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978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines, and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

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The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.

Written by his friend, the physician John Baron (1786–1851), this laudatory biography of the 'father of immunology' did much to enhance the reputation of Edward Jenner (1749–1823) upon its publication in two volumes between 1827 and 1838. The work covers Jenner's personal and professional life both before and after his development of the vaccine for smallpox, as well as touching on the vaccine's reception and use around the world. Thoroughly explaining the history and facts of vaccination, Baron established himself as an authority on the subject. Although criticised by some for its unquestioning praise of Jenner's genius, the work is valuable for its use of primary sources, drawing heavily on correspondence and personal notes, excerpts of which appear throughout the text. Volume 1, published in 1827, focuses on Jenner's early life and the history and science of vaccination.

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John Baron

Frontmatter

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.

*With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence*

VOLUME 1

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John Baron

Frontmatter

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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108071130

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2014

This edition first published 1827
This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-07113-0 Paperback

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Baron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)



E D W A R D J E N N E R, M. D .

L. L. D. F. R. S. & c. & c.

Drawn from the Bust by H. CORBOULD, and on Stone by R. J. IANE.

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE
L I F E
OF
EDWARD JENNER, M.D.
L L. D., F. R. S.,
PHYSICIAN EXTRAORDINARY TO THE KING, &c. &c.
WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS OF HIS DOCTRINES,
AND
SELECTIONS FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE.
BY
JOHN BARON, M.D., F.R.S.

LONDON :
HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1827.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY, DORSET-STREET.

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TO THE

KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

SIRE,

THE incalculable advantages that the world in general was likely to derive from the indefatigable perseverance of the author of Vaccination at a very early period attracted your MAJESTY'S notice: and the beneficent designs of Jenner called forth, on more occasions than one, the unequivocal and generous expression of your Royal favour.

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978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

DEDICATION.

The discovery which your MAJESTY condescended so to signalize must ever be memorable in the annals of your MAJESTY'S dominions, and of mankind.

A work devoted to the elucidation of that discovery, and to the personal history of its author, will, I trust, prove not unacceptable to your MAJESTY. I therefore beg leave humbly to lay it at your MAJESTY'S feet.

I have the honour to be,

Sire,

YOUR MAJESTY'S

Most humble servant,

And dutiful subject,

JOHN BARON.

Gloucester, January 6, 1827.

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978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

History of his early Life p. 1.

CHAPTER II.

1773—1783, including Letters from John Hunter p. 27.

CHAPTER III.

Life from 1783 to the publication of the “Inquiry” p. 62.

CHAPTER IV.

Early History of Vaccination p. 121.

CHAPTER V.

Opinions of Dr. Jenner respecting the Variola, and Variolæ
Vaccinæ.—Illustrations drawn from their Literary and Medi-
cal History p. 161.

CHAPTER VI.

Sketch of the History of Variola, and of Variolous Inocula-
tion p. 217.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER VII.

Dr. Jenner's Opinion respecting the Origin of Small-pox and
Cow-pox—Illustrations of that Opinion — Proofs of its ac-
curacy p. 236.

CHAPTER VIII.

Difference between Variola and Variolæ Vaccinæ—Observations
on Varioloid Diseases p. 256.

CHAPTER IX.

Life after Publication of the "Inquiry" to July 1800.—Disasters
at the Small-pox Hospital, and at Petworth, &c. p. 289.

CHAPTER X.

Introduction of Vaccination into America, France, Spain, Me-
diterranean, Constantinople, Bagdad, Bombay, &c. &c. &c.
p. 385.

CHAPTER XI.

Publication of the Account of the Origin of Vaccine Inocula-
tion—Introduction of Vaccination into Denmark, Sweden,
Russia, &c. &c. &c.—Discovery of the Variolæ Vaccinæ in
Lombardy, &c. p. 436.

CHAPTER XII.

Presentation of Plate by his Friends in Gloucestershire.— First
Parliamentary Grant p. 479.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

vii

CHAPTER XIII.

Adverse claims, French and Hindoo p. 543.

CHAPTER XIV.

Formation of the Royal Jennerian Society—Departure of the
Expedition under Don Francisco Xavier Balmis from Spain
p. 565.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

THIS work has been composed from materials of the most authentic description, the whole of the notes and correspondence of Dr. Jenner having been put into my hands by his executors. My close and unreserved intercourse with him, and my intimate knowledge of his sentiments and habits of thinking on all subjects during the last fifteen years of his life, probably induced them to believe that I was not an unfit person to draw from such sources an accurate delineation of his character and opinions.

