

Vaccination Burke'd.

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Tracts 1129.

Vaccination—Burke's.

*"The age of compulsion is gone: the scruples of conscience are allowed:
and the glory of Jenner has departed for—five years at least."*

It is 1798. The Irish Rebellion is over: "Vinegar Hill" has been fought and won: and—we have just received a copy of "An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the *Variolæ Vaccinæ*," by one Edward Jenner.

A Prophet is said to have no honour in his own country, and Jenner was a Prophet.

His friend Cline says to him: "Come to London and pocket the ten thousand a year which is awaiting you." Says Jenner: "Shall I, who even in the morning of my days sought the lowly and sequestered paths of life—the valley and not the mountain; shall I, now my evening is fast approaching, hold myself up as an object for fortune and for fame? Admitting it as a certainty that I obtain both, what stock should I add to my little fund of happiness? My fortune, with what flows in from my profession, is sufficient to gratify my wishes; indeed, so limited is my ambition and that of my nearest connexions, that were I precluded from future practice, I should be enabled to obtain all I want. *And as for fame, what is it? A gilded butt, for ever pierced with the arrows of malignancy.*"

A century has passed. Mr. Speaker has just declared that the "Ayes" have it, and the Bill before the House needs only the Royal Assent to become the Vaccination Act of 1898.

Exit Common-Sense: enter the Conscientious Objector. * * *
If you believe in "spooks," come with me to Norfolk Street and we will see if the genial editor of Borderland can put us in communication with the spirit of Edward Jenner, erstwhile of Berkeley in the county of Gloucester.

We send up our card, in response to which the medium promises to see what he can do and, taking a seat, we silently await the spook's reply.

Suddenly there is a shuffle and a voice says: "Are you there"? We venture an affirmative.

The voice proceeds: "Dr. Jenner left home on August 12th* and has not been heard of since. He talked of going to Germany,"† We recognise

* The date of the passing of the Vaccination Act, 1898.

† In which country both vaccination and re-vaccination are compulsory.

that further enquiry is useless and, thanking the editor, wend our way homewards.

The *locus* is a country village, and it is Vaccination day. Picture to yourself a doctor's surgery, filled to its utmost capacity with multiparous mothers, bearing in their arms howling specimens of heaven-born humanity. The maternal mind is occupied, primarily, with the inconsiderate selfishness of the law which subjects *her* to sleepless nights and other inconveniences following in the wake of vaccination, and secondarily with its barbarity in condemning her offspring to be "cut about." One woman, whose presence is accentuated by a smell suggestive of strong beer, declares that she "don't believe in vaccinashun," and she "wouldn't 'ave it done neither, if it wasn't that Bill's wages is so small." (Bill and his bibulous spouse realise that the imposition of a fine will mean less drink for both of them.) Another sour-faced and quick-tongued individual asserts that her first child was "murdered, yes, that it was, by bein' vaccinated." (Its death was certified by the coroner, after an inquest, as due to "convulsions," caused, if we may believe street scandal, by being dropped on its head from the arms of its drunken mother.) Yet another contends that "there's one law for the rich and another for the pore." "A gentleman—'e was a gentleman, 'e was—as come down from Glor'ster last week and lectured in the Baptis' Chapel, said as 'ow 'e 'adn't never been vaccinated, and didn't mean 'is child'en to be." (The said "gentleman" had thought it unnecessary to mention the fact, to which his face bore ample evidence, that he had himself suffered from a severe attack of confluent small-pox, and that two of his children had died from that disease.)

One lady is comforting her babe in the manner ordained by nature : another infant is frantically endeavouring to extract through a greasy rubber tube the nauseous-looking contents of an old soda-water bottle. Yet another is inflating himself with air through one of the so-called "comforters," and some are vigorously sucking filthy pieces of bread-crust, bacon-rind, and various articles reputed to possess special powers of solace in the early months of existence.

Custom has ordained that water-gruel is the best diet for the newly-made mother ; and what is sauce for the goose is sauce for—the gosling. To explain to her that for the first few months of life infants are unable to digest starch food, is useless. What does she know about starch food ? The only starch she recognises is Reckitt's or Colman's, Blue or White. To argue that an all-seeing Providence would have provided an organ capable of turning out biscuits instead of one producing milk, had the former been more suited to the requirements of the case, is energy wasted. The mother smiles, admits that it sounds reasonable enough, and on her way home invests in a pound of "Robb's" by way of showing her faith in doctors.

The newly-vaccinated child is, for the time being, peculiarly liable to gastric disturbance, and gruel, Robb's biscuits, and in short, any food other than milk in one form or another, are just the agents most likely to foster

a condition, the prominent symptom of which is steady and gradual wasting. What has caused the illness? It cannot be diet, for that has been the same all along. The child gets worse : a doctor is consulted : he prescribes milk : worse follows worse, and death ends the scene. The certificate ascribes it to "*marasmus*" and "*asthenia*," the result of innutrition arising from improper feeding. Ask the mother what the child died of, she will reply : "*Why, Vaccination, of course ; only the doctor, he wrote it down in Latin.*" Poor Jenner ! Give a dog a bad name and hang him.

* * * * *

Exit the old year : enter the new.

The small band of martyrs, until lately brooding over the dissipation of the family effects under the hammer of the distressful auctioneer, is jubilant. Since the days of martyrdom are over, recruits pour in on every hand ; and, under the militant orders of the "Major-General," the older weapons are laid aside, to be replaced by those of greater scientific precision. The conscientious parents of conscience-stricken babes become argumentative.

One declares that, in his opinion, vaccination affords no protection at all from small-pox : his name is Creighton. Another, that it does give temporary protection (i.e., for two or three years), but that he would prefer a return to the old method of inoculation : his name is Crookshank. A third argues that while vaccination is followed for a short time by a certain amount of protection, the remarkable immunity recorded in the case of nurses in Small-pox Hospitals cannot be wholly accounted for by the fact that they have been re-vaccinated : his name turns out to be Collins.

Of course the "consecrated cobbler" is there, methodistical as ever in his scriptural logic. "Christ was not vaccinated," he says, "neither can any mention of the operation be found in the Bible" : *ergo*, it is wrong, it is sinful ; *ergo*², it must be injurious. A worthy disciple of Dr. Squirrel of old, declares that it is contrary to the designs of Providence and the established law of nature : consequently it is impious. *Q.E.D.*

Verily, verily, conscience makes objectors of them all. Oh ! what a Lord is Conscience.

* * * * *

We refrain from prophecy, contenting ourselves with the reflection that if, before another "*lustrum*" has gone by, these should have failed to suffer for their obstinate temerity, they will have had more than their fair share of Fortune.

GEORGE C. PEACHEY.

