly paid for it. Now, what lesson is to be learned from all this, and let us ask at the same time what lesson has the late Conference in Rome learned from this?

The Conference of Constantinople (in 1866) had adopted ten days as the furthest limit of the period of incubation—that is to say, if any ship coming from an infected port had been at sea for ten days and no case of cholera has appeared on board, the ship is to be considered "clean" and is to receive free *pratique*. Now, steamers sailing from Bombay arrive under favourable conditions off Suez on the eleventh day, and therefore if no cholera has appeared during the whole of the voyage, the ship ought, according to the above, receive free *pratique*. But instead of this every ship is detained and kept under "inspection" for at least twenty-four hours at Suez, at the instance of the Egyptian authorities acting under the instructions of the General Board of Health. The majority of the medical members of the late Conference at Rome carried this still further in recommending that all ships coming from India should be detained and kept under inspection at Suez for five days, some delegates even for ten days. Another still more iniquitous recommendation, and one which, if carried into practice, is likely to have serious consequences for Egypt and Europe, is this: that if any "suspected" ship—the decision as to this "suspicion" resting with an Egyptian official of self-estimated competency—arrive off Suez, the passengers and crew are to be turned out into lazarettos, kept there under observation, disinfected, &c. Now, the Conference, in order to establish a permanent focus of cholera from which the disease might, and in all probability would, spread into Egypt and the adjoining countries, the Mediterranean Basin and Europe, could not have recommended any arrangement

that is more likely to further such a hazardous and dangerous object. In vain did Dr. Thorne, one of the English delegates, urge at the Conference the iniquity and danger of this recommendation. The French delegates leading the majority turned a deaf ear to any reasonable suggestion; they seem to have learned no lesson from the misery that lazarettos, fumigations, and all other measures of land quarantine, without stopping the introduction and spread of cholera, have in the past inflicted on their country.

If we ask ourselves, What new facts, what new experiences have in the last cholera epidemic in 1884 been gained in order to justify these recommendations of the majority of the Conference? we have to answer—None; and those that have become known point in the opposite direction. The recommendation as to five to ten days' quarantine off Suez for ships coming direct from India seems to imply that the late outbreak of cholera in Egypt owed its origin to importation from India. This view has during 1883-84 been stated and re-stated by French writers with their usual self-confidence, but not a tittle of evidence has been brought forward to support it. Moreover there exists a good deal of evidence showing that that outbreak, which, as is well known, commenced in Damietta, owed its origin to importation from an altogether different direction—viz., overland by pilgrims from Mecca. As Prof. Lewis, another delegate from England, has urged at the Conference, no English ship coming from India has ever been known to have imported cholera into Egypt and Europe; and, considering the enormous number of vessels arriving from Indian ports in Egypt, the Mediterranean countries and Europe, it is certainly a very remarkable fact that importation, if it happened in this manner, should not be of common occurrence.

The real danger from cholera for Egypt, Turkey, and Europe does not lie at Suez and the Suez Canal, but at Mecca and the countries about the Caspian Sea, this being the route in which cholera has hitherto travelled—viz., from Mecca, Mesopotamia, and Persia, into the Red Sea coast, Egypt, Syria, the Levant, Turkey, and Russia—and therefore these are the portals, if any, which the European Powers ought to guard. As England has urged in the past, and as it has also urged on this occasion, every country may, and has a right to protect itself as it thinks best. France and Spain may make their own maritime quarantine as rigorous, their land quarantine as vexatious as they choose; but that these countries should dictate measures to others, which past experience has proved to be fallacious and futile to achieve the end they aim at, is as iniquitous as it is against common sense.

Cholera in Europe being dependent on importation from the East, it is quite clear that absolute prevention of such importation would theoretically be the best safeguard; but then the question arises, and it is one that has been repeatedly asked—viz., can this be practically achieved? To stop unconditionally every and all communication with an infected locality involves, apart from the great practical difficulties in carrying it out, such enormous hardships, material loss and misery, that the remedy would entail greater misfortunes than the evil it tries to cure, even granting, for the sake of argument, that it is capable of so doing.

Prof. von Pettenkofer in his various writings on the

subject of quarantine has fully and clearly stated the case, and their perusal would have materially enlightened many of the members of the late Conference. They would also find in those writings what they might have found already in the protocols of the former conferences (in Constantinople and Vienna), viz. that one of the *chief* and *first duties* of the State in order to prevent and check the spread of cholera is a *proper attention to general sanitation*. Make your military cordons as strict as you please, stop and impede all traffic by sea and land as much as you like, fumigate your railway travellers and mails as carefully and rigorously as possible, you will not hereby succeed in stopping all communication with an infected country. On the other hand, give up all those silly and harassing limitations, but keep a good look-out for infected ships coming to any of your ports, detain the infected persons in a specially-fitted hospital, disinfect the ship and articles, but allow the rest of the passengers and crew to depart, keeping their names and addresses, and notify their arrival to the sanitary authorities of the place they are bound to. Further than this, see that your dwellings, your water and air are in sanitary respects looked after, and that filth is properly disposed of, and you will hereby have done what is compatible with all past and present experience in order to check the entrance and dissemination of cholera. It is admitted on all hands that general insanitary conditions of dwellings, water, and air are the most powerful allies of cholera; without them, cholera is as unable to spread as typhoid fever.

The principles just mentioned are practically those on which the sanitary authorities in this country have been acting in the past, and on which they are acting in the present. The danger to this country from importation of cholera from Spain is greater than perhaps to any other, seeing the vast maritime communications existing between this country and the east and south coast of Spain; but there can be little doubt that, if cholera should unfortunately be imported, it can never assume those gigantic proportions that it has assumed in France, Italy, and that it is now assuming in Spain.

If one reads of the unspeakably filthy conditions prevailing in Spain, and reads at the same time of the silly and arbitrary proceedings of the authorities in carrying out quarantine, one is reminded of the General who, in trying to keep out a powerful enemy is putting up on the frontier a few dummy soldiers and toy guns, but who has omitted to provide the interior of the country with a real army and guns. The result is, of course, clear: the enemy cannot be prevented from entering, and, having entered, cannot be kept from overrunning and devastating the country.

A NATURALIST'S WANDERINGS IN THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO

A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago, a Narrative of Travel and Exploration from 1878 to 1883. By Henry O. Forbes, F.R.G.S. With numerous Illustrations. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1885.)

M. R. FORBES' Wanderings in the far East extended over about four and a half years, during which time he visited the Keeling Islands, Java, Sumatra,