

Observations on Baron Dimsdale's Remarks on Dr. Lettsom's Letter to Sir Robert Barker, and George Stacpoole, Esq.; respecting general inoculation / [John Coakley Lettsom].

Contributors

Lettsom, John Coakley, 1744-1815.

Publication/Creation

London : Frys, Couchman & Collier for E. & C. Dilly & H. Payne, 1779.

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OBSERVATIONS

On BARON DIMSDALE's

R E M A R K S

On Dr. LETTSOM's

L E T T E R

T O

Sir Robert Barker, & George Stacpoole, Esq;

R E S P E C T I N G

GENERAL INOCULATION.

By JOHN COAKLEY LETTSOM,

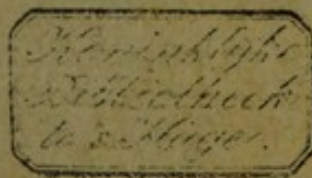
M. D. F. R. S. and S. A.

L O N D O N :

Printed by FRYS, COUCHMAN, and COLLIER, in Queen-Street,
near Upper-Moorfields.

For E. and C. DILLY, in the Poultry, and H. PAYNE, N^o 67, Pall-Mall,

M.DCC.LXXIX.



42600



"Mark, now, how plain a tale will put you down!"

SHAKESPEARE.



OBSERVATIONS

On BARON DIMSDALE'S

REMARKS, &c.

AN apology for troubling the public with the concerns of individuals, is always necessary. Private character is, to almost every man, of less or more importance; but, to a Physician, it is of the greatest: the defence of private character in the case of a Physician, must, therefore, be admitted as an apology sufficiently valid.

From motives of humanity to the indigent part of my species, and from a full conviction of the utility of “the establishment for inoculating the poor at their own houses”; I some time ago addressed a printed letter to Sir Robert Barker and George Stacpoole, Esq; two gentlemen concerned in the support of that establishment, containing some hints which I thought might operate in its favour. Towards the close of this letter, the following unfortunate paragraph was innocently inserted.

“Before I conclude, I beg leave to add, that though I am engaged in the plan for General Inoculation, an institution which has not been so fortunate as to have gained the patronage or approbation of the celebrated BARON DIMSDALE, yet it has not arisen from the most

“ most distant idea of opposition to him.
 “ I acknowledge, with pleasure, that I have
 “ long enjoyed the favour of his friend-
 “ ship; and the more intimately I have
 “ been acquainted with him, the more I
 “ admire and esteem his character as a
 “ gentleman, and his discernment as a
 “ physician; and I am persuaded that he
 “ would as cordially as myself, unite in
 “ promoting a plan for General Inocula-
 “ tion, if he had the same conviction of
 “ its public utility.”

This was sincere; it wore the appear-
 ance of sincerity; it was at that time my
 opinion, and seemed incapable of giving
 offence to any man. But there are men
 whom it is equally dangerous to praise as
 to censure; they are too great to be ap-
 proached. The late Alex. Pope was of
 this number: his pride and irritability were
 intolerable,

intolerable, and notwithstanding the acknowledged superiority of his character as a poet, rendered him despicable as a man.*

Soon after the publication of the above-mentioned Letter, I heard with great surprise, that the most severe censures of my conduct, the most depreciating and injurious insinuations of my “meanness and” “presumption, in pretending to an acquaintance where none subsisted,” were circulated in the most public and insulting manner; and that by persons who not only professed a Friendship for BARON DIMSDALE, but who had actually acquired his confidence. Their abuse would have

* See a correspondence between him, and the late Aaron Hill, Esq; printed in the posthumous works of the latter. In this correspondence, the petulant disposition of the great poet is too visible for the honour of his character, and gives his liberal adversary a manifest advantage.

been

been treated with deserved contempt, had not the BARON himself declared his opinion in a pamphlet, which he has industriously endeavoured to distribute, which he has advertised to be left at Coffee-houses for general inspection,* and with copies of

* The Authors of the Critical Review, express themselves on BARON DIMSDALE's "REMARKS", in the following terms. "In this pamphlet Baron Dimsdale *clearly evinces* the danger that might arise to the community, by the infection of the Small Pox, *upon the plan proposed of inoculating the poor at their own houses.*" Vol. xlvii. page 234.

