

SERIOUS FAULTS IN THE BOARD OF HEALTH

It Is Suffering From a Worn-out Constitution and Bad Methods.

So Says Dr. Henry Leffmann in an Interesting Interview.

A Recital of Some of the Antique Practices Which Date Back to the Beginning of the Century. The Quarantine Question.

"The Philadelphia Board of Health is suffering from a faulty constitution and antique methods of business," was the comment of Professor Henry Leffmann in an interview last evening. "It is not the fault of the individuals of the board, against whom I have nothing at all, but the system needs remodeling."

The doctor proceeded to particularize vigorously. He said: "A single one of a hundred instances will serve to demonstrate the methods of the board. That single instance is that they have a daily messenger service of their own between the office in City Hall and the Lazaretto Station at Tinicum Island. The reasons that existed away back in 1818 for this messenger service, when Tinicum Island was nowhere near a postoffice and had no telegraph or telephone connections, have been entirely removed in this age, when there is a postoffice within pistol shot and complete telegraph and telephone connections.

"Nevertheless, the special messenger service is continued in order to convey all official documents from the office to Tinicum, and from Tinicum to the office, daily, and a letter reaches there by 9 o'clock in the morning by mail that would get there at 4 o'clock in the afternoon by their special messenger. That messenger's trips must cost two railroad fares a day or else requires a pass, which is a very obnoxious thing in a public office. There is no reason in the world why such a method should exist to-day, but they keep it up and it is one of those very small matters that serve to show how they are tied down to traditions.

ANOTHER USELESS METHOD.

"For another instance, they require the Quarantine office to make a report as well as the Lazaretto Physician. They never read it. They have no use for it because it covers exactly the same grounds as the other reports, and when it comes up the president says 'another report of like import from the Quarantine office, which will be filed.' They still go through this merely from the force of old habit. It is of no use in the world.

"For another instance, they give the captains of vessels twenty-one questions on a form to answer. He answers them. They then take this form, filled up and signed, from him, and give him a separate certificate showing that he has answered and sworn to the original. There is no reason on earth why they shouldn't give him the original to bring on up to the city himself to present to the Health Officer. Suppose, as may frequently happen, a fruit vessel comes up on Saturday. She gets in, unloads and starts away to sea on the following Monday, and not until the next day (Tuesday) do the board receive the form of questions the captain has answered. By that time the vessel is away at sea.

"Now there are a hundred purposeless intricacies in their business like those I have mentioned. They involve details, and the labor of executing them is entirely superfluous. Those I have mentioned are merely straws of evidence as to the whole system.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL FAULTS.

"Let us turn to faults that are more fundamental. The Lazaretto Physician's scope of work extends from Marcus Hook to Bristol, and the Board of Health's business is properly with the city, yet it is subject by law to their orders. It is a case of inferior powers controlling superior.

"The physician is a State officer. The Board of Health should properly have no jurisdiction outside of the city limits. That is the State's business, and the Board of Health's position in the matter is entirely anomalous. The Mayor appoints the members of the board, and the Governor of the State appoints the Lazaretto and Port Physicians and Quarantine Master, and yet these State officers are subjected to the orders of the Board of Health.

"The Bullitt charter, in my opinion, made a bad change in the Board of Health by giving the appointing power into the hands of one man, the Mayor. It is not because I have anything to say against the present Mayor or the members of the board, but there is a body that has immense powers over the lives and property of the people. Think of vesting their appointment in one man. It should be a mixed body, as it was before, when Councils elected some members and the judges appointed others. It would be still better if the Councils and the judges and the Mayor had the appointing power divided among them. Imagine a state of politics, when there comes a time that every possible office is prostituted to political ends—imagine the powers that a Board of Health has over the people. Where there is one-man power there is bound to be more or less domination in the end. The evil may not present itself immediately. The court decided that Mayor Fitler had the power to remove the president of the Board of Charities and Correction, assigning simply, 'good and sufficient reasons,' and so, for no specific reasons at all, except dislike in the guise of, 'good and sufficient reasons,' another Mayor, at another time, may remove the most valuable member of the Board of Health.

THE HEALTH OFFICER'S POSITION.

"In New York city the Health Officer is made a member ex-officio of the Board of Health. That I think is a good thing. It should be so here. A proper quarantine service should cause very little inconvenience to commerce. This idea has been so far carried out in their improved service at New Orleans that Major Holt refuses to call it quarantine at all, because it conveys the idea of detention, which is the very contrary of the object. The object is to facilitate commerce and to enable vessels to proceed as rapidly as possible. They say that a vessel is either fit to proceed at once or else that she shall be immediately made fit to proceed, and they have reduced the cost and delays to their commerce to a minimum.

"Last summer, in the cholera scare, the Board of Health requested the government to establish quarantine at the Breakwater. It was simply a confession of weakness on their own part. It meant that Tinicum was not the proper place, but as they had previously committed themselves to Tinicum in the fight against changing the location they were tied down to their previous action, and so turned to the National Government to get help. There is no question that the Lazaretto Station ought to be taken away down the river somewhere. A national quarantine law would help solve the question; but, still, this State would not be satisfied to depend on that alone.

COULD BE SELF SUSTAINING.

"This State and city will continue to exercise local control in some measure over the harbor. The three States ought to co-operate and establish the proper quarantine. The station could be made entirely self supporting. In New Orleans the State fixes charges on vessels, and whenever those charges result in a surplus of revenue the New Orleans authorities are required to make horizontal reduction of the charges. It used to

cost ten times as much as it does under the new system.

"Our quarantine system is, of course, a big subject. It is complicated by the four jurisdictions. It is needlessly intricate, by reason of traditional, outgrown methods that are capable of business-like simplification. It is fundamentally wrong in the manner of constituting the Board of Health and its relations with the Health Officer and Port Physician and Lazaretto Physician and Quarantine Master, and it is intolerably bad in respect of the continuance of the station at Tinicum Island.

"The Governor, in his message to the Legislature, has made some wholesome suggestions about it, and now, in the presence of continued dangers from cholera, is a time that some good changes will certainly be made."