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ART. XXXVI.—ON THE CONTAGION OF CHOLERA.

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The fearful pestilence that has stalked over the length and the breadth of the land, with such fearful strides, tracking its course with desolation and mourning, having now for a third time passed away, leaves us free to express ourselves,

"In thoughts that breathe,"

and openly to discuss any, and every doubtful point, connected with the history, character, progress, cause or treatment of cholera, without the apprehension of creating alarm; and, consequently, the necessity no longer exists for subduing or withholding a truthful and free expression of opinion. I shall, therefore, offer no apology, for now redeeming a promise made elsewhere, of resuming the subject of the contagion of cholera at a future time; although I am well aware that, in doing so, I am treading on disputed ground. When I consider the professional characters, and the elevated positions of many of the parties whose opinions and views are adverse to my own, I do not enter the lists without being fully impressed with a sense of the importance of the subject, and of the obscurity that involves it—as well as of my own inability to do it justice; yet, from the fact that the ground is not neutral, I step forth fearlessly, well knowing, that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," resolved, that my data shall be correct, my facts, true, and my arguments, brief.

Having had the melancholy, personal experience of three visitations of this insidious and appalling disease in this city, during the years 1832, 1834, and 1849, I intend in the course of this paper, not only to give such facts as have come under my own observation, during each of these periods, tending to establish the contagious nature and character of cholera; but, in support of these views, I purpose laying some of my medical friends under contribution, besides drawing on other published and authentic sources of information. Having access to some important documents, never before published, it is my intention to endeavor to trace the disease to its origin, in each of the years above mentioned; and to establish, *by proofs*, that it had an existence, not epidemically, but in isolated cases in persons who had arrived from infected localities, or who had come in contact with persons or effects from infected localities, *before its presence was generally admitted or ascertained*.

From the title that I have given this paper, it becomes necessary that I explain what I mean by the word "contagion," and what force I intend it to convey. The celebrated Dr. David Hossack, in writing to a

medical friend on the subject of contagion, upwards of a quarter of a century ago, thus expresses himself. "As far as I have examined this subject, it appears to me to be more a dispute about *words* than *facts*. The abuse of the terms contagion and infection, and the neglect of writers in not according to them a precise definition of the manner in which they severally employ them, have, I believe, been the source of our medical warfare," &c.

These observations are most applicable to our present position and times, hearing, as we do, one medical practitioner declare cholera to be contagious—another, infectious—another, communicable—another, contingently contagious or infectious—another, all these under particular conditions or circumstances—and another, none of them. These different opinions arise, sometimes from the different modes of receiving facts, and sometimes from taking for facts what are really not so; as there is, I regret to say, the greatest unwillingness among medical men to probe into *facts that do not favor their pre-conceived opinions*. But, notwithstanding these diversities of opinion, all are agreed that the disease is communicated, and spread directly from person to person, and from place to place, regularly and successively, although we are all still "*in nubibus*" as to the particular mode of its transmission, and to the particular physical laws governing its progress and diffusion. Let us not, then, blindly attach ourselves to either the one or the other party or faction, that dogmatically declares that the disease is contagious or non-contagious, without reflecting for themselves; but let us set forth direct all our energies to the unravelling of all that is entangled in the doubtful web—not suffering ourselves to be led away by fine drawn theories, put forth at the expense of common sense; and let us set forth *facts* plainly, so as to establish a principle broadly, and under its widest and fullest bearing. Many medical writers, whether on cholera or other diseases, are *mere writers and not practitioners*, and we consequently find among the thousand and one sixpenny publications of the day, issued by the teeming press of the neighboring republic, theories and opinions unsupported by a single fact of personal experience, evidently written "*ad captandum vulgus*," for the amount they will yield in dollars and cents. I will not now particularize any one, it being foreign to my present purpose; but will merely remark, that even such opinions as they propound, when put into print, have their influence upon the public, as well as upon the more unreflecting members of the medical profession.

But to return from this digression to the precise meaning of the terms contagion and infection; both Hooper and Dunglison, define *contagion as infection*, and under