

[Source: [History and Pathology of Vaccination by Edgar Crookshank MB](#)]

A  
**LETTER**  
OCCASIONED BY THE MANY FAILURES OF  
**COW-POX.**

From [JOHN BIRCH, Esq.](#)

Surgeon to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, &c.

ADDRESSED TO

W. R. ROGERS,

Author of the Examination of the Evidence before the House of Commons, &c, Sec.

To Mr. W. R. ROGERS.  
*Herts Regiment, Ipswich..*

London, July 6th, 1805.

Dear Sir,

THE able and dispassionate manner in which you have treated the argument concerning Vaccination, seems to have had its proper weight with the thinking part of mankind. I recommend you therefore to reprint your pamphlet. It cannot have too extensive a circulation. I wish it could be sent to every part of the globe in justification of English Surgery. Inoculation has hitherto been considered as distinctly the province of the Surgeon; the success of it, and the alleviation of its distressing symptoms, depend on surgical treatment. It is a melancholy consideration, therefore, to think that this branch of practice should be taken from those who alone ought to exercise it, and transferred to persons, some of whom are totally ignorant of our profession.

The experiment of Vaccination has been carried on from the commencement, to the present period, with a degree of art, which does not augur much in favour of the cause.

The number of persons adduced as supporting it when before the Committee of the House of Commons was forty; but the Public has not been told that out of this forty,

twenty-three spoke from *hearsay* only, not from any knowledge they had acquired by practice, *while the three persons who spoke against it, corroborated their evidence by proofs*. Strong as this fact is, no one has taken notice of it.

When first Vaccination was recommended to me, it was announced authoritatively to be an absolute security against Small Pox; but the experiment, when tried at St. Thomas's Hospital, failed; and there it was first discovered that in a variolous atmosphere it was not to be depended on.

This in the outset did not prove much in the favour of Vaccination ; further difficulties arose from eruptions which appeared, too often in the face; but these were obviated by saying, that observation had proved the vaccine matter to be divided into genuine and spurious, and that its good or ill success depended on the period at which it was taken : on a certain day it would prove innoxious and genuine; before and after that day it could not be depended on. Sometimes the cow was to blame, and sometimes the doctor.

Thus we were left to judge by the event. If the patient should die from the inflammation of the puncture, we might then conclude the matter was not genuine; if the apothecary plunged his lancet too deep, or the infant was not of a proper constitution, the experiment might be fatal. To reason thus was to insult humanity. Alas ! how can the constitution of a child be ascertained, when only one month, or six months old ? The failures which occurred, instead of operating conviction, seemed but to change the theory of the system; new doctrines, new books, new instructions appeared every month. Even the first principle, of the origin of the disease, could not be settled. Dr. Jenner traced it from the grease of the horse's heel; and the description he gave of it, was alone sufficient to frighten us from adopting it. But this notion was soon found to be erroneous, and it is now conjectured to belong to the cow; yet after all, this animal poison is too mischievous for use, until it has been meliorated by passing through some human body, selected as the victim of the experiment.

But mere uncertainty was not the only evil attendant on Vaccination. New diseases occurred, as in the case, among others, of Rebecca Latchfield. It was studiously represented, indeed, that her affection was nothing more than common boils; but the discriminating colour, the stony hardness, and the continued succession of the tumours, together with the painful sufferings of the afflicted child, marked the novelty of the disease. Many individuals acknowledged this distinction the moment they saw her. As it is important this case should be generally known, I have procured a drawing at full length of this unhappy little sufferer, which may hereafter be presented to the Public.

How far it was well judged, or politic, to direct our soldiers and seamen to become the subjects, whereon a doubtful experiment should be tried, I do not mean to enquire. At all events, it would have been more regular, and more to the interests of Society, as the experiment was surgical, to have consulted the College of Surgeons, and to have had their collected approbation before a parliamentary reward was adjudged. In all cases where Parliament has neglected to do this, it has committed an error; as in the instance of Mrs. Stevens' medicine for dissolving the stone.

But was it not highly reprehensible to conceal industriously all the cases which occurred to the prejudice of Vaccination, while everything that could tend to lessen the credit of Inoculation was *most artfully* propagated ?

