AN INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
ON
Contagion
SUBMITTED TO THE
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
AND MEDICAL FACULTY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE,
FOR THE DEGREE OF
Doctor of Medicine.
BY
James M. Mitchell,
OF
Tennessee
1858
W. T. BERRY AND CO.
BOOKSELLERS AND STATIONERS, NASHVILLE.
Contagion

The communication or regeneration of a disease from one to another. This is a subject that should elicit the attention of each and every man that makes the healing art either his study or practice; for there is no subject connected with the profession that you meet with more frequently than this. And there is none which you are more ignorant of than this. It has been set aside by all the philosophers of the present, and past ages as an all-absorbing subject.
For the further consideration of this subject, we divide it into several classes. First those diseases which are attributable to no specific cause. Such as influenza, fevers, etc. etc. Such diseases are attributable most generally to some local cause, which can be readily seen by any one who may perchance to witness an exhibition of any one of these many diseases. This class of disease may be distinguished from the second by its frequent return or by the cause or property which generates the disease. The most common of these causes is exposier.
Class 2d

Are those diseases which have a specific source, which is to bring the body in direct contact with the virus, and so often as the body is brought in contact with this class of disease just so often will it take effect. This is the feature by which this class of disease may be distinguished from the third. For when this the second class of disease has been removed from the system, it leaves no impression by which it is excluded in case it should ever make the second application.
In this the second class we find situated Vex. and Syphilitic diseases.

The communicating properties of which we will not tax your mind with at this point. Knowing its very common existence and its simplicity.

Thinking it sufficient to say that like all other forren bodies when introduced into the system it produces inflammation. It is supposed by some that Syphilitic diseases can be produced only by the most common way which I suppose every body is familiar with (that is the act of copulation with one affected).
But he who reasons in this way is blind, for the want of reflection; for not unfrequently is this disease produced by persons dressing those receivers. I once knew a man to get this disease by lying on the bed where one afflicted with this curse had been lying. I hope that there is no one who may read this essay that will go forth and assail one’s character with ridicule by accusing him of immoral conduct. Before departing from this subject, we will state that pus being collected from any syphilitic will undoubtedly generate the disease.
Class Third contains also those diseases which may be traced to have risen from some specific cause, thus far corresponding with the second class.

In this division you will locate some diseases which is very common; viz. Measles, Hooping Cough. Small Pox, etc. etc. This division of our subject, is the one which we feel the deepest interest in; for there is in this class, points yet to be settled which may be made the instrument by the assistance of which some philosopher will immortalize his name.
For the further consideration of this topic, I propose for your consideration more minutely the well known disease Variola or Smallpox. This has been for years, and by some, at the present day, considered as one of the most active diffusible infections that ever prevailed. It is also supposed by some to be communicable through the atmosphere. But this I give but little credit. Believing it as far from being communicated through the atmosphere, as Syphilitic disease which has been settled for years by the greatest philosophers of the present or past ages, as not being
communicable through that medium. The only point that is dealt upon, by those who contend that it is conveyed by the atmosphere, is the frequent occurrences on persons who have never been near a case of this disease. This we acknowledge as being a fact. But in this acknowledgment we deny, but what the virous was brought more directly in contact with the body of its victim, than by the atmosphere and say that this cannot be so. The question very naturally presents itself here: how or by what means was the virous conveyed to the object of its affection.
Before answering this question we will ascertain how much virus is requisite to produce its effect. It has been decided by a great many experiments that the smallest amount is sufficient to generate the disease. This experiment may be very readily tried by any of you by taking a piece of finely polished steel or needle if you choose, introduce it in one of the Boek. Particles withdraw the instrument, and these remains not enough of the virus to be perceived by any of your senses, but still by trying this instrument
in contact with any of the absorbents, and it will be sufficient to generate the disease, as you see we have acknowledged, that the smallest particle of the virus is sufficient to produce the disease, but still I deny that it was, or can be, a sufficient amount conveyed by the atmosphere. And the first argument that we produce I deem sufficient to prove the absurdity of such a notion as the atmosphere being a true medium for the transportation of this disease. The reason why I do not suffer myself to credit any such probabilities.
is simply because it has been long since decided, that by exposing the virous to the atmosphere, its infecting properties are destroyed. This point has also been sustained by many experiments, and it has been proven to have no more effect through this medium than so much smoke from a common fire. The question is yet to be answered: how does this infectious property make its way through from one to another at such distance from each other? The first vehicle that we call your attention to is some one that is passing from one to
the other, the man who bears this virous about with him has it collected in such great mays in his clothes, that it cannot be decomposed before brought in contact with some predisposing system.

The means by which this disease can be diffused are numerous. I am of the opinion that not unfrequent is this virous conveyed to different persons by the well known animal (the common house fly) which is frequently in very great pest with persons who have this disease. They can bear this virous either within or
On their bill or extremity. It is a well-known fact that the fly can carry a sufficient amount to infect any predisposing system. Yes, it is able to bear more than the aforesaid lance with which we have just been generating this disease. Concluding that I have clearly proven to you, that the atmosphere is not a true medium for the transportation of this and at the same time down you how it was diffused. We proceed to its effect surprising to say that its anatomical effects are the larger portion of the
entire system, after which affection the disease is gradually eliminated from the person of its affection; but has made an indelible stamp.

Unlike a great many other classes of diseases it rarely affects the same body more than once. Though it is on record where where cases have been affected the second time. These being exceptions. The peculiarity of this class of disease is the effect that it produces, which, proves a preventive to the second attack. To account for this we say that this forren substance has become an
essential property in the system, and rarely if ever eradicated. To account for these rare cases, I think it is quite simple: For it is admitted that the system is continually suffering some change such as reformations, etc. etc. And this substance deposited in the system by the disease for the want of a regenerative property is in the course of time entirely eliminated. By the many changes that are continually going on in the system, and just so soon as there is an entire elimination of this virus, the system will receive the effect again, etc., etc.