

An examination of the part of the evidence relative to cow-pox : which was delivered to the Committee of the House of Commons, by two of the surgeons of St. Thomas's Hospital ; with some remarks on inoculated small-pox / by W. R. Rogers.

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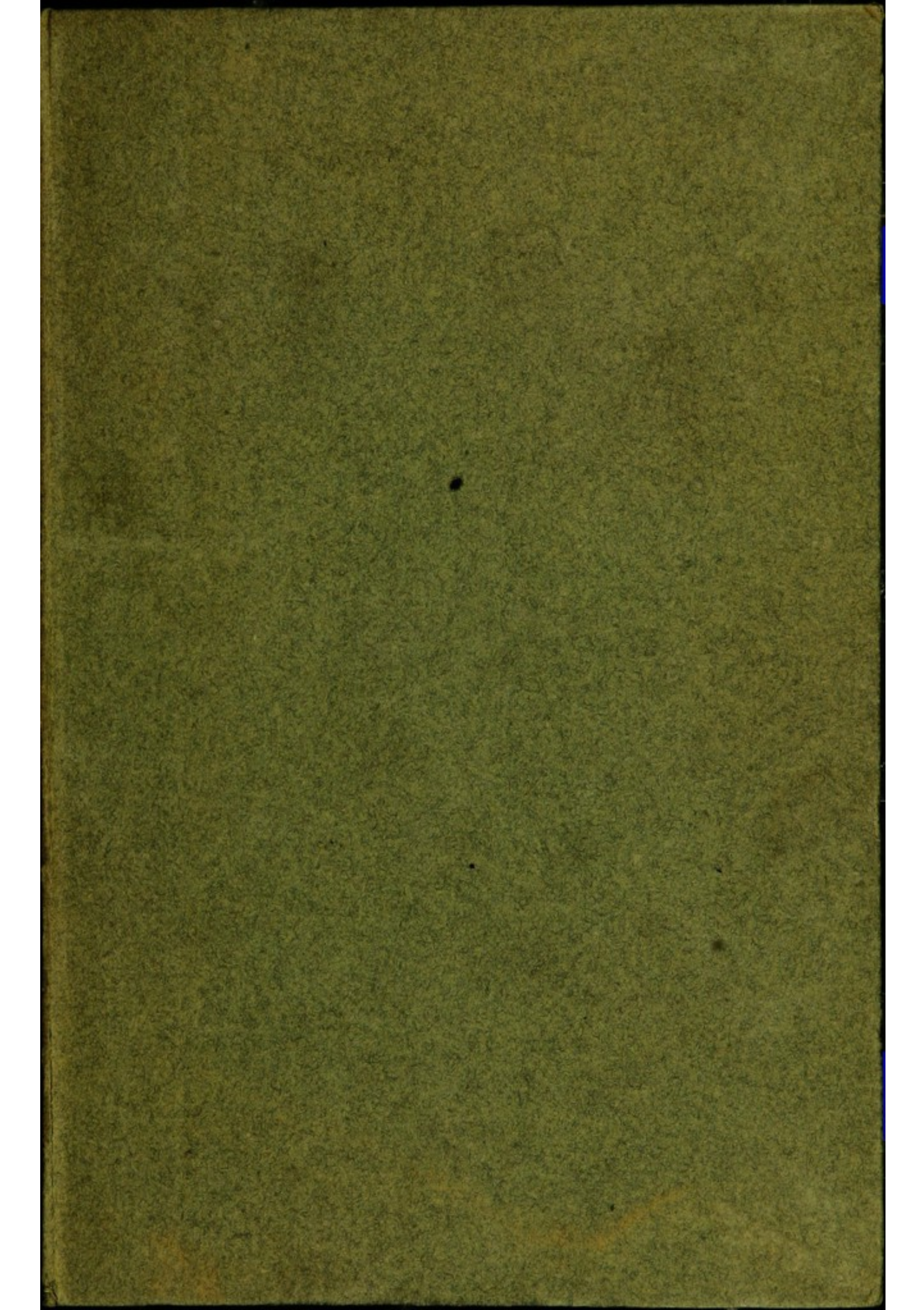
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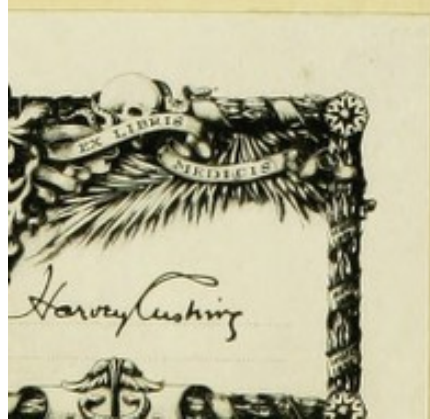


