

**Memorial of Edwin M. Snow, Providence, Rhode Island : protesting against the passage of the "Joint resolution (S. 38) providing quarantine regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of Asiatic cholera," and praying that a thorough investigation of quarantine regulations may be instituted.**

### **Contributors**

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MEMORIAL

OF

EDWIN M. SNOW,

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND,

PROTESTING

*Against the passage of the "Joint resolution (S. 38) providing quarantine regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of Asiatic cholera," and praying that a thorough investigation of quarantine regulations may be instituted, with a view of reforming alleged flagrant abuses existing in some of our principal seaports, in order that a uniform system of quarantine may be established, founded upon the true nature of diseases.*

MARCH 22, 1866.—Referred to the Committee on Commerce and ordered to be printed.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled :*

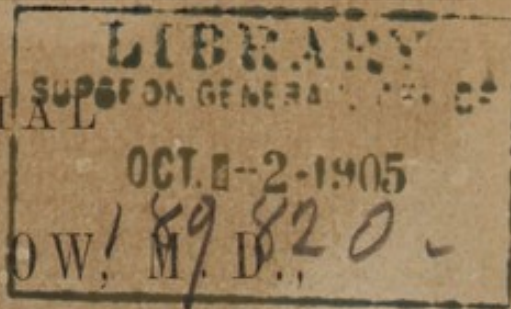
The undersigned has noticed the presentation to your honorable body of a memorial praying for the establishment of a uniform system of quarantine throughout the country ; and also the introduction and reference of a "Joint resolution providing quarantine regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of the Asiatic cholera,"

The necessity for the establishment of a uniform system of quarantine in this country has for a long time engaged the attention of those acquainted with the subject, and has not only received the approval of individuals who are prominent for their knowledge of sanitary science, but has also been indorsed by conventions of physicians, and others, from every portion of the country, who were specially acquainted with and interested in sanitary and quarantine matters.

The overwhelming necessity for the establishment of a uniform system of quarantine will be apparent from a single consideration, which I beg leave, briefly, to present.

The whole tendency of the highest civilization, and the uniform action of the most intelligent and the greatest commercial countries in the world, have been, for the last thirty years, to ameliorate the evils of quarantine, and to abolish those restrictions which a better knowledge of the nature and causes of diseases have shown to be unnecessary and useless, and particularly to lessen the restrictions of quarantine so far as relates to persons. But notwithstanding this fact, which reflects so great honor upon the age in which we live, the systems of quarantine in many of our seaports remain as they were half a century since, and contain many of the most odious, oppressive, and unnecessary features of the quarantines of the middle ages.

It is true that in most places the quarantine regulations, though odious in themselves, give, in their enforcement, a large discretion to the health officers, the result of which has been that, in some of our seaports, all quarantine has been practically abolished ; in others a mild and unobjectionable system is kept up ; while, in a few, the most oppressive and useless restrictions are constantly enforced.





The importance of the subject and the vast interests involved justify a reference to the quarantine regulations, as they have been enforced for many years past, in the commercial metropolis of this country, as a prominent example of the latter class. In the consideration of this subject, I would earnestly pray your honorable body that you will inquire into and receive evidence in relation to the operations and results of the quarantine in that city. Such an investigation will show :

1. That oppressive and unnecessary restrictions upon *persons* have been enforced every year.

2. That vessels have been subjected to quarantine on the ground that a contagious or communicable disease existed on board, and passengers who were entirely well have, nevertheless, been confined on the vessels for weeks, in daily constant intercourse with the sick.

3. That *persons* have been confined at quarantine for long periods of time to prevent them from communicating diseases which the almost unanimous evidence of the best authorities shows it is impossible for *persons* to communicate.

4. That *persons* have been subjected to rigid quarantine to prevent the introduction of diseases, at a season of the year when it was impossible for those diseases to spread in the city.

