

# **Vaccination prosecutions, and the Royal Vaccination Commission : the duty of Guardians.**

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# Vaccination Prosecutions, and the Royal Vaccination Commission.

## THE DUTY OF GUARDIANS.

WE are profoundly sorry that the Guardians of the King's Norton Union have decided to prosecute seven parents for non-compliance with the Compulsory Vaccination Act. The rigour being displayed here and elsewhere in the enforcement of this Act is exceedingly ill-timed. A Royal Commission has been appointed to inquire into and report upon the whole question of Vaccination. A vast amount of evidence has been taken, and no really impartial person can say that it conclusively proves the efficacy of JENNER'S great theory. The very fact that a Commission has been granted is an admission that there is *primâ facie* a doubt as to whether the interests of the public are being served by the compulsory enforcement of a rite which is admitted, even by those who advocate it with the greatest energy, to be capable of causing fearful injury to health, and death in not a few cases. It is the law of this country that the man who commits murder shall die by the hand of the public executioner. But who would consign a man to the gallows while a *primâ facie* doubt was acknowledged as to whether any murder had been committed? Recently the Birmingham Board of Guardians decided to enter upon a vigorous crusade against those who look upon Vaccination with horror, and now the King's Norton Board have followed suit. But why this activity at such a time? We are not suffering from an epidemic of small-pox—we are not seriously threatened with one; there is no special display of parental obduracy calling for stern repression. The Vaccination officers have pressed the subject upon the attention of the Guardians, and we are not quite certain that their motives in doing so are wholly disinterested and *pro bono publico*. They are wroth at the very thought of a Royal Commission having been granted. They are burning with anxiety to convince the public that *they* have no doubts. Parents with ghastly instances of foul diseases communicated to pure infants by inoculation hold back with horror, but the public vaccinators think only of putting poison into every baby's arm. We have nothing whatever to do with the Anti-Vaccination League, but we have seen with our own eyes a poor little infant, the offspring of healthy parents, bright and pure until it was vaccinated, dying by inches—a mass of horrible sores—after the operation. We have seen the mother of that child weeping over another while the father intimated his sullen and reluctant submission to the coercion of the law. In the Coroner's Court of Birmingham more than one case of that character has been disclosed. Only yesterday we published a cold record of the facts in what is known as the Leeds case. The day before a correspondent summarised in our columns the case of "fiendish cruelty" of which LYDIA COOK, of Southend, was the victim.

Such revelations and experiences must give pause to all thoughtful men. The Chairman of the King's Norton Board of Guardians is quite sure that "he could convince any reasonable man who needed convincing that Vaccination is supported by facts and common sense." We know most of the available facts, and are not so convinced as to approve the decision arrived at by the majority of the King's Norton Board yesterday. The theory of Vaccination is that by communicating a mild type of a certain disease the human system is protected against a virulent form of the same disease. Now, even admitting that this theory is sound in itself, it is material to bear in mind that the risk of contracting the disease is comparatively remote, and that it may be made infinitesimal by thorough sanitary precautions. It is still more material to bear in mind that vaccine matter, taken from a human subject which has contracted or inherited

certain diseases of a foul and odious character, may contain not only the virus necessary to produce a mild form of small-pox, but also the germs of these repulsive diseases. It is, further, material to bear in mind that it is wholly impossible to ascertain before its use whether or not the vaccine does contain the seeds of these other diseases. All this is incontrovertible fact. It was unsuspected by JENNER, but it has been admitted by his successors. It has been proved, too, that Vaccination does not save from small-pox absolutely. JENNER thought its effect would be permanent, and that the inoculation in childhood would protect throughout an average life. It is granted now that within the threescore years and ten inoculation should be repeated at least ten times in order to give protection. If JENNER foresaw any risk of communicating other diseases, he may have argued that they were slight; but they are increased by every repetition of the operation, and are most serious in the aggregate. Consumption may be communicated, and may develop so long after Vaccination that the cause is unsuspected. Syphilis is communicated, and generally kills quickly in its own shocking manner. It is in the interests of public vaccinators and of the medical profession generally to conceal the real cause of deaths which are directly due to Vaccination. Yet many undeniable instances are on record. Who can tell how many lives are sacrificed and how much enfeeblement results from such reckless ignorance as has been displayed by medical men who know little more about Vaccination than how to scratch a patient's arm!

Boards of Guardians say they are constrained to prosecute parents who doubt whether the protection which Vaccination is alleged to provide against one disease compensates for the risk it involves of incurring others. There is the law on the one hand, the medical fraternity on the other. Guardians need not be constrained by either. On behalf of the Government it has been distinctly stated that Guardians may exercise a perfectly independent judgment—in other words, they need not order prosecutions unless they like. The average doctor is not one whit more capable of giving an opinion upon the question of Vaccination than an intelligent layman. Not one medical man in a thousand who vaccinates day by day has made such a study of cow-pox virus, and of all the other viruses with which vaccine may be impregnated, as to be able to give an original opinion upon JENNER'S system. Vaccination has been introduced in India, and leprosy is increasing with appalling rapidity: it has been proved that leprosy can be communicated just as easily as syphilis by vaccine matter. "If," said the *Bombay Guardian*, commenting upon this fact—"if we have to choose between the danger of leprosy and small-pox, let us by all means have the latter. The ghastly sights, to be seen in every Indian public thoroughfare, of the scabrous handless arms and footless legs of begging lepers forbid any other alternative. Small-pox is bad, but leprosy is a hundredfold worse." And leprosy, although happily the cases are very few at present, is on the increase in England. Mighty Bumbledom, backed by the medical profession (with fees at stake), ignores all this, and while a Royal Commission is in session it resolves that parents who stand between their children and a rite that may have terrible consequences upon their future health shall be "prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law." Is this just? Is it wise from any point of view? At least the prosecutions might be suspended until we have an authoritative judgment delivered after careful investigation of all recent experiences and researches. The parent who can pay fines may protect his child; the parent who is poor must submit or be sent to pick oakum like a common felon. Again we ask is this even-handed justice? Statistics have been accumulated on both sides: they prove little or nothing, and we have ignored them. We appeal on behalf of the poor, who love their children as dearly as the rich. We should not have written as we have done were it not that there seems to be a spirit of persecution abroad, and that there are such special reasons just now for letting the compulsory powers of the Vaccination Acts lie latent. Suppose the Royal Commission reports in favour of the repeal of these powers, what will Guardians who force parents to submit to a law which is upon its trial say then?