Many reasons, with which I need not trouble the public, would have induced me to shrink from the labours of such a work ; and nothing certainly could have reconciled me to the attempt had I not been influenced by the most sincere veneration for the name of Jenner, and by the conviction that the confidence with which he honoured me *did* afford me facilities for acquiring an insight into his feelings

b

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978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines, and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

INTRODUCTION.

and motives, by which I have been enabled to speak without hesitation or doubt on all those points that most concerned either his conduct as a man, or the nature of his doctrines.

Notwithstanding these encouragements, I cannot but own that I have entered upon this undertaking with a degree of anxiety in which I can scarcely expect any to sympathize. I trust that I am not deceiving myself when I say that nothing of a personal nature prompts this avowal. It is of moment that a true and faithful portrait should be drawn of so distinguished an individual; that those, who have admired and extolled him as a great benefactor of our race, may know that on many other grounds he was worthy of their highest regard and warmest affection. It cannot be expected that there should be an uniformity of sentiment on momentous questions of a professional or scientific nature, but I shall ever have cause to lament if, through any defects of mine, the kindness, the rectitude, the consistency, and the unextinguishable ardour and devotedness of Jenner in a glorious cause do not shine conspicuous in every act of his long and laborious life.

On a knowledge of these things my pretensions as his biographer chiefly rest. If I have failed in imparting that knowledge I shall have a cause

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and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xi

for regret which no deficiency in any other part of my design could occasion. The world at large has felt and acknowledged the blessings of his great discovery ; but few are aware how numerous were his claims to admiration. For these reasons I have been anxious in the early part of this work to disjoin, as much as possible, his private character, and his acquirements as a naturalist, from that important subject which has so extensively occupied the public mind and caused his other numerous titles to consideration to be overlooked.

It must, at the same time, be remembered that Doctor Jenner was nearly fifty years of age before he published his first work on the Variolæ Vaccinæ. The whole of the early part of his life having been spent in comparative seclusion, it cannot be expected that it should afford those materials which best suit the purposes of the biographer. His epistolary intercourse with Mr. Hunter has enabled me to fill up a space in his life that could not otherwise have been supplied. Unfortunately, all Jenner's replies to Mr. Hunter have been destroyed ; and had it not been for his printed papers, we should have been left in total ignorance of the result of the inquiries to which his letters to Jenner refer. Notwithstanding this circum-

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

stance, I have not refrained from publishing many of those letters. Mr. Hunter was too remarkable a character in many respects, and his name is too intimately associated with the progress of natural history and physiology in this country, to permit me to doubt for a moment, that whatever fell from him in his correspondence with such a man as Jenner, will be favourably received by the public.

After thus endeavouring to trace Jenner's history in early life, I have brought together various incidents to illustrate the progress of his mind in effecting the discovery of Vaccination. This detail will, I trust, show alike the force and originality of his genius and the benevolence of his purpose. From the time of his first successful vaccination in 1796 to the last hour of his existence he laboured incessantly to disseminate the practice. In every instance where it was had recourse to; in whatever clime, or under whatsoever circumstances it was performed, his name and reputation were either directly or indirectly associated with it. This peculiarity has so much identified vaccination with Jenner that it is impossible to think of him or to speak of him, as he deserved, except in conjunction with its magnificent and animating course. In this respect he stands pre-eminent; and it cannot but be interesting to

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xii

those, who have reflected upon what has been brought about by his means, to be assured that his private demeanour well accorded with his public reputation ; that he lived with the generosity of a good man, and the simplicity which befits a great one.

While thus delineating his personal qualities I have endeavoured to elucidate his doctrines relating to that subject in which all must feel so deep an interest. My duty on this point has led to a discussion that some may think foreign to the object of a biographical work. I am induced to hope, however, when all things are duly considered, that I shall stand excused not only for bestowing pains in placing Dr. Jenner's opinions in a proper light, but for collecting from different sources such scattered rays of knowledge as may tend to explain and confirm them. He drew his conclusions from the pathological facts which he had an opportunity of observing. These conclusions, it will be found, are verified in a remarkable manner by observations made in different ages, and in different countries.

Had I, therefore, been guided merely by what was due to him, I could not but attempt to explain and vindicate his views. In so doing, I trust it will be found that I am assisting that great cause in which his life was spent ; that I am bring-

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ing past experience and the unprejudiced testimony of impartial witnesses to confirm the decisions which his own investigations led him to; and that therefore, in rendering justice to him, I am giving greater force to his doctrines, and increased confidence in the practice founded on them.

Influenced by these considerations I have, after detailing the early history of vaccination, brought together much that seemed to bear upon the literary and medical history of cow-pox, as well as of small-pox. The nature of the former cannot be understood without well examining the properties of the latter. They agree in some very essential particulars; but the points in which they differ, so far as the welfare of the community is concerned, it is of more importance to insist upon. At present it may be sufficient to remark that the coincidences, as well as the peculiarities, of each affection are best elucidated by combining the examination of their pathological character with their literary history. Under this last head, I would hope that some information has been collected not uninteresting in itself, but possessing a higher value from its connection with the grand results of Dr. Jenner's investigation.

