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History of Medicine

It is sobering to realise that as recently as the year in which *On the Origin of Species* was published, learned opinion was that diseases such as typhus and cholera were spread by a ‘miasma’, and suggestions that doctors should wash their hands before examining patients were greeted with mockery by the profession. The Cambridge Library Collection reissues milestone publications in the history of Western medicine as well as studies of other medical traditions. Its coverage ranges from Galen on anatomical procedures to Florence Nightingale’s common-sense advice to nurses, and includes early research into genetics and mental health, colonial reports on tropical diseases, documents on public health and military medicine, and publications on spa culture and medicinal plants.

The Vaccine Contest

When English surgeon William Blair (1766–1822) embarked on his career, he became familiar with the devastation caused by smallpox in urban areas. The virus was lethal to more than a fifth of the people infected, and the rest were at risk of long-term complications. The first effective vaccine against the disease had been developed by Edward Jenner, who had been made aware that smallpox infection was uncommon among milkmaids who had been exposed to a milder form of pox contracted from cows. Although Jenner’s vaccine was made available soon after its public announcement in 1798, the objections by various sceptics deterred many from embracing the procedure. In this 1806 pamphlet, Blair employs the format of a dialogue between an anxious parent and an ardent vaccination opponent to convince Londoners of the benefits offered by the new vaccine. His account is complemented by a report from the Royal Jennerian Society.

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The Vaccine Contest

*Being an Exact Outline of the Arguments ...
Respecting Cow-Pox Inoculation*

WILLIAM BLAIR



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BY WILLIAM BLAIR.

*“Fierce, unfeeling Ferocity, overbearing Insolence, mortified
“Pride, false Faith, and Desperation.”*

“ AGAINST

“ REASON, RELIGION, AND TRUTH,

“ MILD HUMANITY,

OR,

VACCINE CONTEST;

THE

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THE
VACCINE CONTEST:
 OR,
 “ MILD HUMANITY,
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 “ AGAINST
 “ *“Fierce, unfeeling Ferocity, overbearing Insolence, mortified
 “ *“Pride, false Faith, and Desperation;”**
 BEING
 An *Oratio* Outline
 OF THE
 ARGUMENTS AND INTERESTING FACTS,
 ADDUCED BY THE
 PRINCIPAL COMBATANTS ON BOTH SIDES,
 RESPECTING
“COW-POX INOCULATION,”
 INCLUDING A LATE
 OFFICIAL REPORT ON THIS SUBJECT,
 BY THE
 MEDICAL COUNCIL
 OF THE
ROYAL JENNERIAN SOCIETY.
 CHIEFLY DESIGNED FOR
 THE USE OF CLERGYMEN, HEADS OF FAMILIES, GUARDIANS, OVERSEERS
 OF THE POOR, AND OTHER UNPROFESSIONAL READERS WHO MAY
 BE CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF MANKIND.
 BY WILLIAM BLAIR, M. A.
 Surgeon of the Lock Hospital and Asylum, the Bloomsbury Dispensary, and New Rupture
 Society; Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and of the Medical
 Societies of London, Paris, Brussels, Aberdeen, &c. &c. &c.
 “ When men have become so abandoned as to *pervert truth*, it is high time
 “ for the learned in the Faculty to awaken from their torpid lethargy.”
 Dr. ROWLEY.

LONDON:
 PRINTED FOR J. MURKAY, NO. 32, FLEET STREET.
 1806.

ALTHOUGH the Author has by no means been a supine or inattentive observer of the progress of vaccine inoculation, but has very faithfully endeavoured to appreciate the facts and arguments on both sides, as so important a question required, he is not one of those who make the new practice a leading branch of his profession. He believes, however, that he was *among the first* to introduce and encourage the Cow-pox, without the impediment of exacting the usual recommendatory letters, at a public Infirmary; from whence, likewise, he has cheerfully and *gratuitously* distributed, a considerable number of charges of vaccine fluid, both in town and country. The following printed form of invitation was ordered to be circulated by the Governors of the Bloomsbury Dispensary, at the request of their medical officers; in consequence of which the Author has had an opportunity of inoculating above six hundred persons, exclusive of his private patients:

“ Bloomsbury Dispensary, No. 62, Great Russell Street; May 15, 1802.
 “ We hereby give notice, That all poor persons desirous of being inoculated for the Cow-pox

PREFACE.

