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ZABDIEL BOYLSTON, INOCULATOR,  
AND  
THE EPIDEMIC OF SMALLPOX IN BOSTON IN 1721.  
By REGINALD H. FITZ, M. D., Boston, Mass.



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ZABDIEL BOYLSTON, INOCULATOR,  
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THE EPIDEMIC OF SMALLPOX IN BOSTON IN 1721.

By REGINALD H. FITZ, M. D., Boston, Mass.

The recent centennial celebration, January 6, 1911, of the [315] Boylston Medical Society of the Harvard Medical School, directly leads to the thought who was Boylston whose name is so intimately connected in Massachusetts with towns, buildings, libraries, schoolhouses, corporations, associations, streets, railroad stations, charities, professorships and prizes? "A name," according to John Quincy Adams,<sup>1</sup> "which if publick benefits can impart a title to remembrance, New England will not easily forget: a name to the benevolence, publick spirit and genuine patriotism of which this University, the neighboring metropolis, and this whole nation have long had, and still have many reasons to attest: a name, less distinguished by stations of splendour, than by deeds of virtue; and better known to this people by blessings enjoyed than by favours granted: a name, in fine, which if not encircled with the external radiance of popularity brightly beams with the inward lustre of beneficence."

The Boylstons thus eulogized were members of a family descended<sup>2</sup> from Thomas Boylston, who at the age of twenty years came to this country in 1635 and settled in Watertown, Massachusetts. His son Thomas, born in 1644-5, married Mary Gardner of Muddy River, then a part of Boston, but set off in 1705 as the town of Brookline. This Thomas was the earliest physician and surgeon of Muddy River and died in

<sup>1</sup> Inaugural oration, when installed Boylston Professor of Rhetorick and Oratory, in June, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> The Vinton Memorial, 1858.



[315] 1695 at the age of fifty. It is unknown where and how he received his medical training, unless, in part, in the Narragansett War in which he is reported to have been engaged. There is, however, no verification of the statement by Thacher<sup>3</sup> that he was a native of England and obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine from Oxford. In his married life of thirty years there were born to him twelve children, the sixth being Zabdiel Boylston, who has gained undying fame as the founder in this country of inoculation as a preventive of the disastrous results of smallpox. Although other descendants of the first Thomas Boylston, through their benefactions and achievements, have been more immediately concerned with conferring popular distinction upon the name, it is especially among physicians that the name and fame of Boylston should be connected closest with the memory of this most meritorious physician of his day in America. This is all the more fitting since his nephew Thomas Boylston and his grandnephew, Ward Nicholas Boylston, in announcing their medical benefactions and gifts call particular attention to the great service rendered to humanity by their kinsman. Thomas Boylston's intended benefactions proved valueless in consequence of business reverses which caused the loss of his fortune. Ward Nicholas Boylston, the wealthy merchant, became a patron of medical education through his gifts to Harvard University, and the medical student's society is his namesake. Zabdiel Boylston, however, was a medical hero, of service to all mankind and his example should ever be memorable.

[316] Zabdiel Boylston was born in 1679 and died in 1766 in his eighty-seventh year. He was educated in medicine by his father and by Dr. Cutler, a physician of some note in Boston. He was not a graduate of Harvard College, from which his eldest son Zabdiel was graduated in 1724, afterwards going to England, where he died. Dr. Boylston attracted no especial attention until 1721. He then was living near Dock Square, not far from the residence of the Reverend Benjamin Colman,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> American Medical Biography, 1828, I, 185.

<sup>4</sup> Some *Observations on the New Method of Receiving the Small-Pox by Ingrafting or Inoculating*. By Mr. Colman, 1721.



pastor of the Brattle Street Church, who refers to "my house [316] (which faces into the Doctor's yard)" and from which he was able to observe the behavior of the doctor's patients. At this time he was presumably one of the practitioners of medicine referred to by Dr. Douglass,<sup>5</sup> who states that there were fourteen apothecary shops in Boston and that every practitioner dispensed his own medicines. Indeed, he is called "an apothecary by an anonymous writer not friendly disposed to his cause. It is evident, however, from a communication to the *Boston News-Letter* of July 17-24, 1721, No. 912, signed W. Philanthropos, but written in the manner of Dr. Douglass, that his practice was also surgical. In this he is called a "*Cutter for the Stone*" and is spoken of as illiterate, ignorant and the producer of a "*dangerous quack advertisement*," with but little experience in smallpox and without having at the time a patient with the smallpox under his charge.

Further evidence of Dr. Boylston's surgical qualifications is to be found in the Province Laws.<sup>7</sup> In these it appears that in 1707 he treated Captain Gridley for a broken arm accidentally received while in the expedition to Nova Scotia. In the same year he treated Mary Lyon, "grievously wounded by a Negroe Man," and in 1712 he cared for Joseph Smith, a soldier in the "late designed expedition to Canada." But whatever may have been the other medical or surgical qualifications of Dr. Boylston, they are wholly subordinate to his great work in beginning and continuing the inoculation of smallpox.

Towards the end of April, 1721, Boston for the sixth time was invaded by this disease. It had then a population of about 11,000. Aeneas Salter, at the close of the epidemic, was employed by the selectmen to make a scrutiny of the inhabitants

<sup>5</sup> Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc., I, 2d Series, 1884-85, 44.

<sup>6</sup> *A Letter from one in the Country, to his Friend in the City: In Relation to their Distresses occasioned by the doubtful and prevailing Practice of the Inoculation Of The Small-Pox, 1721, 3.*

<sup>7</sup> The Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, Vols. VIII and IX.