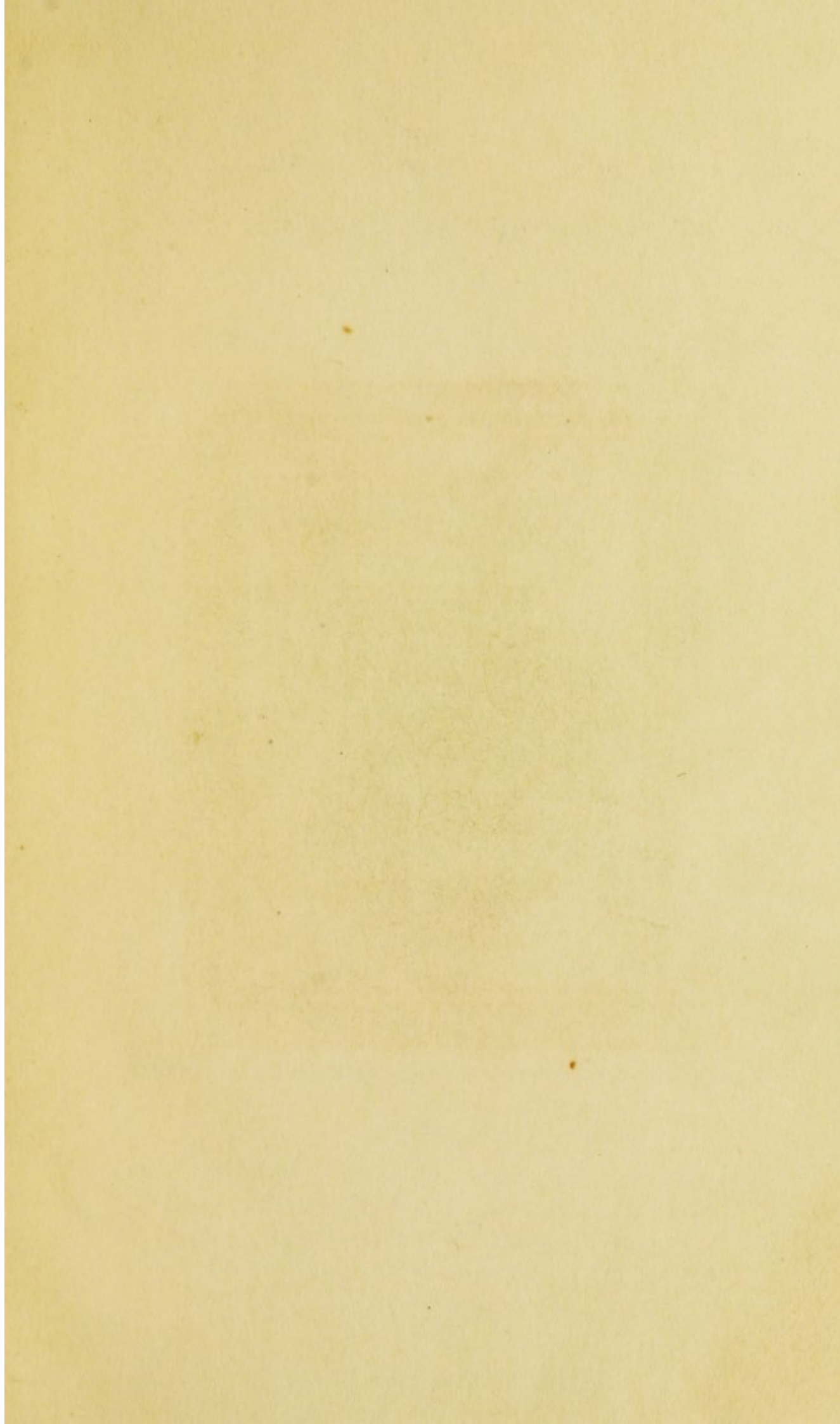
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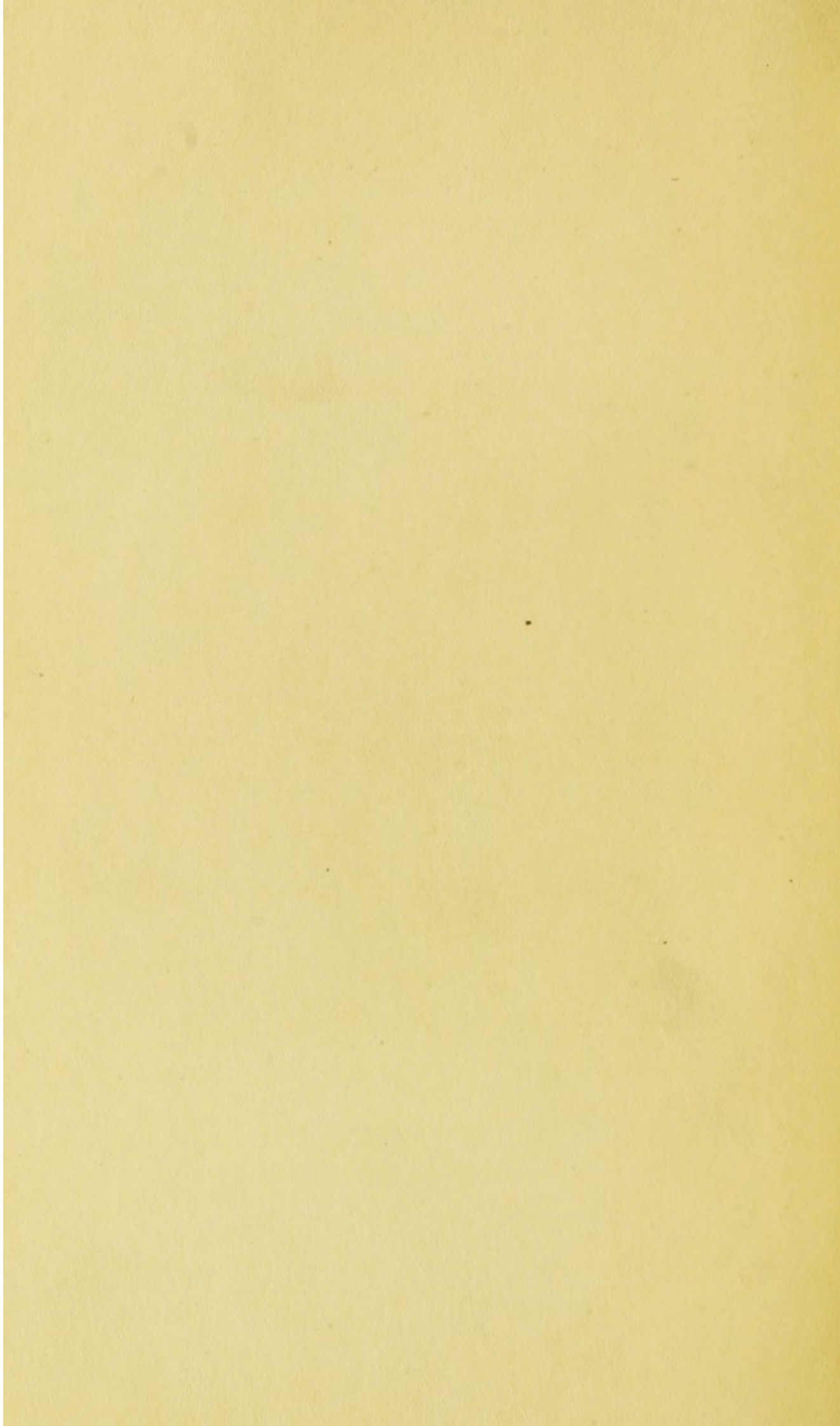
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AN
EXAMINATION
OF
THAT PART OF THE EVIDENCE RELATIVE TO
COW-POX,
WHICH WAS DELIVERED TO THE COMMITTEE OF
The House of Commons,
BY TWO OF THE
SURGEONS OF ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL.