The same Critics, in their review of Dr. Watkinson's Examination of the charge brought against Inoculation by Dimsdale, &c. say, that "the charge examined in this pamphlet is, that Inoculation spreads the variolous contagion, and increases the mortality of the *natural* Small Pox. Dr. Watkinson, however, produces the *strongest evidence to prove that such an opinion is totally groundless and chimerical.* It would lead us into an unnecessary detail, to enumerate the *conclusive facts* and observations by which he *fully vindicates* the practice of inoculating from the *injurious imputation thrown out against it.* Those who are desirous of particular information,

of which he has even favoured his friends on the continent. This opinion is delivered in the following expressions. Remarks page 15 and 16.

“ With respect to the latter part of the
 “ letter, so immediately respecting me,
 “ I regret very much, that it was not en-
 “ tirely omitted. An apology for publish-
 “ ing his sentiments was surely unnecessary.
 “ In disputes of this kind, every one should
 “ follow the example of the gentlemen

“ formation, may have recourse to the pamphlet, where
 “ they will find the subject treated in the *most rational,*
 “ *unprejudiced, and convincing manner.*” Vol. xliii. page
 235. After thus contradicting themselves, these learned
 Critics, probably from a consciousness of their own in-
 consistency, recommend, in the words of Baron Dimf-
 dale, that “ a decisive judgment of this important dispute
 “ may be formed, by presenting the pamphlets on the
 “ subject to some *Coffee-houses* and *other places.*” They
 do not, however, explain what *other places* they mean;
 but by analogy it may be presumed to imply *Porter* and
Punch-houses.

“ at

“ at the bar ; who, notwithstanding they
 “ support a cause with great earnestness,
 “ do not retain the least resentment against
 “ their opponent. Private character had
 “ certainly nothing to do with the subject
 “ on which he treats ; and indeed, I fear,
 “ to those who know the *slight acquaintance*
 “ subsisting between us, the concluding
 “ paragraph must appear abundantly too
 “ flattering. That mutual civilities have
 “ passed the very *few times* we have had
 “ occasion to meet, is true ; but I do not
 “ recollect that we have spent *an hour to-*
 “ *gether*, more than once ; nor had we
 “ ever *any epistolary correspondence*. There
 “ must be an excessive avidity of praise, to
 “ render such lavish and ill-founded en-
 “ comiums agreeable.”

A paragraph more extraordinary than this, possibly never appeared in print. The

reader must possess no trivial share of penetration, if he discerns in the passage quoted from my LETTER, any reason for the BARON's document, respecting the pursuit of medical controversies, in the mode that council support the causes of their clients. The document is certainly good ; but there seems no great propriety in its present application. Resentment ought never to be indulged ; but on this occasion it did not reside in my bosom, nor did any mention of it occur on my paper. From some others, perhaps, it was not very distant, otherwise its name could scarcely have been seen in a place where it evidently had no manner of business. The BARON's fear that my opinion of him should appear "*abundantly too flattering,*" is likewise very peculiar : few people I believe would be angry at being credited with the attributes of politeness and

and discernment: if I was suspected not to be serious, there must surely be some secret consciousness of defect, where well-meant applause was so readily mistaken for ill-meant irony. The inference, that the superficiality of our acquaintance must make my aforesaid opinion "*too flattering*," is by no means just or conclusive: a very intimate connexion cannot surely be necessary, in order to know that a person is a gentleman, and a man of discernment in his profession. But there is something very heterogeneous to the idea generally conceived of BARON DIMSDALE, in his publicly disclaiming these characters, by asserting the encomiums which conferred them, to be lavish and ill-founded.

That I could be absurd enough to flatter any man, when no purpose whatever could be answered by my flattery, those who

know me will not believe ; and that I could be mean enough to attempt to derive importance from mere pretensions to the friendship of any man, will, to them, appear equally incredible. To strangers, it may be requisite to shew, that the respect I professed for BARON DIMSDALE was real; and that my acquaintance with him was not quite so superficial, as he now wishes the world to imagine. To do this, I am reduced to the very disagreeable task of particularizing private, and, considered in themselves, unimportant transactions.

My personal acquaintance with BARON DIMSDALE commenced some time in the year 1770. He was then in the banking business in London, partner in a house with a relation of mine, a circumstance which caused us often accidentally to meet ; and a case of dangerous illness soon after occurring

ring in the family, demanded our joint attendance as physicians. The duration of our interviews on this occasion, I cannot possibly ascertain; but, as he was on the most intimate footing with the family, I think they must sometimes have exceeded the limits of *an hour*. His humane attention, however, obtained him my sincere esteem; and he, in return, favoured me with all the appearances of an unreserved Friendship.

