

Respecting scarlet fever, it is well observed by Dr. J. Brown, in his article on contagion:—"Scarlatina appears suddenly in the latter end of autumn; many are simultaneously attacked, so many at the commencement of the epidemic, that it is wonderful where the foci of contagion exist to contaminate them. In its course it manifests signs of contagious power; it disappears sometimes suddenly, at others gradually, but long before subjects susceptible of the disease are wanting. No cases are seen for some months; and in the following autumn the same course is recommenced, and the same phenomena are displayed. Where lurks the poison whilst thus in abeyance, or does it exist any where?" Such phenomena, Dr. Brown suggests, displayed by some of those diseases which are contagious, tends to excite the suspicion that such causes, as atmospheric, may occasionally engender them.—(Encyclop. Pract. Med., vol. 1.)

It has been remarked by various acute observers that scarlet fever frequently arises suddenly, and rages epidemically in localities or districts where no sporadic cases have existed for a long time, even for many years, and it is equally certain that, at the present day, it does arise suddenly, and spread in the epidemic manner in various parts of the world, in localities where its previous existence was before unknown, and where its first appearance in the human subject could not in any wise be traceable to any previous exposure or communication, and since we cannot with safety adhere to the doctrine which supposes the original or primary production of the morbid germ in the system itself, it is, on the contrary, more consistent with fact and reason to regard the atmosphere as the exciting agent in generating and diffusing the morbid poison which, after its introduction into the system, produces those peculiar effects or symptoms which invariably characterise scarlet fever as a distinct disease. There is no subject, perhaps, in medical science involved in so much obscurity as the origin and nature of poisons in general, which we know to circulate through the medium of the atmosphere and produce specific effects upon the human body when introduced into the system. Our means and opportunities for investigation are but limited and uncertain, and the results of our researches, however carefully made, are liable to all those fallacies which necessarily depend upon obscure and imperfect evidence.

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