

# Influence of disease on U. S. expansion

By

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CONDENSED FROM AN  
O. U. PUBLIC LECTURE

**T**HE influence of disease upon military operations, pioneer expeditions and explorations, the settlement of new territory, and the development of nations has been amply demonstrated in practically every period of the world's history, though it has never been generally understood or appreciated.

It is a fact that through the effect of disease the ultimate outcome of appeals to arms, or international conflicts, have frequently been influenced or decided, and thus have controlled the destinies of nations through military success or defeat.

The failure to appreciate the underlying causes of ultimate military and political results has depended not so much upon a lack of interest as upon inability or failure of those in power to appreciate that such *inconspicuous causes* may actually be the controlling factors in the success of military operations and the aspirations of nations.

Many historians are not entirely unbiased, and even though unconscious that they are prejudiced are inclined to gloss over shameful epidemics which have caused humiliation to their country, or which would tend to minimize the glory of the success of their arms by indicating that they were gained over opponents who were weakened by disease.

Historical records, however, clearly indicate that neglect to take precautionary measures has turned many a possible victory into defeat. Some very striking examples of the truth of that statement are: the destruction of the Assyrian host under Sennacherib which saved the Israelites; the epidemic of dysentery which so severely scourged the army of Xerxes and was responsible for the preservation of Greek civilization; the marsh fevers that drove the Roman forces of Severus out of Caledonia, and on another occasion saved Rome from capture by the Gauls under Brennus; the epidemic of dysentery which wasted the larger and better armed Prussian Army at Valmy and gave the victory to the raw French levies, thereby preserving the infant French Republic; and the pestilence which combined with the rigors of winter destroyed Napoleon's "grand army" in Russia.

I believe it must be conceded that Moses was probably the greatest sanitarian that ever lived, certainly prior to modern times. The Bible is full of references that indicate that he had what appears

to have been almost prophetic vision in health matters, and he was far in advance of his day and generation. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are full of instructions and directions concerning health.

Moses definitely established principles in the prevention and control of disease that are just as true today as they were in his time: namely, notification of disease, frequent inspections, quarantine, and cleansing and disinfection before release, and raising of the quarantine.

How much the peoples of the world *forgot* the lessons handed down by Moses, and how they were *ignored* by the people of many nations in later days, both before the coming of Christ and since the Christian era, will be clearly evident from examination of history.

Americans do not need to go outside the western hemisphere to find illuminating and profoundly interesting examples of

the effects of disease upon political, territorial and national history.

One striking example is that of Benedict Arnold's expedition to Quebec, this invasion of Canada being one of the very earliest strategic moves in the War of the Revolution. If the colonists could have enlisted the support of the Canadians in the war, they would have united the whole of British America and presented an unbroken front to British invasion.

Numerous political and military advantages could have been gained if Quebec could have been captured, as Canadians were believed ready to join the Revolution.

Arnold's expedition started with 1,100 men, expecting to take Quebec's small garrison by surprise. But on the way, dysentery, smallpox and other illnesses broke out on a large scale, causing many fatalities, slowing up progress of the expedition, and requiring that some of the able men be assigned to take care of the sick while the remainder pushed on.

Finally the expedition arrived at Quebec, with only about 510 men, half armed, in rags. The expedition had failed. They were now too late to take Quebec by surprise as they might have done a few days earlier.

George Bancroft writes in his *History of the United States*: "From a military standpoint Arnold's expedition, if carried out as originally planned, should have been a complete success, but the fatal oversight was made of *not solving in advance the problem of sickness as possibly affecting purely military plans.*"

So strong are the invisible links in the chain which holds together the great events of history and may unite or divide an empire. The occurrence of this unforeseen disease with the delays entailed, can be fairly and clearly credited with the failure of this expedition, the repulse before Quebec, the retreat from Canada, and the loss of British-America to the American Union.

Had these diseases been prevented or had they been anticipated and provision made in order to care for and remove the sick our flag in all probability would be floating over the entire continent from the Rio Grande to the Arctic Seas, and the colony of Canada would have united with the other English colonies of the continent to form a greater American republic.



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Another epidemic, which occurred outside our country in connection with a military expedition with which we had nothing to do, also had a tremendous influence on the expansion and development of our own country.

It is not too much to say that second only to obtaining our own independence, the most important event that has affected our national history was an epidemic of yellow fever little known by students of military history and certainly not realized by our own people. The country affected by this second sanitary disaster was France.

Napoleon was determined to give France a colonial empire, and owing to the weakness of Spain he had secured from her the cession of Louisiana to France. He also sent a strong military expedition to St. Domingo where a considerable portion of the French nobility had had rich estates, with the object of taking full military possession of the island and holding it against the blacks and against the English.

In ninety days the French had completely overcome all armed opposition and were in full possession of the island. Troops were not needed to administer and police the reconquered territory, and Napoleon's plan was to proceed with the waiting fleet and transports and continue on to Louisiana, establish French sovereignty and organize the proposed French colonial empire on the North American continent.

