

Texts and Documents

A LETTER OF EDWARD JENNER (1749-1823)

by

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IN 1773 Edward Loveden Loveden of Buscot Park in Berkshire married Margaret Pryse, heiress of the thirty thousand acre Cardiganshire estate of Gogerddan. In consequence a considerable bulk of Loveden's papers are to be found in the hitherto unscheduled Gogerddan archive in the National Library of Wales. Although he has not been accorded the dignity of an entry in the Dictionary of National Biography, Loveden was a man of no mean standing. Born in 1750 he became M.P. for Abingdon, Sheriff of Breconshire, a Fellow of the Royal, Linnean and Horticultural Societies, and a member of the first Board of Agriculture. His broad range of interests are reflected in his correspondence which, in addition to the usual voluminous mass of estate material, includes a number of letters to and from *inter alia*, Sir John Sinclair, Sir Joseph Banks and William Cobbett. Of particular interest is a single letter from Edward Jenner despatched from Berkeley, Gloucestershire and dated April 17th 1805.

Dear Sir,

Will you permit me, on the score of *very old acquaintanceship*, to recommend to your attention my friend Dr. Adams as a successor to the late Dr. Woodville at the Smallpox Hospital of which charity I perceive you are a Governor.^{1,2} I can speak of him as a gentleman in every respect qualified to execute the duties of the important office he solicits. Allow me to add, Sir, that I hope and trust the mischievous practice of the inoculation of the smallpox will henceforward be totally prohibited at the Hospital, for while this is permitted we shall never be able to extinguish the smallpox in the Metropolis.³ With so much better effect have they managed the vaccine inocula-

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¹ Joseph Adams (1756–1818) was eventually elected physician to the Smallpox Hospital in St. Pancras in 1805. Besides editing the *Medical and Physical Journal*, he was the author of several books including *Observations on Morbid Poisons, Phagedema and Cancer* (1795) and *A Popular View of Vaccine Inoculation* (1807). As a friend and supporter of the great John Hunter he also published, in 1816, *Memoirs of the life and doctrines of the late John Hunter Esq.*

² Adams' predecessor William Woodville (1752–1805) had been elected to the Physicianship in 1791. Initially hostile to Jenner's theory of the efficacy of vaccination from cow-pox inoculant he became an enthusiastic devotee, publishing *Reports of a series of Inoculations for the Variolae Vaccinae or Cow-Pox with remarks and observations on this disease considered as a substitute for the smallpox* (1799). A Fellow of the Linnean Society, Woodville was deeply interested in the medicinal value of plants and the fourth of his volumes entitled *Medical Botany* appeared in 1794.

³ During the eighteenth century attempts had been made to immunise against smallpox by intentionally infecting a healthy person with "matter" taken from a sick one. However, the infection

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tion on the continent than we have in this country that gave birth to its discovery that in many of their large cities and in wide extended districts the smallpox is already entirely exterminated. The same may be said in all the populous parts of America and in most of our settlements in the East Indies.⁴ I still continue to flatter myself that Parliament will by some means or other exert its wisdom and humanity in giving its sanction to a plan for staying this horrid pestilence in our own country, a pestilence which I should find no difficulty in proving in a direct or indirect way, sent annually at least an hundred thousand of his Majesties subjects prematurely to the grave.⁵ We bar our doors against the intrusion of foreign plagues in the strongest manner by the laws of quarantine and yet suffer this to remain among us unmolested. We see, as it were, our house on fire, and with *buckets* in our hands stand idly gazing at the flames. For God's sake, my dear Sir, as a member of the British Senate, think of this. Pray pardon the liberty I have taken.

I have the honour to be, dear Sir,

Your very obt. and faithful humble servant,

Edwd. Jenner.

which this method induced sometimes proved severe and occasionally fatal. Despite Jenner's demonstration of the efficacy of cow-pox inoculant against smallpox, many of the vaccinations carried out by William Woodville and George Pearson at the Smallpox Hospital had been ineffective, perhaps due to contamination of the cowpox inoculant with smallpox virus.

⁴ Although vaccination became compulsory in Bavaria in 1807, Denmark 1810 and Sweden in 1814, it was not so in Britain until 1853.

⁵ The Royal Jennerian Society had been established in 1803, being replaced by the Government sponsored National Vaccine Establishment in 1808. Jenner himself was voted a Parliamentary grant of £10,000 in 1802 followed by a further £20,000 four years later.