The recent outbreak of Small-pox on the M.M. S.S. "Océanien."

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The subject of quarantine, although of great practical importance, is not, perhaps, of very general interest; and I feel that some few words of explanation are necessary before I venture to occupy your time with the brief account of the recent case of the "Océanien," which I propose to submit to you presently. I need not now insist upon the necessity which renders it indispensable to regard the whole of Australia—it may even be said, the whole of Australasia—as one country for this purpose of quarantine, since it is thoroughly understood and accepted. If, however, the interest of all the colonies in this matter are the same, it follows that their practice with regard to it should be identical; and this view, also, is understood and accepted by the various health officers. Moreover, the desire that identical lines of practice should be followed, which is so earnestly felt here, is entertained everywhere else, but nowhere, perhaps, more earnestly than in Victoria. Yet it cannot have escaped your attention that the course pursued here in the case I refer to was essentially different to that which had been pursued under the very same circumstances, and only a day or two previously, at Melbourne. At that port the vessel was regarded as clean, and she was admitted to free pratique; here, she was regarded as infected, and she was detained in quarantine for some days. I do not think that so marked a difference of practice, and one so puzzling to shipowners and the general public, should pass without comment; and I believe the facts of the case may profitably occupy your attention for a few minutes.

The "Océanien," after an uneventful voyage of the usual duration from Marseilles, touched at Aden, and on August 8th left that port. On August 9th a passenger and an officer, and on the 10th the chief cook, were discovered to be suffering from modified small-pox. The passenger was shut up by himself in an ordinary first-class cabin; the officer was shut up in his own cabin, which is on the same deck amidships; and the cook was placed in an
apartment called the hospital, which is on the same deck too, but away forward, between the third-class quarters and the forecastle. No doubt, such arrangements were made for confining the infection to the quarters named as seemed practicable. The port of Réunion (which, it will be remembered, is a French Colony), was reached on August 16th, and the Chef du Service de Santé was requested by the captain to remove the three patients, and to disinfect and cleanse the vessel. He refused, however, to receive any but the sick passenger, who happened to be bound for that place, and who, I presume, could not be refused; and he did not cleanse the ship. Mauritius, the next port, and in an English Crown Colony, was reached on the 21st; and there again the captain requested the Health Officer to certify that the ship was free from infection. This application was not made until the eve of departure, that is to say, not until the 26th, when the captain says the patients had recovered; nevertheless, the Health Officer replied that he could not certify to facts which had not come within his own observation, and, in short, declined to board the ship, or to have anything to do with her. So the voyage was pursued, the two remaining patients returning to duty on the 28th; when the quarters they had occupied were fumigated and cleansed, and all their personal effects thrown overboard. Adelaide, for which port there were no passengers, was reached on September 10th. Some cargo was discharged in quarantine, and the voyage was continued after the captain had been warned to bring to on entering Hobson's Bay. On September 12th Port Phillip was touched, and the vessel was boarded by the Boarding Medical Officer and by a medical member of the Central Board of Health. After due examination, these officers gave the vessel free pratique; thirteen passengers, luggage, and cargo were discharged; and the day being Sunday, about 200 visitors went on board during the afternoon. On resuming the voyage, the captain was granted a clean bill of health without any endorsement; and on September 15th the vessel touched Port Jackson, at 6 a.m. On entering the Heads, the captain was ordered to hoist the yellow flag, and to anchor in quarantine waters; and at 6:30 she was boarded by the Health Officer and myself. Careful examination failing to detect any present case of small-pox, at 7:30 she was handed over to two of the quarantine officers, and the usual fumigation and cleansing was at once begun by the Superintendent of Quarantine. First, however, all passengers, with their servants and stewards, were lodged on shore, and as many of the crew as could be spared were landed at the laundry, where they washed and disinfected clothing and luggage. By the afternoon of the following day all these operations had been done under the eye of the Superintendent, and to his satisfaction; his report was received, and on the third day was considered and approved by the Board of Health. The
Health Officer was then in a position to order the release of the vessel; and in this course the Board of Health would have concurred, but during the previous night a case of febrile disorder had occurred in the person of the ship’s butcher. The illness was not especially suspicious; indeed, there was very strong reason from the first to expect that it would turn out to be of no consequence. But under the circumstances it was deemed prudent to defer discharging the vessel for four-and-twenty hours; and she was released at last on the fourth day after her arrival, at 1 p.m. These are the undisputed facts of the case. Two questions arise in them—First, why was the vessel treated as infected at this port, when she was treated as clean in Victoria? And secondly, if she were infected, why were her passengers not detained during the usual incubation period?

