

## **Notes of a conversation held with Mr. Howard in May 1789 / [Anon].**

### **Contributors**

Howard, John, 1726-1790.

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June 4. 1790.

**N O T E S**  
**OF A**  
**C O N V E R S A T I O N**  
**HELD WITH**

**Mr. H O W A R D**

In M A Y 1789.

**M**R. HOWARD was then in the sixty-second year of his age, and apparently in very good health. He said, that for many years he had not tasted animal food, and that for thirty years he had not even tasted wine. His diet for the whole day consisted of two penny rolls with some butter or sweetmeat, a pint of milk, and five or six dishes of tea, with a roasted apple on going to bed.

**W**HILST he was superintending the printing of his Treatise on Lazarettos at Warrington, he arose every morning at three o'clock for eighteen weeks together in the depth of winter. He was, however, always in the habit of rising early, and of going early to bed. Tea he looked upon as a great exhilarator of the spirits, carried it always with him in his journies, and made use always of green tea.

**H**E appeared to think himself supported in his particular pursuit by Divine Providence, and would never let amusement or any other occupation interfere with it. He seldom or ever made use of letters of recommendation to persons of consequence in the places he visited, and said he found he succeeded better in his enquiries when he was left to himself. He imagined that his last expedition would have taken up three years, and intended in that time to have twice visited Grand Cairo (the supposed birth-place of the plague), and to have spent much time in that city, and to have visited the Crimea, Constantinople, and Barbary. He did not appear desirous to consult books on the subject of the plague, and said, in a letter he had written to a person who had sent him a French book on the plague at Marseilles, "I read very little on the subject of the plague, as I wish to draw my inferences from close observation on the disorder itself, and not

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from the theories of persons who never visited patients in that distemper; and indeed my general opinion of it is different from any thing I have yet found in books."

MR. Howard thought that when he was in Constantinople in 1788, he observed some disposition to improvement amongst the Turks. Of the Grand Vizir of that time he spoke well, as of a man wishing to establish printing-presses in the capital, and not averse to making some regulations to prevent the contagion of the plague. The opinions of fatalism, and of necessity, in general attributed to the Turks, he saw prevalent only with those of the lower class of life; the better sort of them taking proper precautions against that most horrible disorder.

HE intended to take with him some James's Powder, to try the effects of it in the plague, and was pleased when he was told that Lord Baltimore had made use of that medicine many years ago in the Franks Hospital at Constantinople, upon six persons, three of whom recovered.

OF their police, in the severe punishments inflicted upon those who make use of false weights and measures, he confirmed the account given by many other travellers. He spoke highly of some part of the moral character of the Turks, particularly of their gratitude for favours received, and said, that when he had once been lucky enough to cure a rich Turk of some disorder, he offered him a purse of two thousand sequins. This, however, Mr. Howard would not accept of, and requested only that his patient would permit him occasionally to send to his garden for some grapes and oranges to eat with his tea at breakfast. The Turk sent him every morning a large basket full of the choicest fruits his garden produced.

OF the general police of Berlin he spoke very highly, and said he found the weight of bread more uniformly just in that city than in any he had ever seen. In every city he visited, he made it a rule to go out in the evening to buy loaves of bread of the same value of different bakers, and to compare them. The bread he always gave to the poor.

PRINCE Henry, the uncle of the present King of Prussia, he said, was the highest bred man he had ever seen. He said, that Prince one day asked him if he never went to any public place in the evening, after the labours of the day were over? He replied, he never did; and that he received more pleasure from doing his duty, than from any amusement whatever.

WHEN the Grand Duke of Tuscany sent to invite him to dinner at his palace, he returned for answer, that he was sorry not to be able to do himself the honour of waiting on his Highness, but that he could not spare three hours from his work. He brought with him from Florence a copy of the new Code of Penal Laws of Tuscany, which he translated into English, and gave away to his friends in 1789.