To which is added
A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR,
FROM
JOHN BIRCH, ESQ.

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

THE SECOND EDITION.

London:

PRINTED FOR J. CALLOW, MEDICAL BOOKSELLER,
CROWN COURT PRINCES STREET, SOHO; AND
HARRIS, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD;
BY W. SMITH AND SON, NO. 49, KING STREET, SEVEN DIALS.

1805.

[PRICE TWO SHILLINGS.]

AN
EXAMINATION

OF
THAT PART OF THE EVIDENCE RELATIVE TO

COW-POX,

WHICH WAS DELIVERED TO THE COMMITTEE ON

THE BOILS OF COWPOX,

BY THE

SURGEON OF ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL.



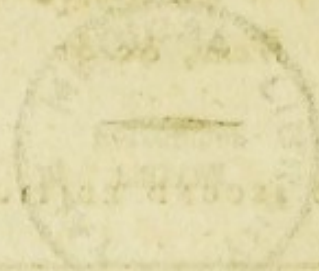
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A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR,

FROM

JOHN BIRCH, ESQ.

OF THE LONDON DISPENSARY, &c.



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PRINTED FOR J. COLLIER, MEDICAL BOOKSELLER,

GRAND COURT CHURCH STREET, LONDON; AND

HARTLEY, IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH YARD;

BY W. SMITH AND SON, NO. 55, KING STREET, LONDON.

1802.

[Price two shillings.]

PREFACE

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

THE favourable reception the first edition of this pamphlet has met with, and the change that has been made in the public mind with respect to Vaccination, lead me to think I have treated the argument with candour. The letter which is annexed to this edition, I have Mr. BIRCH's permission to print. I trust it will not be unacceptable. His sentiments of the inefficacy of Vaccination, have been uniform from its first introduction to the present period. Whenever he favours us with his reasons for dissenting from so many respectable members of the faculty, I am persuaded they will be found to be conclusive.

The confession of some advocates for Vaccination in the Medical Journals of the last month, evince the declining state of the practice. Sincerely do I hope that as the experiment is not found to answer, it will be no longer pursued.

W. R. ROGERS.

Hertfordshire Regiment.

PREFACE

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The confession of some advocates for Vaccination in the Medical Journals of the last month, evince the declining state of the practice. Since 1801 I hope that as the experiment is not found to answer, it will be no longer pursued.

W. B. ROGERS

London, 25th June 1802.

AN
EXAMINATION
OF
THAT PART OF THE EVIDENCE RELATIVE
TO
COW-POX,
&c. &c.

THE mass of evidence which was produced before the committee of the House of Commons in favor of vaccination, did so influence the public mind, that all opposition to it has been borne down; and the faculty of physic having set the example of transferring it to their own children, has been considered as full proof of the superiority of the practice.

But so many subsequent circumstances have arisen, new in themselves, and contrary to that mass of evidence, and so much has been written on the subject without ascertaining any thing clearly, that surely, in some degree, to consider the report of that committee may not be improper nor ill-timed.

Let me be allowed to divide those who have given evidence on this subject into three classes :

Physicians, whose province (it will surely be conceded to me) is not to handle the lancet ;

Surgeons, to whose particular line of practice inoculation appertains ;

And Men-midwives, who are too much interested in the event to be considered fair evidence in the cause, according to a well-known dictum of the English law.

