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978-1-108-07114-7 - The Life of Edward Jenner M.D.: With Illustrations of his Doctrines,
and Selections from his Correspondence: Volume 2

John Baron

Excerpt

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L I F E
OF
D R. J E N N E R.

CHAPTER I.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY GRANT—
JENNER RESIDENT IN LONDON—HIS ANTICIPATIONS
DISAPPOINTED—PROGRESS OF VACCINATION ABROAD,
AND OF OPPOSITION AT HOME—THE NAPOLEON MEDAL,
AND OTHER HONOURS—HIS ALLEGED DISTRUST OF
VACCINATION IN THE CASE OF HIS OWN SON.

THE discussion in parliament, and the very inadequate grant which was the result of it, by no means produced the effects that Jenner's friends anticipated. It stirred up greater hostility and envy, and materially added to his own responsibility, without giving him the strength and independence which might better have enabled him to cope with his antagonists. He was left with the

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whole weight of a most momentous undertaking upon his own shoulders. Those who were jealous of his fame waxed more bold ; his friends became lukewarm ; his enemies more united and clamorous ; the demands upon his time and attention were increased ; his private resources were diminished ; and he could not devote himself to his practice as a physician. Crippled and distressed though he was by the very means which some fondly imagined would have proved most beneficial to him, he, nevertheless, took his station and kept it firmly. He fixed his mind upon the great object which he was called upon to fulfil, and resolved at all hazards to persevere, and never to desert the cause while he had power to labour in it. In this attitude we shall ever find him. Had he been more selfish, more ambitious, more desirous of pursuing objects of personal emolument or aggrandizement, he certainly had the fairest opportunities of doing so ; and no one could justly say that any distinction, which such a man might have acquired, was unmerited.

The people of England seemed to think that the fee-simple both of his body and mind had been purchased by the TEN THOUSAND POUNDS ; and many an unjust and ungenerous intimation of this feeling was conveyed to him. To a mind like his, this was no small annoyance. He was called upon for explanations, for opinions, by every person who thought a direct communication with the author

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of Vaccination an honour worth seeking ; when they might have obtained all the information they wanted from his published writings.

It is likewise to be remembered that a more formidable and rancorous resistance than had yet appeared, began to show itself ; and had he not been constantly cheered and animated by the conviction that the knowledge of his discovery was rapidly extending itself over the earth, and that the unceasing opposition of his enemies could not interfere with the real and substantial benefits which it was actually conferring, he would have had many reasons to regret the conspicuous elevation on which it had placed him.

Influenced by the remarks of some of his parliamentary advocates, he was induced to fix himself in Hertford-street, May Fair. The result of this plan by no means corresponded with their anticipations. “Elated and allured,” he observes, “by the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I took a house in London for ten years, at a high rent, and furnished it ; but my first year’s practice convinced me of my own temerity and imprudence, and the falsity of the minister’s prediction. My fees fell off both in number and value ; for, extraordinary to tell, some of those families in which I had been before employed, now sent to their own domestic surgeons or apothecaries to inoculate their children, alleging that they could not think of troubling Dr. Jenner about a

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thing executed so easily as vaccine inoculation. Others, who gave me such fees as I thought myself entitled to at the first inoculation, reduced them at the second, and sank them still lower at the third." The truth is, that Jenner, in publishing his discovery as he did, effectually prevented the fulfilment of Mr. Addington's predictions; and it was scarcely befitting the representatives of a great nation to speculate on a contingency of this nature, in calculating the reward due to such a benefactor. He himself remarks to one of his correspondents, "I have now completely made up my mind respecting London. I have done with it, and have again commenced village-doctor. I found my purse not equal to the sinking of a thousand pounds annually (which has actually been the case for several successive years,) nor the gratitude of the public deserving such a sacrifice. How hard, after what I have done, the toils I have gone through, and the anxieties I have endured in obtaining for the world a greater gift than man ever bestowed on them before (excuse this burst of egotism), to be thrown by with a bare remuneration of my expenses!" *

* That some estimate may be formed of the nature of the treatment which he received, I subjoin the following extracts from letters written by him to an intimate friend.

June 3, 1804. "The Treasury still withholds the payment of what was voted me two years ago; and now there

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Independently of these causes of distress, his mind was much agitated by anxiety respecting the health of Mrs. Jenner. She had been seized with spitting of blood, and this occurrence was the source of painful solicitude to him during the remainder of her life. It was deemed by his friends in London very desirable that he should be in town during the course of this spring (1804), to attend the anniversary of the Royal Jennerian Society, celebrated on his birth-day—the 17th of May. In declining a pressing invitation on this subject, he observes, “ though a post-chaise or a mail-coach might bring up my body, my mind would be left behind. One cause of my absence, among many others, is the sad state of Mrs. Jenner’s health. I cannot leave her even for a day with any comfort to my feelings. My friends, who honour the glorious cause of vaccination by assembling on the 17th, will, I trust, admit my apology. It is my intention to collect a few

are new officers, the time may be very long before a guinea reaches me from that quarter.”

Nov. 2, 1804. “ The London smoke, I have observed, is too apt to cloud our best faculties. I don’t intend to risk the injury of mine in this way; except it may be occasionally, merely for the transaction of business. That the public has not the smallest right to expect it of me, no one will deny.— I have received no reward for showing them how to remove one of the greatest obstacles to human happiness; but, on the contrary, am loaded with a tax of more than £400 a year!”

