

XVII. *A short Account of the Manner of inoculating the Small Pox, on the Coast of Barbary, and at Bengal, in the East Indies, extracted from a Memoir written in Dutch, by the Reverend Mr. Chais, at the Hague : by M. Maty, M. D. S. R. S.*

Read April  
14, 1768.

HAVING long thought that the Arabs, who, about the middle of the sixth century, were the first who wrote upon the small-pox, were likewise the first inventors of the method to prevent the fatal consequences of that cruel disorder, I was very desirous to get what informations I could concerning the introduction of inoculation in Africa, and in the East Indies.

About twenty years ago, Cassen Aga, a Tripolitan ambassador at London, informed the people about him, that inoculation was universally practised, as well at his court, as at Tunis and Algiers; but that no certain account could be given, either of the introducers of the method, or of the place from whence it took its rise.

One of the chief ministers of state in Holland was so good, on this information, and at my desire, to send a few queries on that subject, drawn up by myself, to a gentleman, who, for several years, has resided with a public character at Algiers. The following is a summary of his answers to my queries.

“ The small-pox is, as well as in Holland, a contagious distemper at Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli,  
“ and

“ and fully as destructive. In order to avoid the  
 “ bad consequences of the natural disorder, many  
 “ people have recourse to inoculation, which there  
 “ is performed in a very different manner from what  
 “ is used in our country. The person, who intends  
 “ to be inoculated, having found out a house,  
 “ where the small-pox is, and is of a good sort;  
 “ goes to the bed of the sick person, if he is old  
 “ enough, or, if a child, to one of his relations; and  
 “ speaks to him in the following manner; *I am come*  
 “ *here to buy the small-pox*: the answer is, *buy if you*  
 “ *please*. A sum of money is accordingly given, and  
 “ one, three, or five pustules (for the number must  
 “ always be an odd one, not exceeding five), extract-  
 “ ed whole, and full of matter. These are immedi-  
 “ ately rubbed upon the skin of the hand, between  
 “ the thumb and fore-finger. This is sufficient to  
 “ communicate the infection; and as soon as it be-  
 “ gins to take effect, the inoculated patient is put to  
 “ bed, carefully covered with red blankets; and  
 “ heating medicines are given him with some honey  
 “ of roses. He is allowed goat’s broth for his nou-  
 “ rishment, and for his drink an infusion of some  
 “ herbs; notwithstanding this treatment, it seldom  
 “ happens that the small pox procured in this man-  
 “ ner has any bad consequences; and almost never  
 “ that any body dies of it; but hitherto the propor-  
 “ tion of the mortality in the natural, to that in the  
 “ artificial way, has not been ascertained. Lastly,  
 “ though the time when this practice was introdu-  
 “ ced in Africa be unknown, yet it is there very old,  
 “ and the Arabs are generally thought to have been  
 “ the inventors of it.”

From this account it plainly appears; 1. that in Africa the operation is performed as it is in Wales, by the rubbing in of the matter, and that this is done to prevent the fatal consequences too often following the natural infection; 2. that this inoculation is generally successful, notwithstanding the heat of the climate, and the bad management of the patients; and 3. that the origin of it is very ancient, and ascribed to the Arabs.

Before I had received these informations from Algiers, I had engaged some friends settled in three different parts of the East Indies, to procure me some accounts from thence, upon the same subject. I, at last, received an answer from one of them, who resides at Patna, in the province of Behaar, 180 leagues from Bengal.

“ I have sent for several physicians, to be informed  
 “ of the things you seem desirous to know about ino-  
 “ culation; the practice is hitherto not used in this  
 “ province; but having met with a Bengalian  
 “ doctor, he gave me the following account.

“ Though the first introduction of the operation at  
 “ Bengal is now unknown, it has been in use in that  
 “ country for a very long time, and is performed in  
 “ two different ways.

“ For the first, some of the variolous matter of  
 “ a good kind having been gathered is kept for use.  
 “ When a child is to be inoculated, the skin between  
 “ some of the fingers is pricked by means of two  
 “ small needles joined to one another. After having  
 “ rubbed in a little of the matter upon the spot, a cir-  
 “ cle is made by means of several punctures, of the  
 “ bigness of a common pustule, and matter is again  
 “ rubbed over it. The wound is then dressed with  
 “ lint;

“ lint; a fever ensues, and after some days, the  
 “ eruption, which if the fever has been strong is ob-  
 “ served not to be very copious. To excite the fe-  
 “ ver, the patient is made to bathe in a tub of  
 “ water.

“ As this way of managing the operation is very  
 “ painful, a more easy one has been invented for peo-  
 “ ple of quality and substance. A little of the matter  
 “ is mixed with sugar, and swallowed by the child in  
 “ any sweet and pleasant liquid. The same effect  
 “ is produced, but the first method is thought to be  
 “ the best.”

The writer of this letter ought certainly to have been more particular in his inquiries; he might have asked whether any preparation previous to inoculation is used, and of what kind; what treatment the patients undergo after the operation; and lastly, how far the event warrants the goodness of the method. It appears however, from what he says, that the people of Bengal have for a long while had recourse to inoculation, in order to avoid the dreadful consequences of the natural distemper in their country; and it is to be wished that farther inquiries be made, both there and elsewhere, about a subject which so nearly concerns the good of mankind.