The College of Physicians, as a body, are of opinion—" that, the practice of vaccination
 " is perfectly safe when properly conducted,
 " and highly deserving the encouragement
 " of the public, on account of the ultimate
 " great advantage expected from it, which
 " can only be fully established by the ex-
 " tended and successful experience of many
 " years."

Much of that caution, which should reside in so learned a body of men, is here apparent.

The College of Surgeons was never applied to for an opinion.

I wish, however, to consider the more prominent parts, which appear in the evidence of two gentlemen in that profession, who stand high in the public esteem, who have practised many years in the same hospital, who were educated under the same tutors, but whose opinions are directly in contradiction to each other upon the point in question; therefore one of them must be in an error.

“ Mr. BIRCH, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, surgeon to St. Thomas’s Hospital, and surgeon extraordinary to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, has seen vaccine inoculation often, but has never practised it, and does not think that he has seen facts sufficient, under his own inspection, to form a positive judgment, having been frequently deceived by the reports of facts in other matters. A case occurred in St. Thomas’s Hospital of a child at the breast, the mother being admitted for fever, which proved to be small-

Vide Report of the Committee.

“ pox; the child was inoculated for the
“ cow-pox (not by the witness, for he ob-
“ jected to this new experiment) and went
“ through the vaccine disorder satisfactorily
“ in the opinion of *those who inoculated him*.
“ After the small-pox had terminated in the
“ mother, her child was taken very ill with
“ fever; but on the appearance of eruption
“ he grew better, and in that state they were
“ dismissed. The witness saw the child
“ afterwards, and believes that the eruption
“ was no other than the small-pox, though
“ it was called at that time an *hybrid* disease.
“ He made no notes, nor can he recollect
“ the day on which the eruption appeared;
“ nor does he know that it was later than in
“ the usual progress of the small-pox. Simi-
“ lar circumstances occurring soon afterwards
“ in the same hospital, in two cases, made
“ it evident that patients, having previously
“ received small-pox infection, were not
“ secured from the consequences of it by
“ vaccine inoculation: none of these cases
“ were fatal. He has no doubt, that in the
“ above cases, the patients were infected with
“ small-pox previous to their inoculation with
“ vaccine matter: but he is of opinion, that
“ if they had been inoculated with small-pox

“ matter, they would have only had the
 “ inoculated sort of small-pox, and would
 “ have escaped the natural sort. His own
 “ practice in small-pox inoculation has *not**
 “ been extensive, but successful: out of
 “ more than two hundred whom he has ino-
 “ culated for small-pox, he never lost one.
 “ He has heard much of spurious cow-pox,
 “ and all the failures which have been talked
 “ of have been attributed to that. He knows
 “ no instance of a person, after having gone
 “ through the cow-pox, catching the small-
 “ pox upon being exposed to it.”

“ Mr. CLINE (to the splendor of whose
 “ talents, on many other occasions, I bow)
 “ member of the Royal College of Surgeons,
 “ and surgeon to St. Thomas’s Hospital,
 “ stated, that in July, 1798, he received
 “ some vaccine matter from Dr. Jenner,
 “ with which he inoculated a boy who had
 “ not had the small-pox; when he had gone
 “ through the stages of vaccine inoculation,
 “ he tried to infect him with small-pox by
 “ inoculation, but in vain; this circumstance,
 “ together with the communications he re-

* The omission of the word *not*, in Mr. Birch’s evidence,
 he desires may be rectified here.

“ceived from Dr. Jenner, produced the
 “strongest conviction in his mind of the
 “great utility of this practice, and he there-
 “fore recommended it strongly to all his
 “friends, amongst whom was Sir Walter
 “Farquhar; and he perfectly recollects the
 “conversation relative to the emolument
 “Dr. Jenner might derive from the practice
 “of vaccine inoculation; but Dr. Jenner at
 “that time declined settling in London.

“Mr. Cline looks upon it as the greatest
 “discovery ever made in the practice of
 “physic, for the preservation of the human
 “race, as the small-pox has been the most
 “destructive of all diseases. He was con-
 “sulted upon the case of a child of Mr.
 “Austin, at Clapton, with whom it was said
 “the cow-pox inoculation had failed; but
 “from particular enquiries of the parents
 “and nurse, he was perfectly convinced the
 “child had never received the vaccine dis-
 “ease; and this evidence Mr. Taylor, the
 “surgeon who inoculated it, confirmed. He
 “thinks that experience has sufficiently de-
 “monstrated that persons inoculated with
 “the cow-pox, are incapable of receiving the
 “small-pox; and he believes that in the

“ instances where the small-pox has been
 “ caught, and the patient has, before the
 “ coming out of the disease, been inoculated
 “ with the cow-pox, it mitigates the virulence
 “ of the small-pox. *The vaccine disease is*
 “ *not contagious, nor does it create any*
 “ *blemish on the human frame; nor does it*
 “ *excite scrophula, or any other disease, which*
 “ *is sometimes the case with the inoculated*
 “ *small-pox.* In November, 1800, he per-
 “ formed the operation for the stone on
 “ William Bench, a child in Isaac’s ward of
 “ St. Thomas’s Hospital. In a few days
 “ after, hearing that this boy was in great
 “ danger of catching the small-pox, he
 “ directed that he should be inoculated
 “ with cow-pox matter, which took effect,
 “ and proceeded in the usual manner: but
 “ in thirteen days after this inoculation, a
 “ few eruptions appeared that seemed to be
 “ variolous. Admitting these eruptions were
 “ the true small-pox, the time of their ap-
 “ pearance shows the infection had been
 “ received before the child was inoculated
 “ with cow-pox matter; for the natural
 “ small-pox frequently does not appear until
 “ sixteen or eighteen days after the patient
 “ has been exposed to infection. A second