[316] and found<sup>8</sup> "that the number of persons who continued in Boston (many fled into the country) were 10,567, whereof about 700 escaped; the small-pox decumbents had been 5,989, whereof 894 died, which is nearly one in seven." Of the previous epidemics that of 1678 had been especially fatal and that of 1702 was of recent memory to many of the inhabitants. Since 1702 the population had nearly doubled in number and a generation of unprotected children had been born. It was announced in the *Boston News-Letter* of April 13-17, 1721, No. 893, that twenty or thirty deaths from smallpox were taking place daily at Barbadoes. In the following week it was stated<sup>9</sup> that the Saltertudas fleet had arrived bringing the disease to the town. Sewall writes in his diary:<sup>10</sup>

April 15th. . . . Hold another Council about giving Liberty to Mr. Frizzle's Ship from Salt-Tartuda (Tortugas) to come up.

On the 8th of May it is learned:<sup>11</sup>

. . . . whereas a Certain Negro man is now Sick of the Small pox in the Town who came from Tertudos in His Majesties Ship Seahorse which renders it very likely that that distemper may now be on board that Ship. Therefor for the preservation of the Inhabitants of this Town,

Voted that John Clark, Esqre., be Desired to go on board his Majesties Ship Seahorse and Report in what State of health or Sickness the Ship's Company are in, Espetially with respect to the Small Pox or other Contagious Sickness.

There being a negro servant sick with smallpox at the house of Captain Paxton, near the South Battery, the first infected, a nurse was ordered to attend the patient and a watch was placed at the door. On the 12th of May it is recorded that the Seahorse is infected with smallpox and the greater part of its company were on a cruise. "Sundry other Sick on Shore, So that there is not aboue ten or fifteen Effective men on Board." The ship was ordered to Bird Island to prevent the spread of

<sup>8</sup> A Summary, Historical and Political, of The First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present States of the British Settlements in North America. William Douglass, M. D., MDCCLX, Vol. II, 396.

<sup>9</sup> *Boston News-Letter*, April 17-24, 1721, No. 894.

<sup>10</sup> 5 Mass. Hist. Coll., 7, 288.

<sup>11</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, 1721, 81.



the infection. A town-meeting was held on this day and it was [316] voted <sup>12</sup> to seek the advice of the Governor and Council with reference to sending the Seahorse with its two or three cases of smallpox to Spectacle Island, "Pursuant to a Law of this Province to prevent (God willing) the Spreading of the Smal Pox in this Town & Province."

By the middle of May, when the ship Francis left for London, she carried the report that the disease was rife, although in the *News-Letter* of May 15-22, 1721, No. 898, it was stated that on the 20th of May there was but one case and that in the house where the disease first appeared. Nevertheless, a committee appointed to prepare instructions for the Boston representatives in the coming session of the General Assembly proposed,<sup>13</sup> May 22, 1721, among other recommendations,

"That they promote some further Law Effectually to enable the Select men of Each Town to prevent the spreading of any Infectious Sickness among them." A week later it was admitted <sup>14</sup> that on May 27 there were eight cases of the disease, one in Bennett street, three in Tremont street, two in School street, one in Batterymarch street and one in Winter street. On the 5th of June the school was transferred <sup>15</sup> to the Representatives' room in the Town-House.

The epidemic increased in severity and raged throughout [317] the fall and winter till the following January. The disease extended also to the neighboring towns, especially to Roxbury, Charlestown and Cambridge. In Charlestown it was reported <sup>16</sup> that there were "lately" 100 deaths and that there were not more than ten or twelve families which had not suffered from smallpox.

The physicians of Boston at that time whose names have come down to us, were Drs. Archibald, Boylston, Clark, Cutler, Dalhonde, Davis, Douglass, Perkins, Williams and White. Of these Drs. Clark, Douglass and Williams were liberally educated, Clark and Williams being graduates in Arts of Harvard

<sup>12</sup> Boston Town Records, 1721, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Boston Town Records, 1721, 154.

<sup>14</sup> *News-Letter*, May 22-27, 1721, No. 899.

<sup>15</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, 1721, 83.

<sup>16</sup> *New England Courant*, Jan. 15-22, 1722, No. 25.



[317] College. Dr. Archibald had been surgeon of an English war-ship, Dr. Dalhonde was a Frenchman who had seen service in foreign wars, and Dr. Cutler was favorably mentioned by the leading clergymen, while Dr. Perkins was a pious neighbor of Cotton Mather and of satisfactory skill. Several of these physicians in after years were members of the first medical society established in this country.

At the outset of the epidemic the best educated physician of the town was Dr. William Douglass, a Scotchman of about thirty years of age who had been in Boston some three years and had brought letters of recommendation to Increase and Cotton Mather and to Benjamin Colman. These gentlemen spoke well of him and were of some help to him, although but little general notice was taken of him until he made himself known through his opposition to inoculation. He had received his education in Edinburgh, Paris and Leyden and was the only physician in Boston at the time who had received the degree of Doctor of Medicine, although it does not appear when and where he obtained it. He was a well-read man of intelligence and ability, but was conceited, injudicious, inaccurate and contentious. Dr. Samuel A. Green<sup>17</sup> regards him as "a man of fine intellectual parts and a versatile writer. He knew astronomy and could calculate eclipses; he had a taste for natural history, and was withal an excellent botanist. He studied his medical cases, and took careful notes by the bedside."

In the earlier part of his career, with which we are especially concerned, his failings were more conspicuous than his virtues. A forceful man he soon attained an influential position among his fellows. At first he was favored by the ministers, but as he lost their esteem he became a bitter and violent opponent of their views. According to the Reverend Peter Thacher,<sup>18</sup>

The greater part of the physicians in town & those of most eminence reprobated inoculation in the strongest terms. Douglass placed himself at the head and did not hesitate to use any

<sup>17</sup> History of Medicine in Massachusetts, a Centennial Address delivered before the Massachusetts Medical Society at Cambridge, 7 June, 1881.

