

APPENDIX B.

REPORT UPON THE PUBLIC HYGIENE OF THE REPUBLIC OF COSTA RICA.

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The Republic of Costa Rica, from its geographical situation, is exposed to the same contagious diseases to which all the countries in similar conditions suffer through the international communications so necessary to the development of commerce.

Though we do not pretend to have accomplished a great deal in the practical application of sanitary science, we have, nevertheless, done something in this line and have availed ourselves of the advantages derived from well-conducted experimentation in other countries. Though we have a code of sanitary and quarantine laws emitted in the year 1884, nevertheless, several of its prescriptions have been changed lately in accordance with our national board of health and with the faculty of medicine of Costa Rica, which bodies have taken into consideration the modern developments of maritime hygiene.

All matters relating to public health depend from the interior department of the National Government which enforces all the regulations emitted to protect the community from the contagious diseases that at any time should menace it. Every question in regard to public hygiene is submitted to our faculty of medicine which has the attributes of a national board of health. This body takes into consideration the circumstances of each particular case, and recommends to the Government the measures to be adopted in accordance with the latest prescriptions of sanitary science.

We have in San José, the capital of the Republic, a national institute of hygiene whose principal object is to analyze and examine all matters submitted to it by the respective authorities.

We have in our ports official physicians who act as Government sanitary officers, and whose principal duty is to enforce the sanitary laws of the country to prevent the importation of contagious diseases.

I will not detain your attention by referring to our quarantine and sanitary laws, as these more or less are the same generally observed by the American Republics, comprising the usual visit by the sanitary officers to the steamers and sailing vessels before they come into port, the inspection of passengers, exaction of the obligatory bill of health from the port of departure, and determination through the different data obtained and the actual state of affairs, if free pratique can be granted or a quarantine of inspection or a rigorous one must be put into force. We have quarantine stations established in both of our ports, namely, Punta Arenas on the Pacific and Port Limon on the Atlantic. These stations are on a small scale, and they do not cover yet all the ground that is required, but I am sure that my Government will shortly improve them.

Port Limon is our most important way of communication with the external world, and through it is carried the principal commerce between this country and Costa Rica. We have weekly steamers from New York, New Orleans, and Mobile, and not so often from Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The very frequent communication between this country and ours is due to the very large trade we have, sending you coffee, bananas, and other products in exchange for your manufactures. In bananas alone we send you about 300,000 bunches a month.

The sanitary conditions of Port Limon are really very good. The government has spent a considerable amount of money in filling and macadamizing its streets, in the building of a very fine breakwater around the port, and in providing the town with a good system of sewerage and very fine waterworks of modern type.

I have visited New Orleans several times, and taking into consideration its sanitary conditions, as compared with those of Port Limon, I really can not understand why they are so exacting in their quarantine laws as applied against all vessels proceeding from our port, even at times when there is not a single case of any contagious disease at Port Limon. This seems to me a one-sided affair and not an entirely fair procedure, as it interferes very much with our commerce.

I do not find any fault with any sanitary measures put in force against the introduction into a country of a contagious disease, but I must draw the line when these measures are more severe than those demanded by actual conditions. I am sure that this matter will be taken into due consideration and that the sanitary authorities of New Orleans, after an impartial study of the question, will not be so strict in enforcing quarantine against Port Limon when there should be no real cause for it.

Aside from the paludic diseases of different forms, we have had cases of yellow fever in our ports, but we may say with certainty, that this disease never has assumed there a truly epidemic type, but has manifested itself only by a few cases at a time. We do not have any small-pox in any part of our country, and with the exception of typhoid fever and some tuberculosis, we have none of the contagious diseases comprised in the number that quarantine laws protect against. Our Government is very careful in this respect, and whenever any of the above referred to diseases appears in our neighboring countries, special protective measures are put in force.

We have arrived at a point in sanitary science where the barbarous procedures of ignorant quarantine can hold their place no longer, and recent discoveries tend to simplify our protective measures in a manner that will not only preclude the importation of epidemics into a country, but will do away with unnecessary barriers to the life of nations, commerce.

This important sanitary conference will do a great deal in this line to benefit us all. Those of us who do not possess the requirements of knowledge, experience, and capital, will profit from the learning of those of our sister republics better fixed, and there is no doubt but that a good understanding on this most important subject will be a source of happiness and welfare for all the Americas.

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