About the year 1773, I resolved to place a kinsman from the West-Indies with some medical practitioner in the country. BARON DIMSDALE's principal residence was at Hertford; and his opinion favouring the character of an ingenious Surgeon of that town, I had no motive left for hesitation, and my relation was accordingly settled there. Fresh instances of the BA-
RON'S

RON's civility, and even kindness, were now experienced. When I visited Hertford on my kinsman's account, the BARON invited me to dine with him, and I was permitted to introduce that kinsman to his family.

In the summer of 1774, Omiah, the native of Otaheite, who not long before arrived in England, was under Inoculation at Hertford. Curiosity invited several, and among them myself, to embrace this convenient opportunity of seeing this celebrated stranger: but I do not recollect that BARON DIMSDALE paid the compliment of invitation to make one at his table with the Russian ambassador and his lady, to any person besides myself; and I spent a great part of the day, consequently more than *an hour*, at his house, in a very agreeable manner.

To

To specify particularly all the opportunities I had of encreasing my acquaintance with BARON DIMSDALE, is not in my power ; but that a considerable degree of friendship, and even of freedom, must subsist betwixt us, is evident, from his introducing his son where we attended in consultation. My regard for him made me overlook small punctilios, and cheerfully acquiesce in any thing, which he thought might promote the interest of his family ; but such an intrusion would, I believe, in most cases, have been thought scarcely decent.

The reader must remember, that the BARON has positively declared that we never had *any epistolary correspondence*. There is a period of life, when early impressions are strongly retained, while recent events elude the memory. The BARON's
 declaration,

declaration, therefore, I should have charitably attributed to forgetfulness, had I not noticed his accuracy in recollecting some late private conversations; an accuracy equalled only by his promptitude in disclosing them. Of a frequent epistolary correspondence with him, I never boasted: as we often saw each other, and neither of us had much leisure for writing more than necessity required, such a correspondence was not likely to take place; but that letters have passed between us, I can safely assert.

The above described connexion, which, if it could not be deemed the strictest intimacy, must surely amount to more than a mere reciprocation of civilities, continued uninterrupted till the summer of 1778, during which, as the BARON justly observes, I was several times, I think thrice, at Hertford.

ford. My business there was this : a lady in that town had been for some time afflicted with a severe chronical indisposition. Dr. Walley, an eminent physician in the neighbourhood of Ware, attended her. For satisfaction of the family, a consultation was thought eligible ; but with Dr. Walley, though perhaps not his inferior in education, learning, reputation, or extent of practice, the BARON, from motives of private animosity, had always refused to consult : application to some other practitioner of course became necessary ; I was thought of, applied to, and attended. Perhaps I was treading on interdicted ground — entrance on the precincts of the BARON's medical domain, might possibly be a trespass not easy to be forgiven. Perhaps this was not the case ; but had I known in the most certain manner that it was, I must at all events have attended. Whatever may

be the opinion of others, it appears to me the indispensable duty of a Physician to attend where he is called ; and to prefer the safety of his fellow-creatures, to the fear of displeasing his friends on the one hand, or to the indulgence of personal antipathy or resentment against his enemies on the other.

Throughout this whole affair, I was unconscious of any intention of offence ; nor did it for some time appear that I had given any. By the BARON'S account, however, the satire of which acts both ways like a two-edged weapon, it seems as if I had a design of offending, if not in that way, yet in another ; either by *neglect* of him, considered as an intimate friend ; or else by impertinent *intrusion* on him, considered almost as a stranger. “ This last Summer,” says he, “ Dr. L——— has been several

“ times at Hertford; and once did me the
 “ favour to call at my house for a *few*
 “ *minutes*, when he introduced the subject
 “ of the Society, by saying, that their
 “ finances were very low, and there had
 “ been thoughts of making some alteration
 “ in their manner of proceeding; but for
 “ himself, as his friends were engaged in a
 “ dispute concerning the Institution, he
 “ had determined to take no part in it. I
 “ only replied, that I hoped whoever did,
 “ would keep to the point, and answer the
 “ objections that had been made without
 “ renewing assertions that had been shewn
 “ to be ill-founded. He answered, Certainly
 “ they should; for whoever neglected this,
 “ would only expose himself. No mention
 “ was made about the General Inoculation
 “ at Ware the preceding Summer, al-
 “ though I lived within two miles of the
 “ place, and he might of course conclude

“ that some information might have been
 “ received from me. Why, therefore, he
 “ neither chose at this interview, or at any
 “ other time to make enquiry of a person
 “ for whom he professes so high an esteem,
 “ who he knew did not approve of the In-
 “ stitution for General Inoculation, and
 “ who is persuaded would unite in pro-
 “ moting the plan if he was convinced
 “ of its public utility, seems somewhat
 “ mysterious.”