<sup>18</sup> *Massachusetts Magazine*, 1789, I, 776.



weapons lawful or unlawful to destroy his antagonists. This [317] man, who had in perfection the hungry penetration and the unrelenting bitterness of his native country (not America), left no method untried to load Dr. B. with obloquy and prevent the success of his practice.

Early in the epidemic he was apparently on good terms with Cotton Mather and had lent him certain numbers or a volume of the Philosophical Transactions published by the Royal Society, of which, at the time, he appeared to have had the only copy in Boston. Later another copy was obtained by John Campbell, publisher of the *News-Letter*, although he did not make its presence known<sup>19</sup> until five months after he had received it.

The volume was entitled "Philosophical Translations, Giving Some Account of the Present Undertakings, Studies and Labours of the Ingenious in Many Considerable Parts of the World. Vol. XXIX, for the Years 1714, 1715, 1716. London, 1717."

It may be that Douglass supposed that Mather's interest would lie especially in article IV of No. 339 for April, May and June, 1714, entitled, "An Extract of Several Letters from Cotton Mather, D. D., to John Woodward, M. D., and Richard Waller, Esq., S. R. Secr." There were twelve of these letters on various subjects communicated in 1712. Mather's attention, however, was fixed on article V, "*An Account or History, of the Procuring the SMALL POX by Incision or Inoculation: As it has for some time been practised at Constantinople. Being the Extract of a Letter from Emanuel Timonius, Oxon. & Patav., M. D., S. R. S., dated at Constantinople, December, 1713. Communicated to the Royal Society by John Woodward, M. D., Profes. Med. Gresh. and S. R. S.*" He also undoubtedly studied with care article No. 347 for the months of January, February and March, 1716, entitled, "*Nova & TUTA Variolas excitandi per Transplantationem Methodus nuper inventa & in usum Tracta: Per Jacobum Pylarinum, Venetum, M. D., & Reipublicae Venetae apud Smyrnenses nuper Consulem.*" These articles gave a statement of the method and successful result of the treatment of smallpox in Turkey and

<sup>19</sup> *News-Letter*, 1722, March 5-12, No. 945.



[317] neighboring countries by inoculating healthy individuals with the disease.

Cotton Mather was quick to see the bearing of these articles on existing conditions, and the following entry appears in his published diary, for excerpts from which I am indebted to Mr. Worthington C. Ford, of the Massachusetts Historical Society:

May 26, 1721. G. D. The grievous Calamity of the *Small-Pox* has now Entered the Town. The practice of conveying and suffering the *Small-pox* by *Inoculation* has never been used in *America*, nor indeed in our Nation. But how many Lives might be saved by it, if it were practised. I will procure a Consult of our Physicians, and lay the matter before them.

He prepared a letter to the physicians of Boston, giving an abstract<sup>20</sup> of these communications and suggesting some action. As this letter was the beginning of the battle which raged so [318] violently the following extract from it is taken from "A Vindication of the *Ministers* of Boston from the *Abuses* and *Scandals* lately cast upon them in Diverse Printed Papers. 1722, 7."

I will only say (writes the Doctor) that inasmuch as the Practice of suffering and preventing the *Small-Pox* in the way of *Inoculation* has never yet (as far as I have heard) been introduced into our *Nation*; where there are so many that would give *great Sums*, to have their Lives insur'd, from the *dangers* of this dreadful *Distemper*, nor has ever any one in all *America* ever yet, made the tryal of it (tho' we have several *Africans* among us, as I now find, who tryed it in their own *Country*) I cannot but move that it be *warily* proceeded in. I durst not yet engage, that the *Success* of the tryal here will be the same, as has hitherto been in the other *Hemisphere*. But I am very confident, no person would miscarry in it, but what must most certainly have miscarried upon taking it in the *Common way*. And I would humbly *advise* that it be never made, but under the management of a *Skilful Physician* who will wisely prepare the Body for it before he performs the Operation. *Gentlemen*, my request

<sup>20</sup> To be found in "Some ACCOUNT of what is said of Inoculating or Transplanting the Small Pox by the Learned Dr. Emanuel Timonius, and Jacobus Pylarinus. With Some Remarks thereon. To which are added, A Few *Quaeries* in Answer to the Scruples of many about the Lawfulness of this Method. Published by Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, 1721."



is, that you would *meet for a Consultation* upon this Occasion, [318] and to *deliberate* upon it, that whoever first begins this practise, (if you approve that it should be begun at all) may have the concurrence of his *worthy Brethren* to fortify him in it.

This letter was dated June 6, 1721, and was directed to one of the physicians, a preacher and also "A Worthy School-master<sup>21</sup> (whom we did not reproach for going out of his Line for practising Physick)," with the request that he should communicate it to the physicians, with a separate note to one or two of them, and with the express request that Dr. Douglass should not be forgotten but should receive a copy of the letter. The latter gentleman evidently was aggrieved that Cotton Mather, a clergyman, should borrow his books and select therefrom communications upon a medical subject and recommend them to the consideration of the physicians of Boston without consultation with the owner of the books in question. He intimates<sup>22</sup> that before the physicians could meet, consult and report Dr. Boylston had been induced privately to make the trial. Nevertheless, there was no reply from the physicians nor did they hold a meeting, and it is probable that Dr. Douglass was exerting his influence against any action. In the meantime a watch was being set in accordance with the order of the Selectmen<sup>23</sup> of May 6, 1678, to control the removal of infected articles and to prevent the premature appearance in public of the patients. But the epidemic was spreading so rapidly that the guards were being taken from the infected houses as of no use. Persons, among others, Mrs. Boylston, were leaving the town to avoid the risk of contagion. Cotton Mather is filled with great anxiety with regard to two of his children who are liable to acquire the disease. He cannot make up his mind to send them away. He writes in his diary on June 13, "What shall I do with regard unto *Sammy*? He comes home when

<sup>21</sup> Presumably Dr. Nathaniel Williams, H. C., 1693, and master of what became eventually the Boston Latin School.