Great care has been bestowed in tracing this

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and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xv

history; and though many may be surprised at the conclusions to which it leads, I nevertheless trust it will be found that nothing has been lightly advanced. My own mind was quite unprejudiced, and the views which I am inclined to adopt have arisen entirely from a close examination of the evidence, and not from any preconceived opinions. They were first suggested on examining the description of Philo Judæus, as referred to in Dr. Willan's posthumous work on the antiquity of small-pox; and from meditating on the nature and properties of cow-pox. My own attention having been thus excited, the natural and medical history of the eruptive diseases of man, and of the inferior animals, necessarily became an object of inquiry. The number of instances in which it appears that a disease of this class affects different orders of animals, and is communicable to the human species, has given a degree of interest to this inquiry which I could scarcely have anticipated. That interest is infinitely enhanced when we consider how much the safety and happiness of mankind are connected with the great discovery which this discussion is meant to elucidate.

The whole subject is a curious and important one; and it may with truth be affirmed that in

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

INTRODUCTION.

no former instance did historical evidence and remarkable pathological phenomena so singularly and beneficially throw light on each other. In this part of my subject, more especially, I have to acknowledge the deepest sense of obligation to two kind friends, Richard Gamble, M.D. Oxon. and the Reverend John Webb, A.M. Oxon. who have aided me by their learning and research.

Throughout this discussion my first object has been to endeavour to throw some light on the nature of cow-pox itself. My next has been to prove the justness and accuracy of Dr. Jenner's main doctrines. As the benefits which might have resulted from his discovery have, manifestly, been circumscribed by erroneous views on both these points, I was solicitous to collect such a body of evidence as might tend to remove these errors. In executing this design I have been compelled to break in upon the chronological order of events, by deducing from the whole experience of vaccination such an accumulation of facts as ought to convince the most sceptical that nothing but the proper extension of the practice is necessary to accomplish all that its benevolent author promised.

Intimately as Jenner's name and character were connected, and always must be, with every instance

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xvii

of vaccination, I wish it to be distinctly understood that I am not to be considered as the *historian of that practice*. The events which arose from its first promulgation were unspeakably interesting to him. These, therefore, have been recorded with great care and fidelity. I have felt this to be a delicate part of my duty, because it required me to bring forward many incidents which I would gladly have allowed to fall into oblivion. In placing his conduct in its true light I have studied to be equally just to that of others, as no statement has been delivered that is not corroborated by original and authentic documents.

I have abstained entirely from taking any part in the violent and discreditable controversy which arose out of the vaccine discovery. Although Dr. Jenner was the object of many harsh and unfounded aspersions, he never thought it necessary to weaken that strong position, which truth and knowledge had enabled him to take, by replying to them. The utmost vigilance of those who ignorantly assailed either his conduct or his doctrines, has left no stain upon his name. All, therefore, that is required of me is plainly and distinctly to describe his actions; and to leave them to speak both for his genius and his virtues.

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

INTRODUCTION.

In treating of the progress of vaccination I have confined myself to such incidents, as were either immediately directed by Dr. Jenner himself, or were of a striking nature from their magnitude, or the station of those engaged in them. Had not my design been limited in this way, it would have been a sincere gratification to me to have made mention of many individuals who distinguished themselves by zealously promoting the practice. Their co-operation was gratefully felt by Dr. Jenner; and whenever the history of vaccination shall be fully recounted, their services will not be overlooked.

The private history of Jenner and of his labours could only be fully derived through those channels of information which have been open to me. I have selected such facts as are for the most part new, I believe, to the public. In order to authenticate the narrative, and to impart to it that spirit which original documents alone can give, I have embodied such as appeared to me most interesting, in the text. I have preferred this method either to that of printing them as an appendix, or in the form of notes. One of the chief reasons for this decision arose from the nature of the transactions that I was called on to record. Many of them regarded the conduct of

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xix

individuals; and I saw no method of escaping charges of partiality or unfairness except by bringing forward proofs that cannot be denied, and which will show that I have dealt honestly by all. In a question which has in a peculiar degree excited strong feelings, both with the public and in the profession, I can scarcely hope to have written, on all occasions, so as not to have called up recollections of an unpleasant kind in the minds of some. However this may be, I trust it will be apparent that truth and moderation have guided me throughout the whole work.

Many of Dr. Jenner's own letters are published from copies transcribed by himself into his notebooks. He appears sometimes to have omitted the introductory and concluding sentences; and very frequently the precise dates. These circumstances will account for an abrupt termination of some; and likewise for any deviation that may be noticed between the manner of expression in the copy and the original.