This certainly demands explanation.
 My first journey to Hertford was performed
 in haste. I was confined for time, and
 dined at an Inn. A near relation of the
 BARON'S, a courteous and amiable gen-
 tleman, afterwards politely upbraiding me
 for omitting to dine with him, I deter-
 mined at my next visit to make amends
 for the omission. After dinner, at this
 visit,

visit, the BARON sent a message with information, that he would call on me for half an hour's conversation. I returned for answer, " That being obliged to be in
 " London as soon as possible, I was preparing to set out, and would for expedition-sake immediately wait on him." I did so, and if he had really then conceived any disgust at my above-mentioned attendance with Dr. Walley, the emotions of it were so carefully suppressed, that no appearance of it could be discovered. Such unreservedness, on the contrary, prevailed in his behaviour, as tended to heighten my ideas of the sincerity and ardor of his Friendship. It is a maxim of the famous Cardinal de Retz, that " persons who are entrusted with affairs of
 " importance, are the least inclined to disclose trivial matters." BARON DIMSDALE enjoys the title of " Actual Coun-
 fellow

“fellow of State to the Autocratrix of all
 “the Russias ;” but supposing the aforesaid
 maxim to be just, his conduct on this oc-
 casion indicated, that his Imperial Patro-
 nefs had rather honoured him with titles,
 than confided to him secrets of state, or
 else that he afforded me the most unequi-
 vocal mark of his Esteem. During the
 “*few minutes*” we passed together, besides
 his share of that conversation which he has
 exposed in the passage just quoted from his
 “REMARKS ;” he introduced the circum-
 stance of a dispute, between himself and Dr.
 Walley. Whether, by apprizing me of his
 difference with that gentleman, he meant to
 intimate that my connections with both at
 the same time would be incompatible, I do
 not pretend to determine. But I will not
 imitate his example in publishing private
 discourse, in which the world in general has
 no interest. Suffice it to say, that all things
 considered,

considered, I think I have fully acquitted myself of the charges of neglecting him on one hand, or intruding on him on the other.

The reason why, at the above interview, I chose to say little on the subject of Inoculation, was this: Dr. Watkinson's opposition to the BARON's sentiments was mentioned by him with such evident displeasure, that I should have deemed it an unpardonable instance of rudeness to have told him in his own house, that I entertained the same opinions with his antagonist. The reason why I made no enquiry of him respecting the WARE Inoculation, is obvious: such enquiry must have been an unpolite adherence to what was plainly perceived to be a disagreeable topic: nor could I have derived any information from him concerning it, which had not already been

been derived from others. I had heard that there had been such an Inoculation, and on requesting the particulars, was informed as follows :

That a malignant Natural Small-Pox had raged, in WARE, all the Winter of 1776, and Spring of 1777, and destroyed about eighty persons—That the poorer class of people, sensible of the benefit of Inoculation, were eager to obtain it, but that the Parish for some time refused to assist them—That the remonstrances of some neighbouring Gentlemen at length prevailed, and the remaining subjects, in number about one hundred, were inoculated by a principal Surgeon of the Town. The operation was universally successful; and a disease which had continued with such fatality for several months, was totally exterminated in a few weeks. The BARON, in his REMARKS,

MARKS, asserts, that “ this Inoculation was
 “ conducted exactly in the same manner
 “ that he has recommended in his writings;
 “ and that such as were unwilling to submit
 “ to the operation, took all possible care
 “ to avoid intercourse with the infected.”
 Here, however, he is certainly mistaken.—
 Precautions or restrictions in a place already
 full of contagion, would have been absurd;
 nor indeed did any such exist. No persons,
 as I have been credibly informed, quitted
 the Town, or confined themselves to their
 houses, or in fact did any thing which they
 had not been used to do.*

Previous

* None of those few, who had not had the disease, and did not chuse to be inoculated, contracted it in the natural way, after the Inoculation took place.—If they unluckily had, Inoculation would have been blamed for it, though these very persons would have been subjected to as much or more hazard from the progress which the natural disease would certainly have made through the town. An Inoculation in a large town (supposed to be

D

Bedford)