<sup>22</sup> THE ABUSES and SCANDALS of some late *Pamphlets* In Favour of Inoculation of the SMALL POX, Modestly obviated, and Inoculation further consid'd in a Letter to A.... S...., M. D. & F. R. S., in London, 1722.

<sup>23</sup> Boston Town Records, 1678, 119.



[318] the small-pox begins to spread in the neighborhood; and he is lothe to return unto *Cambridge*." His daughter Lizy was in greater fear of the disease than her brother. June 22 he records: "I prepare a little Treatise on the *Small-Pox*; first awakening the Sentiments of *Piety*, which it calls for; and then exhibiting the best Medicines and Methods, which the world has yett had for the managing of it; and finally adding the New Discovery, to prevent it in the way of Inoculation. It is possible that this Essay may save the *Lives*, yea, and the *Souls* of many People. Shall I give it unto the Booksellers? I am waiting for Direction." It would appear from the diary that he made another attempt to interest the physicians for it is written June 23: "I write a letter unto the Physicians, entreating them, to take into consideration the important Affairs of preventing the *Small-pox* in the way of Inoculation."

One of these letters was sent to Dr. Boylston and is reprinted<sup>24</sup> in a memorial of him by the Reverend Peter Thacher, of Brattle Street Church. It reads as follows:

June 24, 1721.

Sir,

You are many ways endeared unto me, but by nothing more than the very much good which a gracious God employs you and honours you to do to a miserable world.

I design it, as a testimony of my respect and esteem, that I now lay before you, the most that I know (and all that was ever published in the world) concerning a matter, which I have been an occasion of its being pretty much talked about. If upon mature deliberation, you should think it advisable to be proceeded in, it may save many lives that we set a great value on. But, if it be not approved of, still you have the pleasure of knowing exactly what is done in other places.

The gentlemen, my two authors, are not yet informed, that among the [illegible] 'tis no rare thing for a whole company, of a dozen together to go to a person sick of the small pox, and prick his pustules, and inoculate the humour, even no more than the back of an hand, and go home and be a little ill, and have a fever, and be safe all the rest of their days. Of this I have in my neighbourhood a competent number of living witnesses.

But see, think, judge; do as the Lord our healer shall direct you, and pardon this freedom of, Sir,

Your hearty friend and Servant

Co. Mather.

Dr. Boylston.

<sup>24</sup> Massachusetts Magazine, 1789, I, 778.



This letter must have had a very decisive effect on Dr. [318] Boylston's conduct. He was aware that in virtue of his occupation his household was especially exposed to contagion. Intelligent, experienced, skilful, encouraged and supported by an influential citizen of the town, with the undaunted courage accredited to him by Dr. Douglass, he undertook the experiment of inoculation on the 26th of June, 1721. He could not inoculate himself, apparently for the reason that he had suffered from smallpox in 1702, but he was so convinced of the merits of the operation that he inoculated his son Thomas, six years of age, and two of his negro slaves, Jack, thirty-six years old, and Jackey, two and one half years old. According to Hutchinson,<sup>25</sup> "Inoculation was introduced upon this occasion, contrary to the minds of the inhabitants in general, [319] and not without hazard, to the lives of those who promoted it, from the rage of the people." Against Dr. Boylston "the vulgar were enraged to that degree that his family was hardly safe in his house and he often met with affronts and insults in the streets. . . . Many sober, pious people were struck with horror, and were of opinion that if any of his patients should die, he ought to be treated as a murderer." I find no confirmation of the statement of Thacher<sup>26</sup> that parties with halters threatened to hang him to the nearest tree and that he was obliged to remain secreted for fourteen days in his house in a place known only to his wife and that a handgrenade was thrown into a room occupied by his wife and children. He distinctly states that his wife was out of Boston at the time of his first inoculations and makes no mention of any specific insult offered him either by halters or grenades. As Thacher acknowledges his obligation to Ward Nicholas Boylston, a grandnephew of the inoculator, for information and as the latter was a youth of seventeen at the time of Dr. Boylston's death, it is possible he may have obtained from him an account of personal experiences which were not recorded at the time.

Cotton Mather's diary, however, gives a contemporaneous statement of the behavior of the people.

<sup>25</sup> History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, 1767, II, 273

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., 187.



[319] July 16: G. D. At this time I enjoy *an unspeakable* Consolation. I have instructed one Physician in the New Method used by the *Africans* and *Asiaticks*, to prevent and abate the Dangers of the *Small-Pox*, and infallibly to save the Lives of those that have it wisely managed upon them. The Destroyer, being enraged at the proposal of any Thing, that may rescue the Lives of our poor People from him, has taken a strange Possession of the People on this Occasion. They rave, rail, they blaspheme; they talk not only like Ideots but also like *Franticks*, And not only the Physician who began the Experiment but I also am an Object of their Fury; their furious Obloquies and Invectives.

July 18: G. D. The cursed Clamour of a People strangely and fiercely possessed by the Devil, will probably prevent my saving the lives of my Two Children, from the Small-pox in the way of Transplantation.