“ case was in November, 1801; the child of
 “ Mary Solloway, in Mary’s ward of the
 “ same hospital: this child was known to
 “ have been exposed to the infection of
 “ small-pox, and therefore the mother per-
 “ mitted it to be inoculated with cow-pox
 “ matter; but in four days after, the small-
 “ pox appeared, and the disease was very
 “ severe; however the child recovered. A
 “ third case was a patient of Dr. Lister’s,
 “ whose mother had the small-pox. In six
 “ days after the complaint had appeared in
 “ the mother, the child was inoculated with
 “ cow-pox matter, and the complaint from
 “ this inoculation proceeded as usual; but
 “ in about fifteen days a few eruptions ap-
 “ peared that were of a doubtful nature.”

From the most minute enquiry, these are
 all the cases which have occurred in St.
 Thomas’s Hospital, where variolous eruptions
 have succeeded the vaccine inoculation, in
 each of which there can be no doubt that the
 patients were exposed to the infection of
 small-pox previous to their being inoculated.

Mr. Birch having taught his pupils the
 maxim, that experience was preferable to ex-

periment, examines cautiously into facts before he gives them his assent, and therefore admits that his patient, Abraham Howard, should be vaccinated while at the breast of his mother, who was labouring under the natural small-pox; but he refrains doing the operation himself, that the experiment may be most unequivocally relied upon. The event, as he relates it, was, that the vaccine disease passed through its stages to the perfect satisfaction of his colleagues; but *that* being over, the child sickened, had fever and eruption, which he insists was the small-pox, although his colleagues, with equal firmness, maintained it was an hybrid eruption. *

Two more cases of vaccination in the same hospital, and followed by the same appearance, cleared up the dispute, and it was allowed that if the patient had caught the natural

* Dr. Woodville, physician to the Small-Pox Hospital, supposed the cow-pox, ingrafted on a patient who had been in the atmosphere of small-pox, would frequently be followed by an eruption of a mulish nature, different from small-pox, which he called the hybrid eruption. It was afterward discovered this was the real small-pox appearing after vaccination.

small-pox, the *vaccine* inoculation would not impede its progress.

Now, as it is agreed on all hands, that the inoculation of small-pox, under similar circumstances, would supersede and destroy the infection naturally received, Mr. Birch took his stand on this ground, and has ever since steadily and firmly maintained that on this account he was satisfied the experiment would not produce the results promised from it.

He named to the committee four practitioners in different parts of the kingdom, who in correspondence with him had related the failure of cases which had been vaccinated: these gentlemen were written to that night, and their answers are printed in the report, recounting four cases where the small-pox has appeared after vaccination.

Mr. Cline, on the other hand, asserts, that after trying the experiment in *one* case, he wished Dr. Jenner to settle in London, and communicated his success to several friends, and, upon his opinion alone, they immediately adopted his proposition, in particular Sir Walter Farquhar.

Mr. Cline is of opinion that it is the greatest discovery ever made, because the small-pox is the most destructive of all diseases. He proceeds to say, that it is *sufficiently* demonstrated, that persons who have been vaccinated can never receive the small-pox. He admits, with some reserve, the hospital cases quoted by Mr. Birch, but says the vaccine inoculation, even under such circumstances, though it does not supersede variolous infection, mitigates it; yet in the case of Mary Sollo-way's child, if I rightly understand him, Mr. C. states "*the disease to have been very severe, but that the child recovered.*" He further declares, *the vaccine creates no blemish, and does not excite scrophula, nor any other disease.*

The contradictory opinions of two such eminent surgeons did not pass unobserved by the committee—the answers returned to the letters of enquiry from Dr. Hope, Mr. Nooth, Mr. Grovesnor, and Mr. Slater—the case of Mary Dyer, of Old Sodbury—together with other opinions, created some doubt; notwithstanding which the committee declare three things (among others) which, if upon

enquiry they are found to be erroneous, may tend to invalidate that mass of evidence given in support of this new invented disease.

The first assertion is, that vaccine inoculation has never proved fatal in any one instance.

The second, that it does not excite other humors or disorders in the constitution.

And the third, that it not only is to be relied on as a perfect security against small-pox, but that if it becomes universal, it will absolutely eradicate and extinguish it.

First, I have only to regret, in contradiction to these benevolent *wishes* (rather than *deductions*) of the committee, that I can shew it has proved fatal in more instances than *one*:

That in others it has created a new and undescribed disease:

And that in several the small-pox has followed beyond any dispute.

The first fatal case which was made public was a patient at Islington ; the arm ulcerated, and the patient died. Many of the faculty visited this case, among whom were (I am informed) Sir William Blizard and Mr. Cline,

The next was a patient at Clapham, and this is a well known case.

The third was the infant of Captain B. of the navy. And the last I shall mention was the child of Dr. Smyth Stewart, related by himself in a letter to Dr. Squirrell.

