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LIFE OF EDWARD JENNER

CHAPTER I

Edward Jenner's family. School. Pupil of John Hunter. Refuses post of naturalist on Captain Cook's second voyage. Declines partnership with John Hunter. Returns as country doctor to Berkeley. William Cobbett's description of Vale of Gloucester. Berkeley Castle.

EDWARD JENNER was born on May 17, 1749, at Berkeley, in Gloucestershire—an ideal spot for one destined to be a devoted lover of the English countryside.

The little old town, standing on a gentle eminence, with its feudal castle, overlooked the rich pasture lands of the Vale of Berkeley and the river Severn, where, after long wandering, its waters widen as they near the sea.

Edward was the third son of the Rev. Stephen Jenner, vicar of Berkeley. His mother was a daughter of the Rev. Henry Head, sometime prebendary of Bristol. He was scarcely five when he lost his father; but the boy was brought up with 'affectionate care and judicious guidance' by his eldest brother, the Rev. Stephen Jenner, who now succeeded his father at Berkeley.

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Another brother, the Rev. Henry Jenner, became rector of Rockhampton and vicar of Little Bedwin in Wiltshire. Two sons of this brother (the Rev. George C. Jenner and Henry Jenner) qualified as medical practitioners, and assisted their uncle Edward in his natural history studies and medical practice.

When eight years old Edward was sent to the Grammar School at Wotton-under-Edge, and, later, to a school under the Rev. Dr. Washbourn at Cirencester.

The lad's taste for natural history began to show itself early. Before he was nine he had made a collection of dormice nests, and, while at Cirencester, a much-prized collection of fossils from the oolite. Later on, while still a schoolboy, he studied pharmacy and surgery under Ludlow, a well-known surgeon at Sodbury, near Bristol. Then for two years he was one of John Hunter's pupils in London.

Apprenticeship to a surgeon was at that time the beginning of a medical student's training—an important part of his education. Always in touch with his master, an eager pupil would continually absorb useful knowledge not to be found in books, nor to be learnt in a hospital ward.

Jenner was at that time twenty years of age; Hunter forty-one, surgeon to St. George's Hospital, and owner of a menagerie at Brompton, where he

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studied the habits and life-history of animals. ' Penetrating and original thinker,' indefatigable in his search for scientific truth, Hunter was Jenner's hero. Tutor and pupil became friends for life.

In 1771, Captain Cook returned from his successful voyage to the ' Great Southern Continent.' Sir Joseph Banks—afterwards the well-known President of the Royal Society—had furnished Cook's ship. He had provided an artist and a botanist for the expedition, and had brought back a cargo of natural history treasures, including a mass of new plants dried and pressed. They had been collected near the sea, at a spot afterwards named Botany Bay.

Jenner was asked to prepare and arrange all Banks's specimens. This he did with such skill and care that he was offered the appointment of naturalist to Cook's next expedition—to sail in 1772. At the same time Hunter suggested a partnership, as he wished to increase the number of his lectures on comparative anatomy and surgery.

But Jenner had few of the common ambitions of men. These, and other offers, which other men would have proudly accepted, were declined. Jenner preferred to return to the sweet air of his native village [1] to live among country people and

[1] Jenner in his letters also talks of the little town of Berkeley as a ' village.'

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country creatures, ride along the well-known lanes, and accept the drudgery of a country doctor's life. Like Virgil,[1] he loved rivers and woods more than glory. What for him was the good of ambitious struggling all for the bubble reputation?

'. . . What is its reward? At best a name.
Praise—when the ear has grown too dull to hear.
Gold—where the senses it should please are dead.
Wreaths—where the hair they cover has grown grey.
Fame—when the heart it should have thrilled is numb.'[2]

The unexpected—paradoxical—result of this refusal of all likely to lead to fame was that Jenner became famous in all civilised (and in many uncivilised) countries throughout the world.

As a rule, no doubt, Wendell Holmes is right in saying that people gain by being transplanted into new surroundings. Like trees, they grow more freely on fresh soil. But for one of Jenner's temperament his was a wise decision, and, as it happened, a fortunate one for the world. Jenner loved the Vale of Berkeley; there he found friendliness and understanding between all classes; and an escape from the smoky air of London, which, he said, choked him.

Above all, it saved him from learning that indifference to neighbours—that necessary but un-

[1] '*Flumina amem silvasque inglorius.*' Virgil, *Georg.* ii. line 486.
[2] N. P. Willis.

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attractive hardness, which comes to all who have to struggle every day in a crowd—often against women and children.

And it was a beautiful bit of old England to which Jenner returned—the sister Vales of Berkeley and Gloucester. Even half a century later, when agricultural depression and the decay of the countryside had begun, William Cobbett described that corner of England with enthusiasm.

Cobbett was then taking his *Rural Rides*, and pouring out indignation and lamentation at the over-taxation of the land which followed the Napoleonic wars—the ruin of the country yeomen—the poverty of the labourers, and the wealth of war-profiteers, with their harsh manners and ignorance of country ways.

One of Cobbett's journeys was to Gloucester. He writes of the misery of country-folk in and around Marlborough, of the new park at Savernake, where '50 to 100 farms of former days' had been 'swallowed up.'[1] He rides by 'Cititer' (Cirencester) through desolate country. 'Anything quite so cheerless' he does 'not recollect to have seen.'[2]

'This miserable country,' he writes, 'continued to the distance of ten miles, when all of a sudden I looked down from the top of a high hill into the *Vale of Gloucester*! Never there was, surely, such a contrast in this world!