The outcry against the inoculations was such that Dr. Boylston felt the need of a public statement which should justify his conduct, and he makes the following announcement<sup>27</sup> in the course of three weeks after his first experiment:

I have patiently *born with abundance of Clamour and Ralary, for beginning a new Practice here, (for the Good of the Publick) which comes well Recommended from Gentlemen of Figure & Learning and which well agrees to Reason, when try'd & duly consider'd, viz., Artificially giving the Small-Pocks, by Inoculation, to One of my Children, and Two of my Slaves, in order to prevent the hazard of Life, which is often indanger'd and lost by that Distemper in the Common way of Infection: . . . until the third Day, my little Son's Fever with the rage of the People, sufficiently affrighted me, but I no sooner us'd means, but the Fever abated and the Small-Pocks came out. . . . And in a few Weeks more, I hope to give you some further proof. And as the Thing was new & for fear of erring in doing, I left it wholly to Nature, which needed no help in my Negro Man, who was taken in a day or two before the other two in which time the Symptoms abating, caus'd me to hope for the same in the others.*

Although twice called to account by those in authority for continuing the practice, he inoculated his son John, thirteen years of age, on the 17th of July, and four days later had seven inoculated patients under his care whom he invited his fellow-physicians to inspect. But one of them, Dr. White, accepted the invitation. It was now that the abusive letter

<sup>27</sup> *Gazette*, July 10-17, 1721, No. 85.



already referred to and signed by W. Philanthropos appeared [319] in the *News-Letter* as a criticism of Dr. Boylston's communication. It credited Cotton Mather with "a Pious & Charitable design of doing good" but had only contempt for Dr. Boylston. Within a few days a reply appeared<sup>28</sup> signed by the so-called inoculation-ministers. It reads as follows:

To the Author of the Boston News-Letter.

*Sir*

It was a grief to us the *Subscribers*, among Others of your Friends in the *Town* to see Dr. *Boylston* treated so unhand-somely in the *Letter* directed to you last Week, and published in your Paper. He is a *Son* of the *Town* whom Heaven (we all know) has adorn'd with Some very peculiar *Gifts* for the Service of his Country, and hath signally own'd in the successes which he has had.

If Dr. *Boylston* was too suddenly giving into a new Practice and (as many apprehend) dangerous Experiment, being too confident of the Innocence and Safety of the Method, and of the Benefit which the Publick might reap thereby; Altho' in that Case we are highly obliged to any Learned and Judicious Person who kindly informs us of the hazard and warns against the practice; yet what need is there of injurious Reflections, and any mean detracting from the known worth of the *Doctor*? Especially how unworthy and unjust (not to say worse) is it to attempt to turn *that* to his reproach, which has been and is a singular honour to him, and felicity to his Country? We mean those words in the *Letter*—*A Certain Cutter for the Stone*—Yes, Thanks be to *God* we have such a One among us, and that so many poor *Miserables* have already found the benefit of his gentle and dextrous Hand. We that have stood by and seen his tenderness, courage and skill in that hazardous Operation cannot enough value the *Man* and give praise to *God*. And we could easily speak of *other Cases* of equal hazard wherein the Dr. has serv'd with such Successes as must render him Inestimable to them that have been snatch'd from the Jaws of Death by his happy hand.

The *Town* knows and so does the Country how long and what Success Dr. *Boylston* has practis'd both in *Physick* and *Surgery*; and tho' he has not had the honour and advantage of an *Academical* Education, and consequently not the *Letters* of some *Physicians* in the *Town*, yet he ought by no means to be call'd *Illiterate*, ignorant, &c. Would the *Town* bear that Dr. *Cutler* or Dr. *Davis* should be so treated? No more can it endure to see

<sup>28</sup> Gazette, July 27-31, 1721, No. 88.



[319] *Boylston* thus spit at. Nor has it been without considerable *Study*, expence in *travel*, a good *Genius*, diligent Application and much Observation, that he has attained unto that Knowledge and successful practice, which he has to give thanks to God for; and wherein we pray God that he may improve and grow with all humility.

The meanwhile we heartily wish that Men would treat one another with decency and charity, meekness and humility as becomes fallible creatures, and good Friends to one another and their Country.

As to the *Case of Conscience* referr'd to the *Divines*, we shall [320] only say—What *Heathens* must they be, to whom *this* can be a question.

"Whether the trusting more the extra groundless *Machinations of Men*, than our Preserver in the ordinary course of *Nature*, may be consistent with that *Devotion and Subjection* we owe to the *All-wise Providence of God Almighty*."

Who knows not the profanity and impiety of trusting in *Men* or *Means* more than in God? be it the best learn'd men or the most proper Means? But we will suppose what in fact is true among us at this Day, that Men of Piety and Learning after much *Serious* tho't have come into an Opinion of the Safety of the saulted method of *Inoculating the small pox*; and being perswaded it may be a means of preserving a Multitude of lives, they accept it with all thankfulness and joy as the gracious Discovery of a *Kind Providence* to Mankind for that end:—And then we ask, Cannot they give into the method or practice without having their devotion and subjection to the *All-wise Providence of God Almighty* call'd in question? Must they needs *trust* more in *Men* than in their Great Preserver in the use of *this* means than of any other? What wild kind of Supposition is this? and the *Argument* falls with the *Hypothesis* in our *Schools*.

In a word, Do we not in the use of all means depend on GOD's blessing? and live by that alone? And can't a devout heart depend on God in the use of *this* means, with much Gratitude, being in the full esteem of it? For, what hand or art of *Man* is there in this Operation more than in *bleeding, blistering* and a Score more things in *Medical use*? which are all consistent with a *humble Trust* in our Great preserver, and a *due Subjection* to His *All-wise Providence*

Increase Mather.  
Cotton Mather.  
Benjamin Colman.  
Thomas Prince.  
John Webb.  
William Cooper.



The above communication somewhat modified to meet with [320] the approval of the other signers was written by the Reverend Benjamin Colman, whose original manuscript has been given to the Boston Medical Library by Dr. F. C. Shattuck. Its historical importance is such that Mr. Colman's letter is printed as originally written, at the close of this article.