These cases were as favorably palliated and as ingeniously excused as they could be ; but it is admitted *that each patient was punctured by a lancet infected with what is called cow-pox ; each arm so punctured became inflamed and ulcerated, and each patient died.*

That of Captain B.'s infant was, for a short space of time, concealed ; but the anguish of the parents soon caused a disclosure. I forbear, in this instance, to mention names, the practice so strongly patronized, and under the sanction of the legislative body, excuses every one from censure.

The number of children who have died of the natural small-pox, owing to their parents relying on the security of their having been vaccinated, might be added to the fatal catalogue, and be adduced as proofs that *vaccination does not mitigate the virulence of small-pox*. This number might be known by an advertisement; but here are enough to prove the experiment has been fatal in more than one instance.

The next point I am to endeavor to establish is, that a new disease, hitherto undescribed, is frequently produced by the insertion of this unnatural fluid into the human frame.

This disease shews itself under three forms.

An eruption, which appears on the face, as well as the body and limbs :

An hasty abscess, which contains a fluid dissimilar to any other, and

Glandular enlargements of the skin; at first the size of a pea, then growing knotty and hard, at length suppurating.

The eruption of the skin is the most frequent. It may be heard of in every parish in London—alas! in too many private families: it is not an *hybrid eruption*, but one *sui generis*.

Mr. Peers, perfumer in Jermyn Street, can exhibit a melancholy instance of it in one of his children.

Rebecca Latchfield, daughter of a workman at Mr. Banck's, Strand, the subject of the print annexed, was vaccinated when five months old, and the arms proceeded in the usual manner; about a month after a pimple was observed in the middle of her forehead, which was succeeded by several in the arms; at first they felt like peas, they gradually increased in size, and more appeared in the skin on different parts of the body. The child was carried to a surgeon when about twelve months old; he purged it with calomel, and directed the tincture of bark. As its health improved, the knobs advanced to suppuration; that on the forehead first matured, and was opened; some on the arm slowly followed.* The plate is made from a drawing

* This drawing was given to me by Mr. Birch.

of one arm only, the whole subject would appear disgusting ; but this case, I think, clearly demonstrates a *new disease of the skin*, not at all similar to scrophula, or any other disease I am acquainted with.

A servant belonging to Mr. East, Adelphi, had a child vaccinated while at the breast ; the progress of the pustule was regular ; about nine days after the scab formed, large superficial abscesses appeared on the nates, thighs, and body of the infant. They suppurated hastily, but the color of the skin was unlike what it is in common inflammation ; it was of a dusky bluish red ; the child suffered great pain. They were opened freely with a lancet ; their contents was a gelatinous, blue fluid, very similar to a solution of starch, and extremely offensive.

In the last place with grief (but confidently) I assert, that the great advantage which mankind was to have received from this discovery has not been attained, from it being no security, in numerous instances, against the infection of the natural small-pox.

Divers cases to prove this last assertion have been brought forward; but until Mr. Goldson published his they were concealed. Whenever the case pressed strongly, the vaccination was declared imperfect; the matter was taken too soon, or too late, or it was spurious, or the practitioner was informed he had yet a lesson to learn.

Before the committee had made their report, (*I believe I am accurate in saying*) the child of Matthew Montague, Esq. who had been vaccinated in the country, was put to the test of variolous infection. Several eminent practitioners visited the child while under the variolous eruption, and Dr. Denman declared it was not small-pox, because it turned on the sixth day; however, matter was taken from it, by Mr. Walker of St. James's Street, and two *children* of his coachman were infected by that matter with indisputable small-pox.

Dr. Croft saw these children who were inoculated from Mr. Montague's, and I learn he admitted they had the small-pox.

Mr. Gould, at an oyster warehouse in Bow Street, Covent Garden, had a child vaccinated at the Small-Pox Hospital about a year since, and the pustule was considered so perfect, that some were vaccinated from it. The latter end of last January, this child took the natural small-pox, at a time when it was laboring under the whooping cough; it had about 200 pustules, and the cough proceeded in its course.

The cases of Mr. Hodges's children, in Holborn, have been so accurately drawn up by a medical committee, and confessed indisputable, that I have only to remark, with surprize, how so many persons, pretending to know any thing about small-pox, should for a moment have doubted the nature of the disease.*

If Dr. Wollaston, to whom society (as I have heard it indeed observed) are not a little

* When so much difference of opinion prevailed among the faculty, whether it was or was not small-pox, it is surprizing that Mr. John Hunter's distinction of the slough, lining the bottom of the pustule, should not have been the object of the search.

indebted for a deliberate investigation of these cases, had signed the conclusion annexed to the account of them, we should have been all astonished; as he did not sign it, we are, I believe, all satisfied.

But the case, which above all others is the most conclusive, is that of Mr. Bowen's child, at Harrow, which, after being vaccinated, was submitted to the test of variolous inoculation three successive years, without producing any effect. On the fourth inoculation, small-pox was made to appear, and matter was taken from one of the pustules, with which another child was successfully inoculated.*

Here, then, is the instance of the child of a medical gentleman, one who heretofore was fully convinced of the security of vaccination, and who boldly submitted his own infant to the test of this experiment (viz. Whether vaccination was an antidote to the small-pox?) and this he repeated not once nor twice only, but a third and a fourth

* See Mr. Bowen's letter to Mr. Birch, in Dr. Moseley's *Lues Bovilla*.

time; at length the small-pox takes effect. Here we see the boasted security completely overthrown, and the practitioner, terrified at the event, judiciously putting to the trial all within his circuit, and succeeding in giving the small-pox to many who thought themselves secure from it, they having been previously vaccinated, as it is called.