The facts which you have adduced are so strong in themselves, and the authority on which they rest so incontrovertible, that they entirely subvert the data laid down by the Committee of the House of Commons. Yet the argument might have been treated in another way, and these questions asked.

- I. Is there any disease consequent to Small Pox Inoculation which is not a natural disease, and which may not be produced equally by other exciting causes ?
- II. Does the puncture of Inoculation ever produce such an inflammation of the arm as to kill the patient ?
- III. Can the artificial introduction of variolous matter produce any disease but genuine Small Pox ?
- IV. Are not the symptoms of inoculated Small Pox, after two years old, generally as safe and as mild as those of the kindest Vaccination ?
- V. Did the justly celebrated Baron Dimsdale, in his extensive practice, both abroad and at home, during the space of forty-five years, ever lose three of his patients ?

I affirm that the negative must be replied to each of these questions. What then is there left for Vaccination to do, that may not be done more advantageously by Inoculation?

But the object, of the projectors of Vaccination was not, I fear, so much the desire of doing general good, as that of securing to themselves, and to Men-midwives, if the experiment should succeed, the absolute command of the nurseries, to the entire exclusion of the Surgeons.

This being really the state of the case, I must call it an unworthy expedient, to alarm the ignorant multitude with the dangers of Inoculation ; an enemy that had been laid at their feet by the firm and steady exertions of the great and good Baron Dimsdale.

A monthly Medical Journal, which has spread the mischief of Vaccination widely, and which, till the last month, has been shut against every statement which could affect its credit, now acknowledges failure upon failure, attested by one practitioner after another. But we are little obliged for these tardy confessions, since the Public has been some time in the possession of the facts, together with many others; and they are now acknowledged, because they can no longer be concealed. I again affirm, that the Public are beforehand with the Medical Journals ; they have indeed been too long misled by the charm of novelty, but they perceive their error; and they have loudly called out for regular Inoculation, to prevent the mischiefs of natural Small Pox, which has appeared epidemical in many places, and proved fatal in cases where Vaccination had been relied on.

I forbear to say more on this subject at present. I have collected materials enough to satisfy the Public of the validity of the reasons on which I have uniformly objected to the practice of Vaccination. That I should come forward, is a duty I owe both to them and myself. Should I contribute towards dispelling that mist of prejudice, which has obscured the judgment of many well-intentioned people, and many able practitioners, I shall have just cause to rejoice. To attempt to vindicate truth and expose error, is the noblest exertion of our faculties : to succeed in the attempt, is to obtain the most exalted gratification a reasonable being can desire.

I am,  
Dear Sir,  
Your

faithful friend,

John Birch.

Spring Gardens,  
July 6th, 1805.

P..S.—Every post brings me accounts of the failures of Vaccination. From Hertfordshire, I have notice of four cases within the last month, two of which were fatal; but as I do not admit Hearsay Evidence, I must enquire more particularly before I publish them.—However, I have just seen a child in Orange Court, Swallow Street, vaccinated five years ago by a Man-midwife, who is not only the strongest advocate for Vaccination, but is considered to be one of its most skilful practitioners. By him this child was pronounced to have had the *genuine* sort; and so strong was his conviction of it, that he took matter from him to vaccinate many other patients with; yet this very Child is now full of the *true*, not of the *supposed* Small Pox.

The mother says the Small Pox is not in the Court—and that the child has not been in the way of infection to her knowledge. Add this case to the confessions of the Monthly Journal, and to Dr. Moseley's\* list, and what is the conclusion we are to draw ?

\* *Vide Moseley on Lues Bovilla, 2nd edit.*

There is but one; namely, that Vaccination neither secures the patient from catching the Small Pox by variolous infection, nor, when so caught, lessens the danger of disease. For my own part I tremble to think on the perils which await Society, from the prevalence of Vaccination. Unless it be stopped, we shall see Small Pox at no very distant period recur in all the terrors with which it was first surrounded; desolating cities like the plague, and sweeping thousands from the earth, who, lulled into a false security, will have fatally deprived themselves of the only proper means of defence.