

(No. 70.)



1869.

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T A S M A N I A.

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V A C C I N A T I O N.

PETITION FROM EDWARD SWARBRECK HALL.

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Presented by Mr. C. Meredith, September 7, 1869, and ordered by the House to be printed.



*To the Honorable the Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly of Tasmania, in Parliament assembled.*

The humble Petition of the Undersigned.

RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH :

THAT your Petitioner has been a legally qualified Medical Practitioner for upwards of forty-two years, during six of which he practised in Liverpool in England, and for the other thirty-six in various parts of Tasmania.

THAT your Petitioner has made Small-pox and Vaccination a special study from the very commencement of his professional career.

THAT Small-pox, previous to the discovery of its prophylactic Vaccination by the immortal Jenner, was the most destructive of all diseases which afflict the human race, and that no community unprotected by the efficient vaccination of all its members can reasonably hope long to escape its terrible visitation.

THAT wherever Vaccination has been properly carried out Small-pox has been virtually extinguished.

THAT unfortunately England, in which the discovery of Vaccination was made, has done less to enforce its practice than almost any other European country.

THAT, nevertheless, badly as the practice of Vaccination has hitherto been enforced in England, about fifty-six thousand lives are now annually saved by it from death by the loathsome and painful disease of Small-pox. At the same time, from three to four thousand deaths, on an average of many years, continue to disgrace the death-rolls of England and Wales.

THAT so late as 1863 about 6000 deaths were registered in England and Wales from Small-pox.

THAT the panic created thereby in Tasmania at that time caused a Committee of Inquiry to be elected by your Honorable House, which Committee reported:—"That the present law relating to Vaccination is altogether unsatisfactory, useless, and inoperative, and there exists a large and most dangerous proportion of the children in the Colony unprotected by Vaccination," &c.

THAT, consequent upon this Report, the draft of an Amended Compulsory Vaccination Bill was submitted to your Honorable House by the late Member for Hobart Town, Maxwell Miller, Esquire, but withdrawn by general wish, for the purpose of trying if the voluntary action of the people would not suffice to ensure the perfect Vaccination of the children were public provision made for gratuitous Vaccination throughout the Island.

THAT the measure then adopted to effect this object, partially withdrawn in September, 1864, and altogether abrogated in January, 1867, while they secured the Vaccination of some 7500 persons who would not otherwise have been vaccinated, yet failed to obtain the Vaccination of nine-tenths of the children born within the period.

THAT, for some years before any public provision for gratuitous Vaccination was made by the English Legislature, the deaths annually from Small-pox numbered nearly 12,000, though private Vaccination had been practised extensively for from thirty to forty years.

THAT from 1841—when the first public provision was made for gratuitous Vaccination without rendering it compulsory—to 1853, when the first Compulsory Vaccination Act became law, the annual deaths from Small-pox fell to less than one-half of the former period,—i.e., 5521.

THAT from 1853 to 1863, when the compulsory Vaccination Law existed, though imperfectly administered, the deaths from Small-pox fell to 3351 annually.

That the latter Act and its working was never satisfactory to the medical profession, and in 1867 the amended Act now in operation was passed.

That in Ireland and Scotland previous to 1863 the death-rate from Small-pox was about three times greater even than in England.

That in 1863 Compulsory Vaccination Acts for Ireland and Scotland passed the Imperial Legislature, and having been properly worked by efficient administration Small-pox has well nigh become extinct in both countries; the deaths in Ireland in 1868 having been only nine, and in Scotland only twenty, while in one town alone in England, Sheffield, in the last six months of the year, nearly three hundred deaths took place. The capital of Ireland, Dublin, had not one death in 1868, and only one in 1867.

That the panic in Tasmania since the commencement of the present year, created by the prevalence of Small-pox in Victoria, has again shown the worthlessness of the existing Compulsory Vaccination Act of Tasmania, and the inadequacy of the measures instituted by the Government for the Vaccination of the people.

That the operations for Vaccination performed at the Public Hospitals, Hobart Town, Launceston, and Campbell Town, in 1867-8, amounted to only 53, many of which were never seen on the eighth day, and others of which proved unsuccessful, and therefore private medical practitioners could not obtain the required supplies of fresh lymph to enable them to vaccinate in their respective districts.

That in many populous country districts no Vaccinations whatever were performed from September, 1864, when the office of Public Vaccinators in rural districts was abolished, until after the panic of the present year set in, and were then dependent on private practitioners in Hobart Town for their supplies of fresh lymph, as were also all the Public Hospitals in the Island.

That up to the 17th of August of the present year only 329 operations for Vaccination were performed at the Hospital in Hobart Town, 173 of which were never seen again, 19 unsuccessful, and 12 others only partially successful. Only 18 were under six months, and 214 were above two years old, many whole large families being included in the number.

That one private practitioner alone in the same period vaccinated 624 persons in Hobart Town, mostly long neglected large families of the higher classes of society.

That of 1443 operations for Vaccination in Tasmania, inclusive of the foregoing which I have tabulated, only 49 were under six months old, that being the age before which the existing Tasmanian law requires all children to be vaccinated. At the same time the registered births in 1868 were 2990.

That here, as everywhere else, the voluntary system has utterly failed to keep the children of the Colony protected by Vaccination from the possible invasion of Small-pox. In New South Wales, where public Vaccination has long been provided gratuitously, but not compulsorily enforced (no less than twelve Vaccinators in Sydney alone), out of 17,223 registered births in 1868 there remained 11,119 unvaccinated as stated by the official Report.

That Small-pox never yet having existed in Tasmania, its insular character, were Vaccination properly enforced, would keep so dangerous a visitor from ever getting a footing in the Island from lack of susceptible subjects.

That the existing Compulsory Vaccination Act being inoperative and useless, your Petitioner prays that your Honorable House will pass an Amended Compulsory Act, based on those which have achieved such satisfactory results in Ireland and Scotland, and embodying such administrative arrangements as the peculiar condition of the Colonists require, the spirit of the British Vaccination laws being,—“That thoroughly good Vaccination, provided at the public expense, under proper and well notified arrangements, should everywhere and gratis be within reach of all persons who may choose to avail themselves of it,” not as a pauper provision, but as a wise precaution of State medicine for the general welfare of the people. *Salus populi lex suprema est.*

And your Petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

EDWARD SWARBRECK HALL.