5. That a rigid quarantine has been enforced upon *persons* to prevent the introduction of a disease, when, at the same time, the disease was more prevalent in the city itself than it was on the vessel, or at the port from which the vessel sailed.

6. That in the case of epidemic diseases, the horrible farce has been enacted of detaining *persons* at quarantine to prevent the introduction of a disease when the same disease was epidemic in the city itself, and of course beyond all possible control of quarantine.

7. That *persons* and *vessels* have been subjected to an oppressive and onerous quarantine to prevent certain diseases, when those diseases did not exist on the vessels, nor at the ports from which the vessels sailed.

8. Finally, it will be found that, in addition to the severe and unnecessary restrictions upon *persons*, by which infinitely more deaths have been caused than have been prevented, vessels and cargoes have been detained for days and weeks, by which great injury and loss have resulted; that they have been heavily taxed for discharging cargoes, and for pretended fumigations and purifications which were entirely useless; so that, in the aggregate, from detentions, injury to cargoes, and from fees, the commerce of the country has been subjected to an enormous tax, amounting to many hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, the greater portion of which, in the light of modern science, has been entirely unnecessary.

What has been the result? Has the city of New York been more healthy and enjoyed a greater exemption from disease than our other large cities in which no such oppressive quarantine has existed? Has New York been protected from the very diseases to prevent which the rigid quarantine has been enforced?

Far from it. On the contrary, there has not, probably, been a moment for the last twenty years in which two of these diseases, small-pox and typhus fever, did not exist in that city, and several times during that period they have prevailed there with great severity.

The necessity, then, is apparent that Congress should interfere, and establish a uniform system of quarantine founded upon the true character and causes of the diseases proposed to be prevented; and which shall do away with the antiquated, barbarous, oppressive, and useless regulations which are still enforced in some of our seaports.

It may be proper to observe that all the reasons that can be given for enforcing such rigid quarantine regulations at the port of New York will apply with ten-fold force for the establishment of internal sanitary cordons which shall enable



other towns and cities to protect themselves from disease by establishing absolute non-intercourse with that city.

Twelve times at least, during the last ten years, the small-pox has been introduced into the city of Providence directly from the city of New York; and every year more or less cases of ship fever are introduced from the same city. There is, at all times, ten-fold more danger to all the towns and cities of the eastern and middle States of the introduction of diseases from New York city than by vessels from foreign ports.

With regard to the joint resolution, now before your honorable body, for the establishment of quarantine regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of Asiatic cholera, I would beg leave most earnestly to protest against its passage.

In the first place, if quarantine regulations were of any value to prevent Asiatic cholera, their most earnest advocates will acknowledge that, to be effectual, they must establish practical non-intercourse with the rest of the world. Such a quarantine is impossible in this country, and, if possible, would be a greater evil than the cholera itself.

In the second place, if quarantine regulations were useful to prevent cholera, it is too late to establish them for the present expected visit of the disease. There is still room for doubt whether the cholera will visit this country during the present year; but if it shall do so, as is generally expected, it will be here before any general system of quarantine could be adopted and put in efficient operation. Of course, after the disease is in the country, it would be absurd to establish quarantines to keep it out.

In the third place, quarantine regulations for the prevention of Asiatic cholera are utterly inconsistent with the known and generally acknowledged character and causes of the disease. It is an *epidemic* disease; it spreads through a country as an epidemic, and depends for its propagation, *wholly*, upon an epidemic constitution of the atmosphere, combined and co-existing with local causes. It is apparent that quarantine regulations can have no possible control over either the atmospheric or the local causes.

In the fourth place, quarantine regulations have never prevented the advent of cholera in any place or country. The evidence that they have done so must, of course, be entirely of a negative character. The fact that a quarantine has been enforced in any place and the cholera has failed to appear in that place proves nothing positively.

For every instance in which it is claimed that quarantines have prevented cholera, a hundred instances can be given where the most rigid quarantines have utterly failed to prevent it.

