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‘THE VACCINATION CONTROVERSY.’

In view of the approaching change in the Vaccination Laws, two recent publications of Messrs. Swan Sonnenschein & Co. are of interest. The more important of the two is a volume entitled “A Century of Vaccination,” by W. Scott Tebb, M.A., M.D., surgeon to the Boscombe Hospital. This may be regarded as a standard work for the medical profession and those who wish to acquire a knowledge of vaccination in both its technical and popular aspect. The other publication is a shilling pamphlet, by Dr. Russel Wallace, entitled “Vaccination a Delusion: Its Penal Enforcement a Crime,” avowedly written with the intention of influencing Parliament.

Though both writers are hostile to vaccination, their high scientific attainments ought to command for their books the attention of pro-vaccinists. Dr. Tebb’s work may be recommended to medical students who are inclined to regard a belief in vaccination as a necessary accompaniment of professional competency, while Professor Wallace’s is more suitable for laymen apt to be misled by the erroneous idea that scientific opinion is overwhelmingly pro-vaccinist.

The propagandist character of Dr. Wallace’s book is indicated by the preface, wherein he calls for speedy abolition of “the unjust, cruel, and pernicious vaccination laws.” Dr. Tebb, on the other hand, “allows within limit the truth of homoprophylaxy or homœoprophylaxis,” and confines his partizanship to his preface. This is contrary to the usual practice, which is to make a great display of impartiality in the preface, and in the book itself get round the unsuspecting readers by degrees.

This much-disputed vaccination question supplies some good material to the student of human nature. We have illustrated, on the “pro” side, the tendency of corporate societies to stick to practices consecrated by time, if not by experience, the abandonment of which might throw doubt on the omniscience and finality of development of corporate bodies in general. But the slander that the financial aspect of compulsory vaccination has any weight with the profession, meets with contempt from all decent people. It is purely a question of respect for decelerations to which the profession has committed itself. When it chooses to abandon vaccination it will, just as it has abandoned blood-letting, but not before. Blood-letting was not abandoned in deference to popular clamour, or because Parliament had not endowed it, but simply because there was not a sufficient number of persons strong enough and patient enough to be bled with impunity. The title of the leading medical journal, the *Lancet*, shows that the profession is not ashamed to own that it spilt more blood in the past than it does now.

Then, again, on the “pro” side we have the mass of conservative opinion, which is just as interesting to the student of human nature. The class which violently resist a change in law or custom, until it is accomplished in spite of them, and afterwards as violently support what they previously condemned, and support it for no other reason than that it is accomplished, is just the class which regards compulsory vaccination as a mainstay of the British constitution. In the opinion of this class it is just as reasonable to suppose that sticking a little filth into a baby’s arm will assist it in after-years to resist disease as it is to suppose that baptizing a baby will promote its spiritual development. Of course, this is all nonsense. The

difference between a baptized and an unbaptized person is evident at a glance to the dullest observer, whereas nobody can tell by looking at a man whether he has been vaccinated once, twice, or not at all.

On the “anti” side human nature is more interesting still. Why should Methodists, Baptists, and other peculiar people, for instance, object so strongly to have their children vaccinated? Surely Churchmen, who are nearly all pro-vaccinists, have just as much regard for their children’s health! The Nonconformist tradition explains it all. Anti-vaccination has been carefully handed down from generation to generation of Dissenters. They happen to have got hold of a good tradition for once—one of the very few they have.

We should like to see both opponents and supporters of vaccination in a position to give or attempt a scientific justification for the faith that is in them. At present few, on either side, think of anything of the kind. Blind prejudice reigns almost supreme. Therefore we do trust that these two books will have a good circulation, especially Dr. Tebb’s. The letter-to-the-editor man will find it a rich storehouse of facts and arguments with which to bombard his opponents. It shows conclusively that, whatever merits there may be in vaccination for certain people, compulsory vaccination ought to be reserved for the criminal population.

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2017.