

abstract of which may be found in "Braithwaite's Retrospect," (Part xxvii.)

But, as before hinted, neither can this specific internal cause be looked upon as sufficient in itself to produce the disease, notwithstanding the many persons who believe that these diseases may be, and often are thus produced, or how could the fact be accounted for, that villages, towns, and even continents have remained not only for years but for centuries free from them, so long as the inhabitants avoided all communication with those laboring under the diseases. That the same specific internal cause existed in these individuals, cannot be denied from the great rapidity with which the diseases were wont to spread, when once introduced by infection or contagion. With these facts before us, it is difficult to admit that these cases occur without any external cause, which are from time to time breaking out in localities apparently cut off from all sources of infection; for, taking into consideration the subtle nature of these poisons, their diffusion through the atmosphere, and the length of time they may remain in a dormant state in fomites and in other situations, it is more than probable that these anomalous cases owe their origin to some lurking infectious matter, which has been unwittingly communicated, and which has really kindled the flame ascribed by many to spontaneous combustion.

On the other hand, it is most difficult to conceive how these diseases first originated, if we do not admit their origin independently of contagion. We have no record of their having existed from the creation, the history of most of them dating back no further than a few centuries; hence we are constrained either to admit that they have arisen without any external cause, or to seek for some way of reconciling their present prevalence with their former absence or obscurity. The reasons why the former admission cannot be made, have been already given; with regard to the latter circumstance, nothing can be brought forward except conjecture.

We are aware that there are many agencies, such as time, and a variety of circumstances, which exercise a powerful modifying influence on many things, and even on diseases themselves. Plants have been taken in their natural state from their native forests and plains, and by the force of circumstances arranged by man's ingenuity, have been transformed in the most wonderful manner. The same may be said of many of the lower animals. Man himself has undergone various changes, both in his physical and moral constitution; and even those very diseases of which we are now treating, have, at various periods of their history, presented characters widely different from those presented at other times;