More than this: for every case in which it is claimed that the quarantine was the cause of the non-appearance of cholera, a hundred cases can be given where the cholera failed to appear in places, though there was no quarantine, and though there was daily constant intercourse with other places where the disease was epidemic.

In this connexion I would pray your honorable body that you will examine the evidence in relation to the results of quarantines and sanitary cordons to prevent cholera in Europe. It will be found that the most rigid quarantines and *triple* sanitary cordons, enforced by large bodies of troops, and sustained by the full power of despotic governments, have utterly failed to prevent the progress of cholera.

In the fifth place, quarantines and sanitary cordons are not only useless, but they are productive of great positive injury. The false idea of security which they engender delays and prevents the execution of those sanitary measures which are universally acknowledged to be useful to prevent the disease, and which alone are of any value. Quarantine measures and sanitary cordons require an enormous expense of money, and, by their interference with commerce, trade, and industry, they produce suffering and want, by which many families are rendered more liable to the disease.



Lastly, I would protest against the establishment of quarantine regulations to prevent cholera, because the almost unanimous evidence of the most intelligent observers of the disease, and the uniform action of the most intelligent and the greatest commercial countries in the world are, to the effect that these measures *are utterly useless to prevent epidemic cholera.*

The evidences of the truth of this statement are innumerable and overwhelming. Of course, the limits of this memorial will not permit their introduction at this time, but they are at your disposal whenever desired. I would only beg leave to quote a single opinion from a source which must commend itself to all as worthy of belief.

The Epidemiological Society of Great Britain is composed of many of the most intelligent physicians and other persons in that country. The sole object of this society is to investigate the causes and laws of diseases, and particularly of epidemic diseases, and to ascertain the best means of preventing them. During the last sixteen years the attention of the members of the society has been especially directed to the subject of Asiatic cholera, and they have recently presented a memorial to the privy council, setting forth the results of their inquiries and observations, in which the following opinion is found:

“With respect to any endeavor to exclude epidemic cholera by the system of quarantine, such as was formerly practiced in this country, and as it is at present adopted and carried out in all the Mediterranean seaports, the experience of the visitations in 1832, 1848, and 1853 appears to show conclusively that no reliance whatever can safely be placed upon it to keep off or avert the pestilence. Moreover, while the adoption of quarantine serves to give delusive hopes to the public mind, it generally leads to the unwise postponement of those internal measures of local improvement which afford the safest defence against the dangers of the assault. Sanitary precautions within a place are far more important than sanitary cordons without.”

Numerous opinions to the same effect are given in the reports of the General Board of Health, and of the Metropolitan Sanitary Commission, in England, as well as in reports upon quarantine of the English, French, and other governments of Europe.

Nor are we without evidence upon this subject in our own country. In addition to the writings of many individuals well known for their professional standing and familiarity with sanitary science, I may refer to the published reports of the “*National Quarantine and Sanitary Convention.*”

This convention was organized at Philadelphia in 1857, with special reference to the subject of quarantine, and has been composed of delegates from boards of health, municipal governments, and medical societies in all parts of the country. The subject of quarantine occupied a large portion of the time of the convention at the four annual meetings which were held in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Boston. I would beg leave to refer to the published discussions of that convention, particularly at the first and third meetings, for evidence confirming the views presented in this memorial.

In conclusion, the undersigned, while protesting against the passage, under the temporary excitement which now exists, of a measure which the best evidence in the world pronounces to be useless, and which involves enormous expense and great personal suffering, with no corresponding benefit, would at the same time earnestly pray your honorable body that you will institute a deliberate and thorough investigation, with the view of reforming the flagrant abuses which now exist in some of our seaports, and of establishing a uniform system of quarantine regulations, and particularly of naval hygiene, founded upon the true nature and causes of diseases, and in accordance with the latest and best evidence upon the subject.

EDWIN M. SNOW, M. D.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., *March* 13, 1866.



