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### *Original Communications.*

#### THE QUESTION OF PROSTITUTION AND ITS RELATIONS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

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The revival of the old question—what shall we do to prevent the spread of syphilis?—seems probable. Twenty years ago the advisability of adopting restrictive measures in the treatment of prostitution was discussed with some warmth. The majority that carried the Contagious Diseases Act and that applauded the licensing system is dwindling down, and the belief gains ground that it is more by indirect and moral means that the desired object is to be attained than by legislative measures.

Several papers lately written, notably that by Drs. Allison and Ashton ("The Failure of Legislation in Limiting the spread of Venereal Diseases," read before the Philadelphia County Medical Society, April 22nd, 1885), will be likely to provoke discussion of the whole question. The following article is reprinted as a contribution to such discussion, and as the writer has not since seen fit to change or modify views expressed when it was first written (November, 1880) it is given entire, without further apology.

Whatever action may be taken regarding them by the people at large, whatever influence may be subsequently exerted by public opinion, questions of hygiene are primarily the property of the medical

profession. For example, it is rarely that we have to thank the priest, with his time occupied with matters of another world, and caring little for things of earth; nor the statesman, with his attention taken up by affairs apparently more important; nor even the laity, who have ever exemplified the proverb, "what's everybody's business is nobody's business"—we have seldom been indebted to any of these for the inauguration of whatever progress has been made in a single department of sanitary science. No fact could add more to the dignity of our profession, because, in consequence, it must prove to all candid observers that, as a rule, medical men really hope and work for a permanent lessening of the diseases that infect the race.

The statement that the primary discussion of any measure to improve the health of communities and individuals has almost always been introduced by medical men might be supplemented by showing that the conclusions arrived at by them have always formed an important factor in determining action taken by the authorities to remedy the trouble under consideration. It is a fortunate circumstance, perhaps, that such is the case in the questions about to be ventilated in this article, for the same spirit of false modesty which prevents a proper discussion by the laity of many a vital question affecting the social economy has relegated the treatment of prostitution and its attendant evils to whomsoever cares to occupy himself with it. With this double warrant there can be no reason why the matter should not be freely and fully discussed in the pages of a medical journal, no reason why the medical scientist should not decide what measures will have the greatest influence in