

As to order of reference No. (3),—

(a.) That, although the matter is not one capable of absolute demonstration, the evidence before us raises a very strong presumption that a substantial factor in the introduction of the epidemic was the arrival in Auckland on the 12th October of the s.s. "Niagara" with patients infected with the epidemic disease.

(b.) The evidence does not exclude the possibility of other sources, such as the presence of infection from other vessels arriving in Auckland at the same time or shortly before the arrival of the "Niagara."

(c.) The foregoing evidence proves, in our opinion, that the official action before, in, and about the release of the "Niagara" showed either non-recognition or a disregard of the gravity of the position described by the wireless message of the 11th October.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATION AS RELATING TO THE EPIDEMIC.

Owing in some measure to the war conditions existing the Headquarters Staff of the Health Department was sadly depleted during the greater part of last year. When the epidemic appeared Dr. Valintine, Chief Health Officer, was engaged with the Defence Department, and Dr. Makgill, Assistant Director of Medical Services, was absent with the Expeditionary Forces. There was only Dr. Frengley, Acting Chief Health Officer, and Dr. Watt, District Health Officer, in charge. In addition to this circumstance there were only four District Health Officers for the entire Dominion. It is proper that the administration shown by the Department should be considered with due regard to the facts mentioned.

The epidemic appears to have been first brought under the notice of the Minister by a letter from Mr. W. T. Young, secretary of the New Zealand Federated Seamen's Union, dated the 27th September, 1918. This was referred to the Chief Health Officer on the 7th October, which, considering the serious nature of the complaint, does not show proper expedition. A reply was sent on the 9th October, based on a report received by the Minister from Dr. Watt, acting in the absence of Dr. Frengley, in which the words are used, "The epidemic which New Zealand is at present experiencing is by no means a new disease. Influenza in its epidemic form presents certain peculiarities, the most striking being the rapidity of extension and the large number of people attacked in a short time." The practical substance of this report was to advise that there was no absolute immunity from the disease, to take steps towards allaying public anxiety, and to wait. It is most difficult to understand why advice of this negative character was given at that time, in face of the statement that influenza was present in its epidemic form, and that this disease spreads with great rapidity. This matter is cited for the reason that it is an example of the method of delay that was followed by similar actions on several occasions by more than one officer of the Health Department. It is a course of action that should not be repeated in the future, because it weakens public confidence in the guidance of the Department, which is established to lead the country in regard to health matters. We know that when Dr. Frengley proceeded to Auckland on the 2nd November all the assistance the Minister had in Wellington was Miss MacLean and a cadet officer, the District Health Officer and the Secretary for the Department being both laid aside ill. It is most evident from a brief recital of these facts that the Department ought to be strengthened by additions, or by providing some qualified Reserve Officers who might be called upon in case of the leading officers being temporarily disabled. The District Health Officers were in a similar situation to that of the Head Office, and also at Christchurch and Dunedin (also probably elsewhere) laymen had to come to the assistance of the Department. The Minister says, "Under the law the responsibility with regard to infectious diseases rested with the Hospital Boards, and we took steps to endeavour to awaken the country in order to get the whole machine moving outside the Hospital Boards." We find, however, that the Hospital Boards and much of the country appears to have been more awake than the Department itself. On the 6th November the Department wired all Hospital Boards, "Get into touch with the Medical Superintendent with view to providing extra accommodation in case needed for influenza"; but Dr. Falconer, Medical Superintendent, Dunedin Hospital, had taken precautionary measures during the week preceding the 2nd