At this point the unforeseen and invisible factor of disease destroyed forever Napoleon's hopes and plans. Scarcely had the army begun to establish itself in Santa Domingo when the scourge of yellow fever descended upon them. Twenty generals were carried off at once. Officers and soldiers perished by the thousands. Of the 22,000 men that landed, only 10,000 were left. Newcomers were seized by the disease as soon as they landed.

Within six months after landing the army was reduced to nine or ten thousand, and despite heavy reinforcements, the quota of troops intended for the garrisoning of Louisiana after reconquering St. Domingo had been absolutely annihilated.

This forced Napoleon to make a complete change in his plans and with the imminence of war with Great Britain he decided to dispose as advantageously as possible of the unoccupied territory on the mainland which he did not have enough men to take possession of and hold. With the loss of Louisiana he early had to abandon his negotiations with Spain for the further contemplated cession of the contiguous territory of the Floridas.

"In this manner," says Thiers, "the Americans purchased from France that extensive country which increased their

territory in North America and made them master of the Gulf of Mexico for the present and for time to come. They were consequently indebted for their birth to that long struggle between France and England."

Munson says, "He might well have added that the United States was directly indebted for such greatness to an outbreak, in a foreign territory, of a disease which should have been foreseen, and even in those days was known to be largely avoidable through quarantine and the evacuation of disease centers."

It does not require the wisdom of a Solomon to appreciate the tremendous consequences to our then infant country as the beneficiary of France's neglect of military sanitation in 1802 in the relatively unimportant island of San Domingo, the effects of which have been in process of development for more than a century and have completely altered and expanded our national destiny.

Had France been able to establish its authority in Louisiana in 1802, supported by powerfully trained and veteran soldiers, there is strong reason to conclude that such well defended territory would have been permanently retained up to the present time just as today she holds French Guiana and the French West Indies.

Under such conditions, the United States, hemmed in by British possessions on the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the east, and French possessions on the south and west, would have been absolutely restricted as to territorial expansion and in all probability never could have extended south of Georgia or west of Illinois or Tennessee.

The present development and prosperity of the area originally held by the United States at the close of the Revolution is almost entirely dependent upon the expansion and development of new territory and resources to the westward and the tremendous immigration that accompanied it.

In the light of history the political, geographical and material development of our nation and country has been greatly affected and influenced by epidemics which brought to naught military movements of vast importance which had begun with every assurance of success.



#### Board nominees chosen

Several Sooners are on the list of ten nominees submitted by the Oklahoma Pharmaceutical Association for Governor Marland's consideration in filling a post on the State Board of Pharmacy. The group includes E. E. Duncan, '23pharm, Oklahoma City; Jess W. Strunkle, '25 pharm, Enid; Dave McLemore, '22pharm, Britton; and G. C. Von Horn, '20pharm, Stillwater.

## WITH THE FACULTY

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ation. A. M. de la Torre, assistant professor of modern languages, was chosen the new head of the Oklahoma chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish.



Oklahoma college and university professors are far from well paid, the *Daily Oklahoman* commented editorially.

The editorial said in part:

For some weeks past, salary schedules maintained in the several departments of state government and in tax-supported schools of this state have been published daily. To the casual reader or to one who has no personal interest in teachers' salaries, those paid in the schools and colleges of Oklahoma may appear sufficient. To the men and women who must live upon those stipends and to persons who have an understanding of the cost of the education which prepared the deans, professors, their assistants and instructors for their life-work and to others who have a proper appreciation of their contribution to society, Oklahoma's college and university salary schedules are nothing we may point to with pride.

Taking 13 state universities in the central states, the middle west and southwest, only one state has a lower salary schedule than Oklahoma. It is Kansas.

No one, of course overlooks the fact that the state faces new obligations under the social security act which must be met. Yet, with the rising cost of living the average faculty family is finding it difficult to make ends meet. A number of those same families who have suffered sickness have been forced into debt, having deficits in some cases as high as \$957 a year. Because of financial pressure 11 faculty members have assigned all or part of their 1936-1937 salaries to obtain loans.

The average number in a professor's household is 3.1—these men of scholarly mind and high character cannot afford to rear many children, although for the sake of our country they rather than men and women on relief should be adding to our population.

One point which may have been overlooked by our state government is the cut in faculty salaries made by Governor Murray, the first of September, 1931, and the second of March, 1933. The total reduction ranged from 182 for deans down to 5 per cent for instructors. Since March, 1933 there has been, in effect, another reduction in salary, due not to pay cuts, but to the rising cost of living.

While reductions in other state departments were declared invalid by the state supreme court, no such action was taken relative to faculty salaries. Faculty members are asking, therefore not for an increase, but for a restoration of contract, previously ignored by the state. For at the time the cuts were ordered by Governor Murray, faculty members had signed up at a certain rate of pay. The cuts were accepted by them voluntarily.



Lieut. J. P. Holland, assistant professor of military science and Sooner polo coach, has received a captain's commission in the U. S. army.



E. N. Comfort, director of the Oklahoma School of Religion, was re-elected president of the Norman Forum, and Dr. Robert K. Carr, assistant professor of government, was re-elected secretary-treasurer.