Dr. Boylston was now a third time called to task<sup>29</sup> and a meeting of the authorities and the selectmen of Boston was held<sup>30</sup> July 21, 1721, "In Relation to the operation called Inoculation lately practiced in this Town by Dr. Boylston of this Place."

The sensational feature of this meeting was the testimony of Dr. Dalhonde who asserted that four out of thirteen soldiers inoculated at Cremona had died, Six recovered with "abundance of Trouble and Care" and three were unaffected. On opening one of the fatal cases the "Diaphragm was found livid, the Glans of the Pancrease tumify'd and the Caul gangreen'd." He stated that he had treated in Flanders a patient with smallpox who claimed to have previously been inoculated five or six times, and whom he believed was incurably lame after his recovery. Of two Muscovite soldiers inoculated in Spain one recovered and the other at the end of six weeks "was seiz'd with a Frenzy, swelled all over his Body, . . . his Lungs were found ulcerated, from whence they concluded that it was the Effect of that Corruption which having infected the Limphæ did throw itself upon that Vital Part which occasion'd his sudden Death."

At the same meeting the Practitioners of Physick and Surgery presented the following series of resolutions which were

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<sup>29</sup> An Historical Account of the *Small-Pox Inoculated in New England*, Upon all Sorts of Persons, Whites Blacks and of all Ages and Constitutions. With Some account of the Nature of the Infection in the NATURAL and INOCULATED Way, and their different effect on HUMAN BODIES. With some *Short Direction* to the *Unexperienced* in this Method of Practice. Humbly dedicated to her Royal Highness the Princess of WALES by *Zabdiel BOYLSTON*, Physician. London, MDCCXXVI, 61.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix to the Historical Account.



[320] based apparently on the testimony of Dalhonde, and condemned the practice:

It appears by numerous Instances, That it has prov'd the Death of Many Persons soon after the Operation, and brought Distempers upon many others which have in the End prov'd deadly to 'em.

That the natural tendency of infusing such malignant Filth in the Mass of Blood, is to corrupt and putrify it, and if there be not a sufficient Discharge of that Malignity by the Place of Incision, or elsewhere, it lays a Foundation for many dangerous Diseases.

That the Operation tends to spread and continue the Infection in a Place longer than it might otherwise be.

That the continuing of the Operation among us is likely to prove of most dangerous Consequence.

According to Dr. Douglass<sup>31</sup> the Selectmen accepted this view and forbade further inoculation, but Dr. Boylston persisted "in *Contempt* of the Magistrates and in Contradiction to the Practitioners." Dr. Dalhonde's letter was published and aroused anew the fears and wrath of the people, many of whom were in a state of terror lest the disease should be extended through the community by inoculation. According to Cotton Mather,<sup>32</sup> "A Satanic fury raged, the town was still possessed with the Devil" and the writer was vilely abused "for nothing but instructing our base Physicians how to save many precious Lives." The Reverend Peter Thacher states:<sup>33</sup> "It is not many weeks since the author of this account was informed by one of his [Dr. Boylston] childrens (three of whom are still living) of the expression of pious calmness and trust in God, which he was wont to drop when his family trembled at his leaving his house, for fear that he should be sacrificed to popular fury, and never visit it again." For a fortnight no further inoculations were made, and then they were resumed to be continued in increasing numbers till the end of the epidemic.

<sup>31</sup> The *Abuses and Scandals*, etc., 9.

<sup>32</sup> MS. Diary, July 27, 1721.

<sup>33</sup> Loc. cit.



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Cotton Mather writes:<sup>84</sup>

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G. D.—Full of Distress about Sammy. He begs to have his Life Saved, by Receiving the *Small-Pox*, in the way of *Inoculation*, whereof our Neighbourhood has had no less than Ten Remarkable Experiments; and if he should after all dy by receiving it in the Common way, how can I answer it? On the other Side, our People, who have Satan remarkably filling their Hearts and their Tongues, will go on with infinite Prejudices against me and [321] my Ministry, if I suffer this Operation upon the Child: And be sure, if he should happen to miscarry under it, my Condition would be insupportable.

His Grandfather advises, That I keep the whole Proceeding private, and that I bring the Lad into this Method of Safety.

August 15. G. D. My dear *Sammy*, is now under the Operation of receiving the *Small-Pox* in the way of Transplantation. The Success of the Experiment among my Neighbours, as well as abroad in the World, and the urgent calls of his Grandfather for it, have made me think, that I could not answer it unto God, if I neglected it. At this critical Time, how much is all Piety to be press'd upon the Child!

And it may be hoped, with the more of Efficacy, because his dearest Companion (and his Chamber-fellow at the Colledge) dies this Day, of the Small-pox taken in the common Way.

The opponents of inoculation now found a newspaper devoted to their interests. This was the *New England Courant*, published and sold by James Franklin, which first appeared on the 17th of August, 1721. The *News-Letter* of Aug. 21-28, 1721, No. 917, contains a communication to its author signed by "*Your Friends and Well Wishers to Our Country and all Good Men.*" In it the *Courant* is characterized as

Notorious, Scandalous, full freighted with Nonsense, Unmannerliness, Railery, Prophaneness, Immorality, Arrogancy, Calumnies, Lyes, Contradictions and what not, all tending to Quarrels and Divisions and to Debauch and Corrupt the Minds and Manners of New England. And what likewise troubles us is, That it goes Currant among the People, that the Practitioners of Physick in Boston, who exert themselves in discovering the Evil of Inoculation and its Tendencies (several of whom we know to be Gentlemen by Birth, Learning, Education, Probity and good Manners that abhors any ill Action) are said, esteem'd and reputed to be the Authors of that Flagitious and wicked paper.