These cases sounded a fresh alarm. Mr. Bowen was brought to London, and examined by Dr. Pearson and others: nothing could be more clear than the account he gave, or more convincing to those who were interested in investigating the truth.

It is unnecessary at present to bring forward more cases in order to establish the point I proposed: these are certainly sufficient to prove that the report made by the committee; from the mass of evidence they had examined, is not supported by experience, for I think we now demonstrate—

That Cow-pox has in more than one instance proved fatal.

That Cow-pox is productive of new ap-

pearances of disease, unknown before in the catalogue of human infirmities.

And that Cow-pox is not by any means to be depended on as a security against the natural small-pox.

Therefore, I conclude that one of these gentlemen is in an error, and I leave the reader to form his own judgment of their evidence.

The question, whether vaccination should be persisted in after what I have stated, comes next into consideration. The order from the medical boards to the surgeons of the army and navy is a matter of very material consequence on this point, and the public mind is so shaken by what has been done, and what is to be feared from it, that I with great diffidence venture to recommend those distinguished gentlemen, who guide and teach the profession of surgery, to consider seriously this matter before the practice of it is further pursued.

The inoculation of the small-pox, in the estimation of any one possessing common sen-

sibility, must boast a proud triumph over the cow-pox ; for the small-pox exposes the just feelings of the parent to only one conflict, and if not performed till two years after birth, the chances in favor of success are, under proper treatment, become almost a certainty. The change it produces in the absorbent system is in unison with nature ; by it destructive consequences are prevented, and the patient is left in perfect security that it cannot attack the system again ; a security which seems not to attach to the cow-pox ; and what the consequences may be of the revolution produced by cow-pox, when the absorbent system is attacked by scrophula, lues venerea, or cancer, time alone can discover.

When the cases of the Hodges' were established, several instances of the small-pox occurring a second time were brought forward ; but as Baron Dimsdale took so much pains to enquire into this circumstance, and never could satisfy himself that it had once occurred, I must quote his authority to support my disbelief of such a thing having ever happened : besides, when so many objections were made to inoculation for half a century, surely if this had ever occurred, the enemies

to the practice would not have been silent on the subject: yet we hear of no such instance (till now) brought forward.

One rational objection has been urged, I confess, against the inoculation of small-pox, that of spreading the infection, by exposing patients during the maturing process of it in public ways; but this is a practice never followed nor recommended by Baron Dimsdale: it is true, that during the febrile state of the eruption, he insists upon the necessity of external air; but the eruption being completed, his words are "all is over," and from that time it was indeed his practice to keep the patient cool and temperate, not cold; for this purpose a well ventilated chamber, the cool side of the house, a yard, or a garden, were all he required. But I am satisfied his instructions have been misunderstood, and an observance of them would remedy the objection.

One of the striking proofs of the utility and advantage of small-pox inoculation was, in my humble opinion, the safety and certainty with which a whole district, a whole army, a ship's crew, or a regiment, might be insured

from the ravages of a pestilential disease, by the artificial method of inflicting it. In this instance art completely triumphs over nature; and I shall here beg to relate a remarkable occurrence, which will fully illustrate this advantage.

Captain Spranger, commander of His Majesty's ship *Crescent*, returning from the East Indies, took a Spanish brig, laden with slaves, many of whom were children from three years old to twelve: to his terror he discovered the natural small-pox had broke out on board this vessel, where much neglect and mismanagement of the disease were evident: the crew were landed on a small uninhabited island, near the Cape of Good Hope, and the sick began to recover surprizingly. This disorder is dreaded at the Cape as much as the plague is in Europe, of course he was directed to perform a strict quarantine, and on consultation with his surgeon he judged it expedient to direct that all the mariners on board the *Crescent*, as well as all persons on board the Spanish brig, who had never had the small-pox, should be inoculated; this was immediately done with complete success, every one so inoculated recovered, notwithstanding they were ill pre-

pared, from a long voyage and salt provisions; many of them were hardly sick at all. During his quarantine, he was obliged, by his instructions from the Admiralty, to detain an American vessel which fell in his way; he recommended to the captain to inoculate his crew, lest it should suffer from the infection: the Americans resisted this advice; but the captain being at length persuaded of the danger of the natural disease, and of the safety of inoculation, partly by constraint, and partly by consent, did inoculate as many of the crew as had not previously undergone the small-pox; here also the success was complete, and the favorable returns made to the governor, induced Lord Macartney to propose to the colony the introduction of inoculation; but his good intentions were frustrated by the prejudices of the people.

Now, I may fairly ask the advocates for vaccination, whether they are assured if cow-pox matter had been used, that the success would have been equal?

I believe there are many other places, beside St. Thomas's Hospital, where, upon trial, the small-pox has proceeded without a

check, and where inoculation was obliged to be had recourse to before the infection could be cleared away.

But as my rank in the profession does not entitle me to do more than recapitulate remarks, I shall here put an end to them, I trust, before I become either tedious or obtrusive, hoping that I have urged them with becoming decorum, and have offended no one in searching for the truth.



