

CANADA

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The Small-pox Epidemic in St. John, N. B., in 1871. By L. C. ALLISON, M.B. Read before the New Brunswick Medical Society, 3rd April, 1872.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—There are no phenomena for which we find it harder to account than for the variations that constantly occur in the types of infectious diseases. One year a disease will appear in a particular locality, diffusing itself widely but causing few deaths and comparatively little suffering among those whom it attacks. It disappears—that is, it travels away to act in other places, for the infecting principle of such a disease being constantly transmitted from one person to another never dies out to be regenerated *de novo*, but merely alters its neighborhood and the area of its action. After a second interval it re-visits its former locality in a form so changed that it hardly seems to be the same thing. A large proportion of those who are attacked by it die, and many others escape only after a protracted and dangerous illness. The sanitary condition of the community and the general healthfulness of its inhabitants are no worse than they were before—perhaps they are better, and the infection is or ought to be the same, but the disease is very different. Last year it was not severe anywhere. This year, in every site or community it reaches; in every climate, hot or cold, moist or dry; in every neighbourhood, crowded or scattered, it exhibits the characters of intense malignity. Whence does it derive these characters? How is it that the same factors give a product in one year of four and in another of forty? We cannot tell. The question puzzles the most modern nosologists as hopelessly as it puzzled Sydenham.

The small pox of 1871 is one of these anomalous epidemics. I am not aware that its origin has, as yet, been definitely investigated; but, when this is done, I think it will be found that its