<sup>84</sup> MS. Diary, Aug. 1.



[321] James Franklin, the editor and printer, soon came to grief, however, through his published criticisms of the government and was imprisoned. Zabdiel Boylston certified<sup>35</sup> to his illness while in the jail and Benjamin Franklin, nominally, continued the publication of the paper.

Despite the opposition of Dr. Douglass and most, if not all, of the practitioners and of the town authorities, inoculation was continued. Dr. Boylston was supported in his action by the leading clergymen of the town who wrote articles and pamphlets, "tracts" in its favor. Some of them saw his patients and advised their parishioners to undergo the operation and were themselves inoculated. Six of his own children, his brother and his sister-in-law were thus treated.

The General Assembly now transferred its place of meeting to the George Tavern at the outskirts of the town near Roxbury, and, August 26, 1721, stationed guards at the doorway to prevent the entrance of any but authorized persons from the infected region.<sup>36</sup>

According to Cotton Mather:<sup>37</sup> "The Town has become almost an Hell upon Earth, a City full of Lies, and Murders, and Blasphemies, as far as Wishes and Speeches can render it so; Satan seems to take a strange Possession of it in the epidemic Rage, against that notable and powerful and Successful way of saving the Lives of People from the Dangers of the *Small-Pox*."

As the epidemic increased in severity so did the number of those inoculated. The better educated and more intelligent were in favor of the method, but the people at large were in violent opposition and objected to the advice of the ministers. In the *Gazette* of October 23-30, 1721, No. 101, there appeared what may be regarded as a report of progress by one, evidently Dr. Boylston, familiar with the conditions.

I. The Operation within these four Months past has been undergone by more than Three score Persons, Among which there have been *Old & Young; Strong and Weak; Male and Female; White & Black; Many serious and virtuous People; some the Children*

<sup>35</sup> Province Laws, 1722, X, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Province Laws, 1721, X, 105.

<sup>37</sup> MS. Diary, Aug. 24.



of Eminent Persons among us. II. . . . Only One Gentlewoman [§21] so circumstanced died; But her nearest Friends and all that knew her Case, do firmly believe the *Transplantation* was not the least occasion of it. *Of the rest, the following Account.* III. Of all the Number that have passed under the Operation, there has *Not so much as One miscarried.* It has done well *in all:* and even beyond Expectation in the most of them. IV. Some few have had a considerable Number of Pustules . . . V. But the most by far, have endured in a manner *nothing.* Their *Pustules,* have been very few. From the time of the *Incision* to the time of their *Decumbiture,* (six or seven days) they have gone about their Business as at other times. After they began, and when they felt the Eruption coming on, they Satt up, and Read and Walk'd; and would have yet more expos'd themselves, if the Physician had not confined them. And they got abroad again sooner than what is ordinary for the Infected in the *Common Way* . . . VII. The Patients return to their *perfect Health immediately;* and suppose themselves rather better than they were before the Operation . . . VIII. Some of them have had nothing but a *Cabbage-Leaf* from first to last applied unto them. IX. Some, of whom the People have confidently affirmed *That they died under the Inoculation,* have sent their dying Charges unto their Friends, *To hasten into it.* These friends have done it; and so found their Account in it, and seen such *Easy Circumstances,* that the surviving Relatives of the Deceased are drowned in Tears, to think how the *Lives of Theirs* have been thrown away.

Nevertheless, the leaders in the opposition to inoculation continued to seek by legislation what the terrorizing of the mob could not effect. Apparently there was doubt whether protective measures against smallpox could be carried so far as to exclude inoculation. According to an Act in the time of William III the selectmen were empowered to remove patients with smallpox and place them in a special house. This had been established at Spectacle Island. Consequently, a town meeting was held November 4, 1721, and it was

Voted<sup>38</sup> that whosoever shal come into this Town of Boston from any other Town Presumptuously, to bring the Smal Pox on him or her selfe, or be Inoculated, Shal be forthwith Sent to the Hospital or pest house, unles they See cause to depart to their own home, or if any Person be found in Town under that operation, which may be an Occasion of Continuing a malignant Infection, and Increasing it, among us, that they be Remoued Im-

<sup>38</sup> Town Records, 1721, 159.



[321] mediately Least by allowing this practise the Town be made an Hospital for that which may prove worse than the Small pox, which has already put So many into Mourning, And that the Justices and Select men be desired to put the Method abovesaid in practise, without Delay as the Law Directs.

[322] The Selectmen took early action, as it is recorded <sup>39</sup> November 13, 1721, that

being Credably Informed that divers Persons belongin to other Towns are already come into this Town, and have taken the Infection of the Small pox, in the way of Inoculation, but that as yet the Infection has not Operated upon them yet Expect that in a few dayes it will, and that Divers others belonging to Other Towns, Intend to Come to this Town for the Purpose aforesaid, and that they know how to come in and where, and what Houses to use in Spite of the Town. And the Remoueing the Said Persons by Law being Impracticable but by Warrant from Some of his Majesties Justies of the Peace.

The Said Select men Therefore doe hereby give notice to the Justices of this Town of the afore said Practice and pray that they will Issue forth their Warrants to search for such persons as have or are to come for such purposes and remove them to their respective houses or to the province hospital.

Cotton Mather, however, though noting in his diary, November 3, 1721, the "Malicious and Murderous Manner" of the treatment received by him and despite, November 9, 1721, "the Sottish Errors, and cursed Clamours, that fill the Town and Country, raging against the astonishing Success of the *Small-Pox* Inoculated;" takes into his house his nephew, Mr. Walter, of Roxbury, for the purpose of being inoculated. While the latter was lying sick in his room, November 14, 1721, a lighted grenade intended for his host was thrown through the window, but the fuse became detached and burned itself out. On a paper attached to the fuse, according to the advertisement of Cotton Mather in the *News-Letter*, November 13-20, 1721, No. 929, were the words: "COTTON MATHER, I was once one of your Meeting; But the Cursed Lye you told of . . . . . You know who; made me leave You, You Dog, And Damn You, I will Enoculate you with this, with a Pox to You."