THE END.

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. &c.

LETTER

ON THE CAUSES OF THE MANY FAILURES OF

COW-POX

By JOHN BIRCH, Esq.

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TO MR. W. R. ROGERS,

Herts Regiment, Ipswich.

London, July 6, 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.

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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 authoratively 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 horses 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 tumors, 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 every thing 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 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 before hand with the Medical Journals; they have in-

deed 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,

Spring Gardens,
July 6, 1805.

JOHN BIRCH.

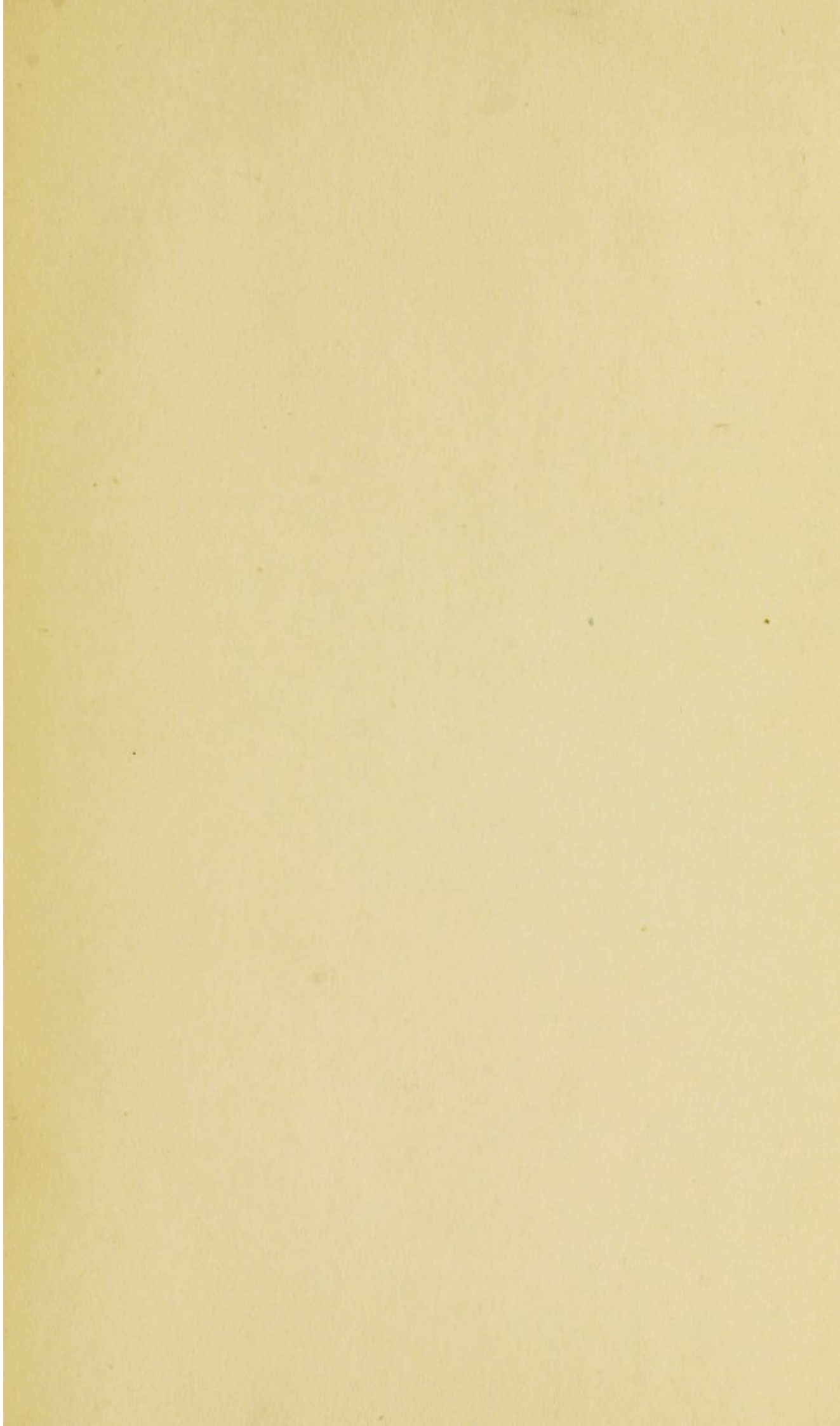
P. S. Every post brings me accounts of the failures of Vaccination. From Hertfordshire, I have notice of four cases within the last month, two of which were fatal; but as I do not admit *Hearsay* Evidence, I must enquire more particularly before I publish them.—However, I have just seen a child in Orange 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.

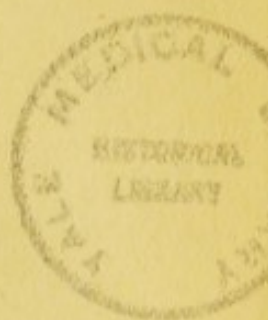
The mother says the Small-pox is not in the Court—and that the child has not been in the way of infection to her knowledge. Add this case to the confessions of the Monthly Journal, and to * Dr. Moseley's

* *Vide* Moseley on Lues Bovilla, 2d edit.

list, and what is the conclusion we are to draw? 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.

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Author

Rogers, W.R.

An examination of

... relative to cow-
1805 Call no. pox.

INOCULATION
VACCINATION