The first consideration is, that the infection of variola clings to inanimate objects with great tenacity; so that a ship which has carried a case of small-pox during the voyage must of necessity be regarded as being infected with that disease down to the time at which she is officially declared to have been thoroughly cleansed. This is the view taken—but no one disputes it—by the Sanitary Conference; and it is expressed in their fourth resolution. Upon this account alone the “Océanien” would have been treated here as infected. But, it may be objected, there is no evidence that the vessel in general ever was exposed to such infection, because the patients were isolated in certain cabins, which there is no reason to doubt were thoroughly cleansed after their recovery. To this criticism there are several answers. If it be granted that the case really was as it represents it to have been, yet the clearing was done by the captain of the ship. No health authority is justified in relying, for the safety of the people whom he is charged to defend from imported infection, upon the statements of persons over whom he has no control. Thus stated, the proposition appears self-evident; but it may be added without offence to captains in general, and merely as testing the legal value of the evidence they can give upon this point, that they are interested parties—interested, that is to say, in procuring the speedy discharge of their vessels rather than in protecting the people of an alien country from disease. The same objection does not apply to any evidence they might be able to produce, under the hand of an independent health authority of whatever country, that careful, thorough disinfection had been done. No doubt, a vessel which, having carried cases of small-pox during the voyage, could produce a certificate stating that she had been inspected by the Health Officer of some port, that she then had no case of disease on board, and that she

* “A vessel infected with small-pox is one which has carried a case of that disease during the voyage.”
had been disinfected by his own staff under his own supervision, would on arrival here be detained no longer than necessary to ascertain that no further case had occurred subsequent to that inspection. But, is it the case that the ship as a whole had never been exposed to infection, but that the latter had been confined to the quarters occupied by the patients? I pass over details, such as the difficulty of attending to patients isolated under such circumstances without exposing their servants to risk of infection, and I proceed to consider the possibility of effectual isolation on board ship. This the Conference specifically denied; but it happens that the untrustworthiness of the measures taken to secure it in this case has already been demonstrated. I have said that the cook was isolated in the hospital. Now, just a year ago a case of small-pox occurred on board the “Océanien”; and the patient, a boy named Manoni, was “isolated” in the very quarters occupied on the present occasion by the chief cook. That patient, also, fell sick the day after the vessel left Aden, and at the ports subsequently touched nearly the same treatment was given her as on the present voyage. At all of them she was treated as infected until Australia was reached; all of them refused to allow communication. But she no sooner touched Adelaide than she was declared clean; she received free pratique at Melbourne; and in consequence she escaped inspection at this port. You will remember what followed; she had only been in this port a few days when a case of small-pox among the sailors was reported; and upon examination of the crew, I found two other persons actually with a half-healed eruption of small-pox upon them. It was thus proved on that occasion that the isolation of Manoni was not such as to prevent the spread of disease among the crew. The deliberate opinion of the Conference, which was based upon many similar cases known to the several delegates, and which had been given long before, was thus supported; but it was thus shown that the cook’s isolation during the present voyage was actually untrustworthy, since exactly the same isolation in Manoni’s case had signally failed. Infection, then, could have spread from the cook’s quarters to the rest of the vessel; the whole ship, therefore, had to be considered infected; and down to the date of her arrival here she had not been cleansed to the satisfaction of any independent health authority. It still remains to answer the second question—Why, if the vessel were infected, were the passengers not detained for the usual incubation period, and the ship despatched in quarantine? The answer is clear. Quarantine is always a hardship; it impedes traffic, deprives many persons of liberty, and causes considerable expense to all parties concerned. Its justification is a reasonable probability that it will save the importing country from epidemic disease. In considering what should be done with this vessel, therefore, all the circumstances
of the case were taken into careful consideration. Thirteen passengers were known to have landed in Melbourne; 200 citizens had visited the infected ship, and dispersed to their homes; any of these might have actually been in Sydney before the "Océanien" came into port. Under any circumstances, little of value can be done by inland quarantine; under these circumstances especially, nothing could be done. It appeared, therefore, that the usual detention, if it were enforced here, would be vexatious—its hardships would be incommensurate with any advantage which could be hoped from it with confidence. The detention therefore was not insisted upon. But, had this been the vessel's first port of call in Australia, it would certainly have been enforced for the reasons already given.

I am constrained to add, that there seems to have been a dereliction of duty along the whole line. The Health Service at Réunion acted with sheer cruelty in condemning some 300 people to remain shut up with two cases of small-pox on board the ship. It was clearly a duty owing first to humanity, secondly to their countrymen, and thirdly to a mail-service subsidized by their own Government, to have taken all three patients into quarantine, and to have thoroughly cleansed the vessel. Had this course been followed, she would, upon the production of sufficiently detailed certificates of cleansing under official seal, have been regarded here as having begun her period of observation at the time of leaving Réunion; and this would have elapsed by the time she arrived at Adelaide. The matter seems to demand the attention of the French Colonial Office, and I am informed that its intervention will be sought by the Company affected. Almost the same remarks apply to the Health Office of Mauritius; but their case is aggravated by there having been at the date they were appealed to no question of receiving actually sick persons, but merely of fumigation and cleansing. This, too, was a duty owing to humanity. It appears to me that in this case the intervention of our own Colonial Office might well be sought; and, as Mauritius is a Crown Colony, no doubt its remonstrances would take the form of commands. The officers at both of these ports seem to have been actuated by no other motive than to shirk the responsibility which it was their fate to encounter face to face; and they did shirk it. Upon South Australia fell the duty of disinfecting the ship, no less than upon the two former Colonies; and, Adelaide having failed, even as they did, it devolved upon Victoria. As to the latter, I simply cannot understand the action taken there, and I therefore pass it over without further remark. At last the "Océanien" reached our shores; and here all was done that events and lapse of time had left possible.

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