Previous to my third visit to Hertford, I had engaged to dine with a gentleman near Ware, and had also promised to wait on Dr. Walley at Rush-Green, the place of his residence. When I came to Hertford, I accidentally met BARON DIMSDALE in the town. Notwithstanding the discourse which had passed betwixt us on Inoculation, no marks of distance or disgust were perceptible in his conduct: far, indeed, from any thing of that kind, he favoured me with what I think must at least bear the resemblance of a more than common respect. He had a patient, he said, a child, with whose parents I was ac-

Bedford) is severely but unjustly censured by the BARON, for the loss of fifty-nine persons (vide Monthly Review, vol. lviii. page 297); but before he had passed his censure, he should have proved, that these fifty-nine persons would not have died of the natural disease: perhaps he thinks all Inoculations criminal, but those that are made under his own Inspection.

quainted,

quainted, on whose case he wished me to be consulted; and had accordingly sent to apprize the family of my arrival. He then pressed me to dine with him in company with the friends of his above-mentioned patient; and my prior engagement, only, prevented me from complying with his apparently kind invitation.

As near as I can recollect, the foregoing passed as we walked together, and I think I accompanied him to his house. That day I dined with the gentleman to whom I was engaged, spent an hour with Dr. Walley, and returned in the evening to London. Whether the BARON's intimation already hinted, of his hostile situation with Dr. Walley, was intended as a kind of prohibitory clause or caveat against my cultivating an acquaintance with that gentleman, I cannot tell; sure I am, at that

time I had no conception that, in order to remain his Friend, it was necessary to avoid a civil intercourse with every one, whom he was pleased to think his Enemy. Some, however, have imagined, that my waiting on Dr. Walley that afternoon, was one of the circumstances that contributed to deprive me of his good opinion.*

After this, no personal interview occurred.—But my last, and most capital crime, indeed the only one I am accused of, was now committed.—That BARON DIMSDALE claimed an exclusive right, not only to the Theory and Practice of Inoculation, but also to every thing that bore relation to it, I could not suspect. Hu-

* Supposing this to be the case, Dr. Walley was much more liberal: he knew of my acquaintance with BARON DIMSDALE; but he did not, for that reason, decline commencing a friendship with me.

manity to the poor, as before observed, stimulated me to countenance a Charitable Institution, founded for their benefit; and although I knew he was a strenuous and powerful opponent of this Institution, I really thought I might venture to express my sentiments without asking his leave, provided they were expressed in a candid and liberal manner.* I presumed then to publish my "Letter to Sir Robert Barker, &c." but what was worse, I published it without consulting BARON DIMSDALE; and worse still, though with intent

* Some of my Friends have suggested, that, in spite of all appearances, my being an active Member of the Society for General Inoculation, must necessarily render me secretly disagreeable to the BARON. How far this might be the case, I know not; but I think Jealousy could not have any share in exciting his displeasure, since I never solicited the practice of Inoculation as a lucrative employment, nor discovered an Inclination to take any step that might diminish his share of business.

to

to preclude all occasion of offence, I subjoined that unlucky paragraph, which has operated so diametrically contrary to my intention.

The Specification of the foregoing particulars has been a painful, but absolutely necessary task; necessary, in order to prove that I once enjoyed the friendship of BARON DIMSDALE, or at least something that could not be distinguished from it. That I have now lost it, is plain: but I hope it will be admitted, that the means by which the loss was incurred, do not discover any marks of a wilful culpability. Let me, however, recapitulate my offences, *supposed*, and *declared*, in a regular climax—I visited a patient at Hertford in consultation with Dr. Walley: it was my duty to do so—In a conversation with BARON DIMSDALE, I did not accede to his sentiments of
the

the Society for inoculating the Poor: but could I help difference of opinion?—I waited on Dr. Walley: was it a crime to exchange civilities with any man?—Nothing passed at that interview injurious to the BARON: the Subjects of his difference with Dr. Walley, or even that of Inoculation, were not called in question, as several respectable Gentlemen, one a Medical Practitioner, who were all the time present, can testify.—I published a pamphlet in favour of the Society, without the cognizance of the BARON: it might be an act of temerity; but one should suppose every man has a right to publish his thoughts on matters that concern the Welfare of the Community.—To complete the measure of my Iniquities, I dared in that pamphlet to claim an acquaintance with the GREAT INOCULATOR.—These, or some of these, have procured me punish-

ment; I have been publicly disclaimed as a contemptible and insolent Pretender to connections with a character far my superior; a character, that not only derives Importance from popularity at home, but unites, in one person, the honorary employments of First Physician and Actual Counsellor of State to an Imperial Princess, at a thousand miles distance!—To inflict this punishment, the “REMARKS” seem principally to have been written.

F I N I S.