For almost all his early letters I am indebted to his friend the late Edward Gardner, of Frampton-upon-Severn, who bequeathed them to me on his death-bed. These, together with those addressed to

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

INTRODUCTION.

myself, form a series which touches on almost every subject of interest, whether of a public or domestic nature, during the last forty years of his life.

I have also had letters and extracts of letters transmitted to me by Colonel Berkeley, Thomas Paytherus, Esq., Henry Hicks, Esq., James Carrick Moore, Esq., Charles Murray, Esq., and Henry Jones Shrapnell, Esq., to all of whom I beg to return my thanks.

Animated as I have been by the most ardent and devoted attachment to the memory of Jenner, it cannot be expected that I should either repress my feelings, or employ cold and measured language to mark my sense of the value of his labours, and the importance of their results. I can scarcely expect that my reader will go along with me on all such occasions, but I *do* indulge the hope that he will see reason to forgive that warmth in which he may not be able to participate. Jenner's nature was mild, unobtrusive, unambitious; and many who have done justice to his discovery have still to learn how beautifully the singleness of his heart and his genuine modesty graced and adorned that splendid reputation which the wonderful consequences of his labours had acquired for him. In every private affair, in every public transaction one principle guided

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and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1John Baron
Frontmatter[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xxi

him. The purity of his motives and the disinterestedness of his actions have, by no means, yet been duly acknowledged: Had those who opposed him and Vaccination known how little of selfishness, of vanity, or of pride entered into his character, they would, I am persuaded, deeply lament the wounds which they inflicted; and in the place of bitterness and reproach would have found cause for unmixed esteem and approbation.

Before I conclude these prefatory remarks I must offer some explanation of the delay that has taken place in the publication of this work. Obstacles were at the very outset thrown in my way, which I need not here specify. The papers too were extremely voluminous, and in the greatest disorder. To bring them into a state capable of affording me any assistance in constructing the narrative with fidelity, required a degree of labour much greater than I could have anticipated. These difficulties not a little increased the really arduous duty that I had to perform. So seriously did I at one time feel this that I anxiously wished and, indeed, had determined, to relinquish my task altogether: in addition therefore to the exertion demanded by the subject itself I may be permitted to state that my professional avocations necessarily precluded me from

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978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines, and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

giving that unbroken and undivided attention indispensable to the rapid progress of a work of this nature.

The publication of the first part, without waiting for the completion of the second, seemed under such circumstances to be expedient, both to the executors of Dr. Jenner and to myself. Other reasons concurred to give strength to this decision. The recent prevalence of small-pox in different parts of Europe, and the corresponding diminution of confidence in the virtues of the *Variolæ Vaccinæ*, rendered it an object of no inconsiderable importance to endeavour to restore and increase that confidence, by showing that Dr. Jenner clearly foresaw the deviations which have been observed; that his doctrines, if properly understood, satisfactorily account for them; and that nothing, in fact, has occurred which does not strengthen and confirm his original opinions both with regard to the *Variola* and the *Variolæ Vaccinæ*. I would hope that something may have been done in these respects, that shall tend to promote the universal adoption of a practice capable of effecting so much good.

Nothing, I am persuaded, can ever accomplish this object except a real knowledge of the nature of that affection which might be made to take

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John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xxiii

place of small-pox. A very sincere wish to accelerate this event has led me to the discussions contained in the present volume, the publication of which, at this time, I would humbly hope may not be without its use.

As there is great reason to fear that Dr. Jenner's views are not sufficiently understood, so in like manner it is to be apprehended that his disinterested efforts, and the formidable difficulties which he overcame, are still very imperfectly appreciated. Due pains have been bestowed to represent both in their true colours. The picture cannot be finished until the subsequent events of his life are recorded: but as the principles which guided him in his early days retained their influence to the last, and as they are set forth in what is already written, the reader will be enabled to form a just estimate of his moral, as well as of his intellectual character.

I own that I have been chiefly solicitous that the true and genuine lineaments of his mind should stand forth in all their fair and just proportions. Had he merely coveted a wide-spread reputation, the voice of the world proclaiming a great epoch in the physical history of man, produced through his instrumentality, might have sa-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07113-0 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines, and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 1

John Baron

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv

INTRODUCTION.

tified an ambition much more greedy of fame. Gratifying as such an acknowledgment must have been, Jenner's heart was too pure not to seek its enjoyment from a constant devotion to higher and better things than those which centre in mere human authority or approbation. Such, in truth, he was; as such it is my earnest desire that he should be remembered. "Ut vultus hominum, ita simulacra vultûs imbecilla ac mortalia sunt; FORMA MENTIS ÆTERNA."