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staunch vaccinists on that day at my cottage. I shall give them some roast beef, not forgetting a horn or two of good October. We shall close the day with bumpers of milk-punch to the health of the friends of humanity at the Crown and Anchor ; and if it were not for the indisposition of my poor wife, we should roar like bulls."

The facts above recorded relative to remuneration, induced many of Dr. Jenner's friends to turn their eyes to other portions of the globe, which were benefiting largely by the vaccine discovery ; with the hope that they would testify their gratitude by some substantial token. Our rich possessions in the East were first looked to on this occasion. The ever-active and benevolent Dr. Lettsom started the idea, and wrote to Jenner on the subject. His reply drew forth the following expression from another friend, the late Benjamin Travers, esq.

London, Feb. 18th, 1804.

MY DEAR DOCTOR,

I have just read your interesting letter of the 8th inst. to Dr. Lettsom. It does you the greatest honour ; and I shall make the best use of it that lies in my power. I wish I had had the happiness of your acquaintance a few years ago : you should not have acted in the manner you have : your liberality and disinterestedness every one must admire and extol ; but you are sadly deficient in worldly wisdom.

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I shall do the little which lies in my power to impress the minds of those whose influence may prove serviceable, was it merely to save the character of the *nation* from being blasted with ingratitude to a man to whom the WORLD has been so greatly indebted.

I am, my dear Doctor,
with the most unfeigned esteem and regard,
yours truly,
BENJAMIN TRAVERS.

In another letter, the same judicious correspondent observes, “If you had undertaken the extinction of the small-pox yourself, with coadjutors of your own appointment, I am confident you might have put £100,000 in your pocket; and the glory be as great, and the benefit to the community the same.”

This excellent individual was not more mindful of Jenner’s private affairs than he was of vaccination itself. As a member of the Jennerian Society, he was endeavouring to effect an object, which (one would have imagined) might have been accomplished without difficulty; I mean the abandonment of variolous inoculation at the Small Pox Hospital. But, strange to say, this act of justice and of mercy was delayed till nearly twenty years after the period of which I now write.

The Directors of the Vaccine Board, soon after this period, felt themselves called upon, in consequence of the peculiar situation of Dr. Jenner, to deviate somewhat from the ostensible purposes of

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their appointment, and to take some charge of his private concerns, as well as of the subject of vaccination. Sufficient evidence has been already given that the “*amor sceleratus habendi*” did not influence his actions; but, free as he himself was from all taint of this kind, his friends could not bear the reflection that his disinterestedness should actually lead to his personal loss at the very time that he was the instrument of conveying unheard-of benefits to mankind. A committee was appointed, in consequence of a reference from the Board of Directors, to enquire whether Dr. Jenner was not a sufferer in his income and pecuniary circumstances, “in consequence of the time which he had devoted to his valuable discovery of vaccine inoculation, and of the various expenses incident thereto, notwithstanding the parliamentary grant of £10,000,” This investigation could not but be interesting to Dr. Jenner himself, and will of course justify me in dwelling upon it for a short time. The detail which I am about to subjoin, certainly does not afford any great encouragement to scientific men to divulge the result of their labours; but we have now this one great consolation, that in the exact proportion of the neglect which Jenner experienced from his contemporaries, did the purity, and firmness, and generosity of his principles shew themselves.

The account between him and the public stood thus:—Without entering into minute calculations,

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or referring to other countries, it may be stated that Dr. Jenner made known a discovery, which has already materially increased the mean duration of human life, and which was capable of rescuing annually between thirty and forty thousand of our own population from a pestilential and fatal disease. To put the world fully in possession of these blessings he abandoned almost entirely the emoluments of his profession as a physician in the country. He incurred great additional expense by keeping up an establishment in London; and was constantly exposed to much cost from printing, postage, &c. &c. without the possibility of a return. His emoluments from vaccine inoculation, contrary to the glowing anticipations of his parliamentary eulogists, were not on an average more than £350 per annum; so that there is clear proof that the gross deficit of capital in the four years immediately subsequent to his removal to London, amounted nearly to £6000. In compensation for all this, Dr. Jenner was voted the sum of £10,000 by Parliament, from which were deducted, in the shape of official fees, &c. nearly £1000, without taking into account the tedious delay in the payment.

Under such circumstances his friends thought it necessary that he should again repair to London. But before we follow him thither, it may be proper to notice the contemporary advancement of

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vaccination abroad, and the opposition it encountered at home.

Excepting in the British metropolis, and some of the large provincial towns, no formidable interruption occurred to its progress. Almost all the communications from foreign countries were gratifying in the extreme. Dr. Frank, who had recently gone to Wilna as Professor of Pathology, on the 13th of January announced to Jenner that that university, wishing to confer a distinguished mark of its esteem, had chosen him an honorary member, and transmitted the diploma. About the same time, Dr. Barboza informed him of the successful progress of vaccination in the Brazils; all the civil authorities assisting his efforts. The manner in which he procured his vaccine lymph deserves to be recorded; it shows an energy in the Brazilian government highly creditable. He had carried vaccine matter from England in 1803. He reproduced it in Lisbon; but it failed when carried across the Atlantic. It was therefore resolved to send some boys to Lisbon, who were successively vaccinated on their homeward passage.

A letter from Dr. Scott of Bombay contains intelligence equally cheering regarding the continent of Asia. The stock of vaccine virus had been kept up with perfect success. About the same period Dr. De Carro transmitted intelligence from other parts of our Indian possessions. He had