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### Original Communications.

#### CHOLERA AND THE COMMA BACILLUS

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(Read before the Médico-chirurgical Society, June, 1885.)

I draw your attention to this subject this evening more with a view of eliciting a discussion upon it than with the hope of adding anything to your knowledge concerning it.

It is well, I think, that we should now especially direct our attention to the consideration of what is already known about cholera. Few of us have ever witnessed an epidemic of this affection, but it is the expectation of many, and a study of the history of previous epidemics would indicate that we may be called upon this summer to contend with an invasion of this scourge, which, in a majority of instances, baffles the most skilful treatment and resists every device of therapeutics.

All epidemics of cholera have their origin in the region about the delta of the Ganges in India, and the course pursued by those which have reached this continent has usually been north-westward through Afghanistan and Persia, over the Caucasus, or along the Caspian to Russia, thence through northern Europe to England and across the Atlantic. The epidemic which threatens us this year is taking a shorter route: it left its seat about 1880, prevailed in Arabia in 1881 and 1882, ravaged Egypt in 1883 and France in 1884.

This year, its existence has already been reported in Calcutta, Toulon and Marseilles, and in the province of Valencia and other parts of Spain it is epidemic. Should it spread to England the probability of its being conveyed to this country will be great.

Before entering upon the subject indicated by the title of this paper I may mention a few facts concerning disease germs:

The germ theory of disease refers to the introduction into the system of the lowest type of plants which, from being found in the body in connection with many specific diseases, are supposed to be their cause. They belong to the lowest group of plants, the protophyta, class schizomycetes, order bacteriaceæ. These minute plants (bacteria) consist of a single cell, and reproduce themselves by dividing into two (fission), and these again into two, and so on as long as they are provided with nutriment; failing which they form a powdery precipitate, which is regarded as a resting state. The spores thus formed having the power of germinating again when the surroundings are favorable. Bacteria require moisture or fluids for their development. They consist chiefly of protoplasm, have no chlorophyll, and are sometimes provided with cilia (also called the flagelli) which by their lashings enable them to move about in liquid media. The cells sometimes appear in groups, held together and separated from each other by a jelly-like matrix, formed by a partial degradation of their cell walls. This is called the zooglea form.

Pasteur terms bacteria which require free oxygen, *aerobies*, and those which can live without free oxygen but have the power of wresting it,