During the preceding year, it was too manifest that prejudices and apprehensions were assiduously stirred up, by the different objectors to vaccine practice; some of whose names and deeds will probably be long remembered by the public, with feelings of honest indignation. The influence of false rumours and distorted facts operated so strongly in the district of Bloomsbury and St. Giles, as to preclude even a single person from applying for inoculation at that Dispensary, after the 12th day of November last,

“WILLIAM BLAIR, Surgeon.”

Vaccine Inoculation.

“EDWARD JENNERS, M. D. Superintendent of the

“GEORGE PINCKARD, Attending Physician.

“J. CARMICHAEL SMYTH, Consulting Physician.

“inoculation only.

“municable by the breath or perspiration, but by

“zard, or even a personal blemish; and is not com-

“it is so mild, as to be never attended with any ha-

“pletely effectual in preventing the Small-pox; that

“thousands of instances, that the Cow-pox is com-

“now offered: as experience has shewn, in many

“neighbours, to avail themselves of the opportunity

“their children, or the safety of their friends and

“recommend to those who regard the health of

“Tuesdays, at half-past twelve o'clock. And we

“may attend the Dispensary for that purpose, on

“(without any expense or letter of recommendation),

until the present time ! But it was not before the beginning of March 1806, that the Author thought it his duty to read a certain vaunting treatise of one of these active objectors ; whose puffing hand-bills, news-paper paragraphs, and degrading *placards* upon the dead walls of London, had previously informed him of its tendency.

Truth will always bear looking in the face. It is never ashamed to be closely examined, by the most scrupulous and penetrating eye : but Truth itself may be so varnished over, and perverted by ingenious glosses, as to appear unlike herself, and even to be mistaken for Error. Such, then, seems to have been the unhappy effect of Dr. Rowley's artful publication on the Cow-pox ; than which, the author of these pages has never perused a literary work, on any subject, so completely unfair—so insidiously imposing—so calculated to deceive—so mischievous in its tendency—so full of invective—so abounding in falsehoods—so plainly inconsistent with itself—and so disgustingly repugnant to common decency.

A mere glance at this book awakened attention ; and a deliberate perusal of it, suggested the idea of turning against an implacable adversary the murderous weapons which he himself had provided for a different purpose. The Author judged it would not be lost time, though a nauseous and revolting task, to extract the *marrow* or *quintessence* of that extraordinary performance ; and, by placing THE DOCTORS OWN LANGUAGE in a new and vivid

light, to afford a spirited and glowing picture of its genuine deformities. The real character and motives of an opponent who is so entirely devoid of justice and decorum, cannot be better discovered, than by dissecting, analysing, and exposing to public view, what may be called the vitals and sinews—the internal springs—the peculiar features and tone, of his composition. And, if it should be found, that his character and motives are far from pure, except in his own eyes, it may be questioned whether his pretended TRUTHS be *unexceptionable*, or his *alleged* FACTS such as honesty demands.

In attempting this ungrateful task, (lest the Author might be supposed to act from personal pique or resentment, on account of insults received, in common with many of his medical friends,) it may here be proper to suggest, that he is *one of the few* practitioners whom Dr. Rowley has never offended; but, on the contrary, who has chosen to compliment him in print, for “his INGENUITY, CANDOUR, and LOVE OF TRUTH.” If, in performing the present duty, he should in reality appear to deserve the commendation he has unexpectedly received, from a writer whose praise is worse than blame, it will yield him an abundant recompense for the irksomeness of his labour.

The portion of materials extracted from Dr. Rowley's work, being in detached sentences and clauses, made it necessary to give the whole a *colloquial form*; by which means the Author was enabled to introduce all the striking paragraphs and phrases, while at the

W. BLAIR, *Great Russell Street,
 Bloomsbury.*

P. S. While this Pamphlet was in the press, the Author heard that Dr. Rowley had been summoned to another, and more awful, tribunal than that of *Man!* As the following pages, in defence of TRUTH, are of equal concern to the public, whether the great Champion of anti-vaccination be living or not; and, as the errors he propagated so industriously are still kept alive by others, and are unlikely to be soon eradicated; the Author could not think it his duty to refrain from publishing what he had conscientiously prepared for the good of mankind. He was never in the smallest degree prompted by personal motives, to take up his pen in this important cause of humanity; and therefore could see no reason, on the death of an individual, to relinquish the design in which he had engaged. The foregoing prefatory observations are precisely what remained in the Printer's hands, when the event alluded to was first communicated to the Author, on the 18th March 1806.

same time he has preserved a general consistency and uniformity of style. Perhaps, likewise, the singularity and boldness of sentiment which are thus infused, will excite the greater interest, and produce more feeling in the unprofessional reader than could otherwise have been looked for, on a medical subject.