THE late Emperor of Germany was very desirous to converse with Mr. Howard, and have his opinion of his hospitals and gaols. Mr. H. did not like to comply with the then established etiquette of the Imperial Court, a kind of genuflexion on being presented, and in the most polite manner begged to be excused waiting on the Emperor,  
 thinking



thinking it right to bend the knee to God alone. The Emperor, however, waived the ceremony (which was abolished by edict in six weeks after Mr. H. left Vienna), and received Mr. H. in his Cabinet, and had a conversation with him of some hours. Mr. H. frankly told the Emperor his opinion of the hospitals of Vienna, which he did not think were well managed, and spoke very much against some dungeons in several of the prisons of that city. The Emperor was not very much pleased at this, and said, "Sir, why do you complain of my dungeons? Are you not in England hanging up malefactors by dozens?"—"Sir," replied Mr. Howard, "I should rather be hanged in England, than live in one of your dungeons." The Emperor afterwards said to an Englishman at the Court of Vienna, "En verité, ce petit Anglois n'est pas flatteur."

MR. Howard appeared to have studied medicine, and said, that in general in his travels he had been taken for a physician.

HE spoke of his spirits as being uniformly cheerful and serene, as never depressed nor elated, which he attributed to his extreme temperance.

HE said, that in returning from Venice in a vessel of the country, it was attacked by an Algerine corsair of superior force, which was obliged to sheer off, after an engagement of some time. After the engagement, he said, the sailors mentioned in very strong terms the *sang froid* of the little Englishman that was with them.

OF the presence of infection, and of bad air, he thought he had a criterion by a feel of tightness over his head and eyes. In the lazaretto of Constantinople he had seen two or three persons dying of the plague.

DR. Darwin's very beautiful lines in praise of Mr. H. in the Botanic Garden, were mentioned to Mr. Howard, and he was asked whether he had read them. He replied, he had not; and that no person could disoblige him so much as to mention him in any publication whatever\*.

\* The following are the Lines in Dr. Darwin's Poem referred to in the above Conversation:

So when Contagion, with mephitic breath,  
And wither'd Famine urg'd the work of Death,  
Marseilles' good Bishop, London's generous Mayor,  
With food and faith, with medicine and with prayer,  
Rais'd the weak head and stay'd the parting sigh,  
Or with new life relum'd the swimming eye.  
And now, Philanthropy! thy rays divine  
Dart round the globe from Zembla to the Line;  
O'er each dark prison plays the cheering light,  
Like northern lustres o'er the vault of night.  
From realm to realm, with Cross or Crescent crown'd,  
Where'er mankind and misery are found,  
O'er burning sands, deep waves, or wilds of snow,  
Thy HOWARD journeying seeks the house of woe.  
Down many a winding step to dungeons dank,  
Where anguish wails aloud and fetters clank;  
To caves bestrew'd with many a mouldering bone,  
And cells whose echoes only learn to groan;  
Where no kind bars a whispering friend disclose,  
No sunbeam enters, and no Zephyr blows;

He treads, unemulous of fame or wealth,  
Profuse of toil and prodigal of health;  
With soft assuasive eloquence expands  
Pow'r's rigid heart, and opes his clenching hands;  
Leads stern-ey'd Justice to the dark domains,  
If not to sever, to relax the chains;  
Or guides awaken'd Mercy thro' the gloom,  
And shews the prison—sister to the tomb!—  
Gives to her babes the self-devoted wife,  
To her fond husband liberty and life!—  
—The spirits of the good, who bend from high  
Wide o'er these earthly scenes their partial eye,  
When first, array'd in Virtue's purest robe,  
They saw her HOWARD traversing the globe;  
Saw round his brows her sun-like glory blaze  
In arrowy circles of unweari'd rays;  
Mistook a mortal for an angel guest,  
And ask'd what Seraph foot the earth impress.  
—Onward he moves!—Disease and Death retire,  
And murmuring demons hate him, and admire.

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