

Transcription, September 2020:

*The Times* (London) No. 35620 (13 Sept. 1898): 13c.

[p. 13]

‘The Vaccination Act.’

To the Editor of the *Times*.

Sir,—It seems desirable that the letter of Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace in your issue of the 1st inst. should receive some reply, or it may be assumed that none can be given to it. This is the more necessary, since the valuable contributions Mr. Wallace has made as a naturalist to our knowledge may give his statements on the subject of vaccination a weight to which, I venture to say, they are not entitled. That he has so fully studied the subject, as he claims to have done, that he should have also given evidence before the Royal Commissioners and have published “a little book” on it, may be considered additional reasons for the desirability of properly appreciating the value of his experience and assertions.

With a good deal that Mr. Wallace says, especially as to the importance of securing accurate statistics and of a careful comparison of them when obtained, every one will cordially agree. It is only when we come to test Mr. Wallace’s principles by his practice, as he admits it is impossible to do in the columns of a newspaper, that we are impressed with the illustration his book affords of the well-known fact that theory and practice do not always correspond. In some letters to an evening contemporary I have indicated a few of the many points in which Mr. Wallace’s statistics fail to support his very dogmatic assertions. And the fact that when before the Royal Commission, in whose report his evidence occupies the portentous length of over 40 closely-printed foolscap pages, to say nothing of a series of statistical diagrams, Mr. Wallace was obliged to withdraw one of these diagrams, which he had introduced to the Commissioners as “the most important of all,” when grave errors in it were pointed out to him, should, one might have thought, have made him a little more moderate than he is in his wholesale denunciations of those who differ with him.

Mr. Wallace appears to have only discovered three cases in which his “little book” has converted strong believers in vaccination to his way of thinking. It would not be surprising if a much larger number had been led by his uncompromising advocacy to accept his assertions that he is absolutely right and that the Commissioners are as absolutely wrong. To any one who wishes for an interesting psychological study of how little the modern equivalent for what the Latin poet called the “ingenuous arts” may do to soften the ferocity of scientific “manners,” I would strongly recommend the perusal of Mr. Wallace’s “little book.” The reader may not in all cases be able to unravel the intricacies of the author’s statistical paradoxes, but, if he has any appreciation of the moderation of language which generally distinguishes scientific men when discussing debateable problems, he cannot but experience a feeling of profound regret that a man of Mr. Wallace’s eminent capabilities should have deserted the paths of inquiry which he has pursued with so much advantage to science for others in which his intellectual idiosyncrasies and emotional susceptibility serve only to mislead him into fallacies which men of much less originality can easily perceive and avoid.

Yours truly,

Francis T. Bond, M.D. Lond., Hon. Secretary, Jenner Society.  
Gloucester, Sept. 6.