

THE

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## Selections: Medicine.

### CONTAGION.

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The social conditions through which, in our own country at the present time, the more fatal infectious diseases are enabled to acquire epidemic diffusion are chiefly such as the following:—that persons first sick in families and districts, instead of being isolated from the healthy and treated with special regard to their powers of spreading infection, are often left to take their chance in all such respects; so that, especially in poor neighbourhoods, where houses are often in several holdings, and where always there is much intermingling of population, a first case, if not at once removed to a special establishment, will almost of necessity give occasion to many other cases to follow;—that persons with infectious disease, especially in cases of slight or incipient attack, and of incomplete recovery, mingle freely with others in work places and amusement places of common resort, and, if children, especially in day-schools, and that such persons travel freely with other persons from place to place in public conveyances;—that often on occasions when boarding-schools have infectious disease getting the ascendant in them, the schools are broken up for the time, and scholars, incubating or perhaps beginning to show infection, are sent away to their respective, perhaps distant, homes;—that keepers of lodging-houses often receive lodgers into rooms and beds which have recently been occupied by persons with infectious disease and have not been disinfected;—that persons in various branches of business relating to dress (male and female) and to furniture, if they happen to have infectious disease,

such as scarlatina or small-pox, on their premises, probably often spread infection to their customers by previous carelessness as to the articles which they send home to them, and that laundries further illustrate this sort of danger by carelessness in regard to infected things which they receive to wash;—that purveyors of certain sorts of food, if they happen to have infectious disease on their premises, by carelessness spread infection to their customers;—that streams and wells with sewage and other filth escaping into them are most dangerous means of infection, especially as regards enteric fever and cholera, and that great purveyors of public water-supplies, so far as they use insufficient precautions to insure the freedom of their water from such risks of infectious pollution, represent in this respect an enormous public danger;—that ill-conditioned sewers and house-drains, and cesspools receiving infectious matters, greatly contribute to disseminate contagia, often into houses in the same system of drainage, and often by leakage into wells. Of the dangers here enumerated, there is perhaps none against which the law of England does not purport in some degree to provide. At present, however, they all are, to an immense extent, left in uncontrolled operation; partly because the law is inadequate, and partly because local administrators of the law often give little care to the matter: but chiefly because that strong national opinion which controls both law and administration cannot really be effective until the time when right knowledge of the subject shall be generally distributed among the people, and when the masses whom epidemics affect shall appreciate their own great interest in preventing them.

Whenever that time shall come, probably the