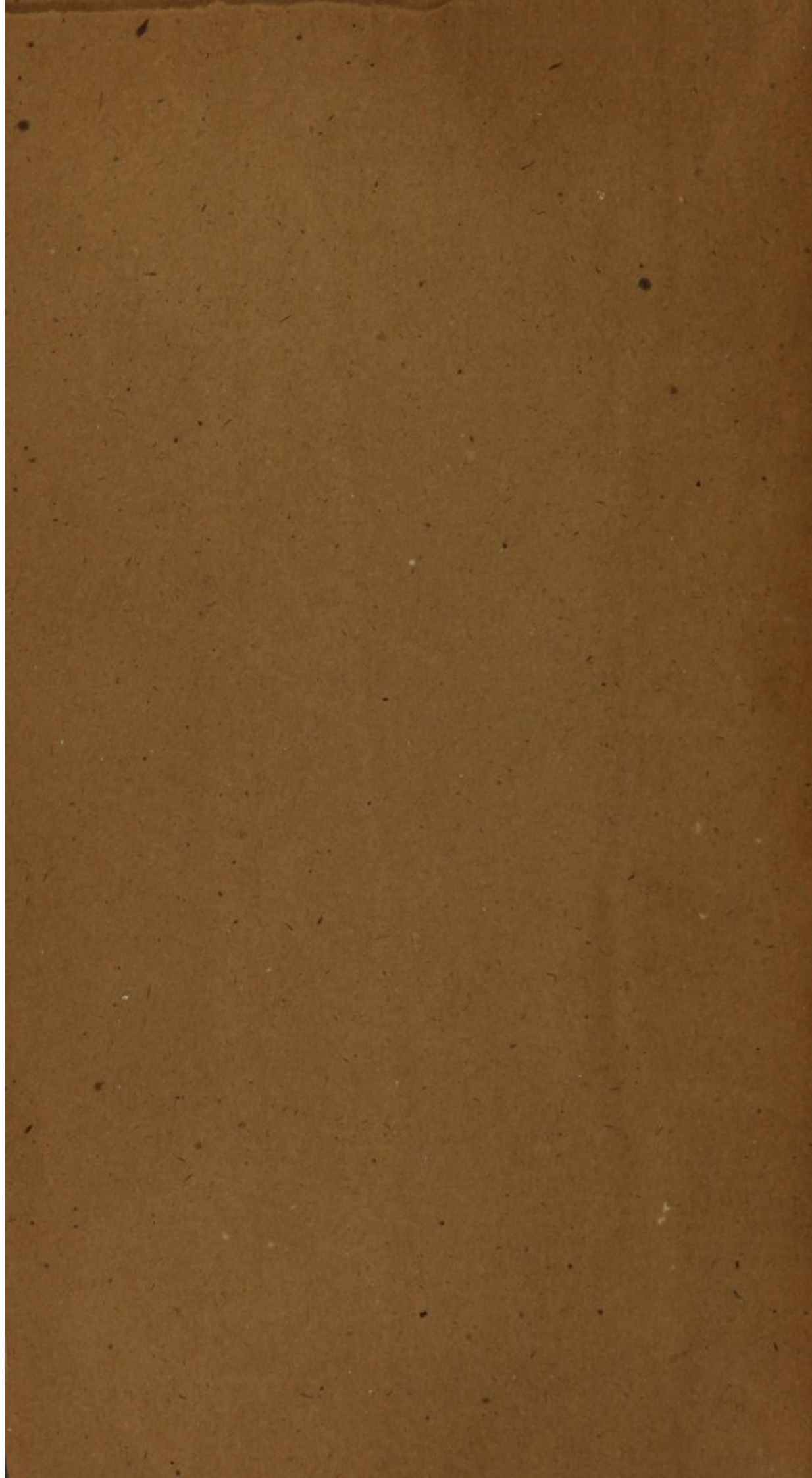












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