[1] *Rural Rides*, Nov. 6, 1821. [2] *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1821.

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The hill is called *Burlip Hill*; it is much about a mile down it . . . From this hill you see the Morvan Hills in Wales . . . All here is fine; fine farms; fine pastures; all inclosed fields; all divided by hedges. Gloucester is a fine, clean, beautiful place; and, which is of a vast deal more importance, the labourers' dwellings, as I came along, looked good. The labourers themselves pretty well as to health and cleanliness. The girls at work in the fields (always my standard) are not in rags, with bits of shoes tied on their feet, and rags tied round their ankles, as they had in Wiltshire.'

No wonder Jenner loved that country! Here his kindness, his dexterity as a surgeon, and his modesty with all his accomplishments, seem to have made him a most popular practitioner. He is described as having the 'generosity of a good man, the simplicity of a great one.'

For a time he lived in the Vicarage with the brother to whom he owed his early training. He then took a small house—Chantry Cottage—near the church—laid out the garden with care—planted shrubs and trees—and, later on, kept 'tame pheasants, sheldrakes, and other birds' in it, as well as an eagle, sent from Newfoundland.

Near by was the great castle—home of the Lords of Berkeley continuously from Norman times. Its owners had taken their share in all the rough life of the Middle Ages, in the old French campaigns, and in the chronic warfare in their own country.

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A Lord Berkeley, together with other barons, had fought against the King at Evesham.

When King Edward II, handsome and athletic, but foolish, frivolous and extravagant, and with no set purpose in life, had plunged England into civil war, the third Lord Berkeley was imprisoned in the spacious Roman castle at Pevensey. Queen Isabella, with her son Edward and the baron Mortimer, then raised the country against the King. Lord Berkeley was released.

On returning to his castle Lord Berkeley replenished his manors, and lived in state. Three hundred persons, according to the Berkeley archives,[1] dined every day at the castle. No manor had fewer than 300 sheep; some had as many as 1500; and 15,380 horses were employed. Every farm had its pigeon-house, and 1300 young pigeons were sent every year to the castle. There were 'falcons' (female peregrines), 'tiercels' (male peregrines) and 'other hawks' (goshawks and merlins) which required five or six hens as food every day.

Fox-hunting—at night, with nets and dogs—was Lord Berkeley's favourite and necessary sport, for foxes were numerous and destructive.

Edward II, who had been made a prisoner, was sent to Berkeley Castle, and there, in the absence of the owner, brutally murdered.

[1] John Smyth's *Berkeley MSS.*, 1567–1640.

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When not fighting, the Lords of Berkeley seem to have been devoted to the cultivation of their pleasant lands. They had a ship, and they exported wool and corn. The fifth Lord Berkeley (so the archives state) was 'a perfect Cotswold sheppard, living a kind of grazier's life, having his flocks of sheep somering in one place, and wintering in another.'

Henry, Lord Berkeley, with his mother and a hundred and fifty servants, attended the Court of Henry VIII—lived in Kentish Town—hunted with hawk and hound in Gray's Inn Fields, Islington, and 'Heygate': then returned to Berkeley—entertained in the castle—sitting 'when neighbours feasted in his hall,' at the bottom of the table, or opposite the salt, between his guests of 'higher or meaner degree.'

Later on, during his absence, Queen Elizabeth visited the castle, and took part in a great slaughter of his herd of red deer. In one day alone twenty-six were killed, others wounded, and the destruction continued. It could not have been a pleasant sight; for the deer must have been driven together into a net, to provide the Queen and her courtiers with an easy target for their crossbows.

Lord Berkeley was distressed, and threatened to disforest his park. On hearing this—so the books say—the Queen sent him an angry message. But

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the Berkeley archives tell a different story. A friend at Court warned him to be careful of his words, as 'the Earl (Leicester) had purposely caused that slaughter of his deere,' and 'might have a further plot against his head, and that castle, whereto he had taken no small likinge.'

But the covetous Leicester did not get his way. The Castle remained with the Berkeleys, who, in the eighteenth century, gave valuable help to Jenner in his vaccination campaign.

Jenner must have enjoyed the beauty of the grand building. In his *Note Book*, lately published by the Royal College of Physicians, he mentions the house-martins' nests on its walls—recalling Shakespeare's description of the martins' nests on Macbeth's castle as Duncan enters:

> 'This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here : no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle :
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
> The air is delicate.'

When castles, and churches, and houses of stone appeared in England, the martins left the rocks and chalk cliffs on which they had built their nests, and became *house*-martins—friends of man's household.

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Now, man stretches fine wires on his buildings, perplexing house-martins as black threads stretched over beds of flowering crocus perplex house-sparrows. The house-sparrows, too,—parasites of man and enemies of martins—which have driven house-martins from London,[1] increase in number ; so the house-martins are everywhere giving up their right to their newly acquired name, and are leaving man to find other, less pleasant, means of keeping down his flies and mosquitoes.

[1] A well-known ornithologist, the late Mr. Howard Saunders, told the writer that he remembered seeing martins' nests on some houses in Bayswater, but that the birds were driven away by London sparrows.

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