<sup>39</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, 1721, 90.



In Cotton Mather's diary<sup>40</sup> it is stated that "the *Granado* [322] was charged, the upper part with dried Powder, the lower Part with a Mixture of Oil of Turpentine and Powder and what else I know not," and the sentence referring to the lie is not included. Hutchinson<sup>41</sup> who saw the grenade states that it did not contain powder but was filled with brimstone and bitumen. Although most writers in referring to this incident assume that the violence was due to Cotton Mather's efforts in favor of inoculation, the phrasing of the note in the "advertisement" suggests that the grievance was more specific and personal. Cotton Mather, however, writes:<sup>42</sup> "The Opposition to it has been carried on with senseless Ignorance and raging Wickedness. But the growing Triumphs of Truth over it throw a possessed people into a Fury, which will probably cost me my Life. I have Proofs, that there are people who Approve and Applaud the Action of Tuesday Morning: and who give out Words, that tho' the First Blow miscarried, there will quickly come Another that Shall doe the Business more effectually." He considers<sup>43</sup> himself as "Being in daily Hazard of Death from a Bloody People." It is possible that this incident of the grenade is the source of the previously mentioned statement that one was thrown into Dr. Boylston's house.

The report of progress above mentioned was followed in the course of a month by the communication of the Reverend Benjamin Colman<sup>44</sup> to the same effect. He visited the sick and saw that

they *found ease and sweetness* and lay *praising* God on their *Beds* or rather sat up in their *Chairs* doing so. Their friends stood smiling about them. Their tongues were filled with laughter and ours with Thanksgiving on their account when we went to see 'em . . . . We saw *scores* thus recover, even as many as went into the happy practice . . . . They were as discreet and religious a number of People, and Persons of as good sense and understanding, and of as much caution and fear as their Nei-

<sup>40</sup> MS. Diary, 14 Nov., 1721.

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit., II, 249.

<sup>42</sup> MS. Diary, 19 Nov., 1721.

<sup>43</sup> MS. Diary, 24 Nov., 1721.

<sup>44</sup> Some *Observations on The New Method*, etc., op. cit., 3.



[322] bors, who made these Experiments; and they did it with meekness and humility, patience and silence, and many prayers, under much provocation from too many . . . . .

The distemper was now extended to Cambridge and Dr. Boylston inoculated a number of the students and two of the instructors. The General Assembly had been sitting in Cambridge since November 7, 1721, having been adjourned to this town on account of the epidemic in Boston, and Governor Shute, therefore, had asked for a short session. In the course of a few weeks, however, one of the Boston members died of smallpox. It was supposed that he had become infected through the Speaker, Dr. Clark, who was the leading physician of Boston and in active practice. The Assembly immediately adjourned and did not meet again until the following spring when the epidemic had ceased.

The custom of inoculating, urged as a duty by the leading citizens, ministers and magistrates, who offered examples in themselves and in their families, now became definitely established and ceased only with the disappearance of the disease.

During its course Dr. Boylston had inoculated 244 persons, and Dr. Thompson had inoculated 25 in Cambridge and Dr. Roby 11 in Roxbury. Dr. Boylston had inoculated 10 patients in Charlestown, but was so busy in Boston and Roxbury that he could see them but once. The *Courant* states: <sup>45</sup> "We hear 104 Persons have had the Small Pox inoculated upon them at Roxbury." Of the 280 inoculated persons only six died, a mortality of one in forty-six, in contrast to one in six or seven of those who had become diseased through contagion.

Reports now were received from London of the introduction of inoculation into England. The *News-Letter* of October 16-23, 1721, published as news from London that

A Representation has been made to his Majesty, by some Physicians, that the Small-pox may be communicated, and with great Success, by Incision or Inoculating, as 'tis commonly term'd, as might be experienc'd, if some proper Objects to practice on were found out. And we are assured that two of the condemned Prisoners, now in Newgate, have offered themselves to undergo the Experiment, upon Condition of receiving his Majesty's most gracious Pardon.

<sup>45</sup> *Courant*, Dec. 5-Jan 1, 1721-2, No. 22.



In the *Gazette* of October 23-30, 1721, it was announced that [322] the eruption had appeared on some of the inoculated prisoners. The effect of these experiments is made apparent by the following quotation<sup>46</sup> from the *London Mercury* of September 16, 1721: "Great Numbers of Persons in the City and in the Suburbs are under the Inoculation of the Small Pox. Among the rest the oldest Son of a Noble Duke in Hanover Square."

Increase Mather published<sup>47</sup> an account of the communication of Dr. Walter Harris of London with regard to the inoculation of small-pox. In this is an abstract of the communication of Timoni and a statement of the inoculation of the children of the Hon. Wortley Montague. The *News-Letter* of March 5-12, 1722, No. 945, reports from the *St. James's Evening Post*, August 17, 1721, the letters of Timoni and of Pylarini as printed in the *Philosophical Transactions* and which Dr. Douglass had refused to show even to the Lieutenant Governor after they had been returned by Cotton Mather. Mr. Campbell, the publisher of the *News-Letter*, adds a note to the effect that a copy of these letters had been in his possession for five months.

The epidemic had now come to an end and Dr. Boylston's efforts met with a deserved recognition from Isaac Greenwood, afterwards Professor of Natural Philosophy in Harvard College. He published, February 25, 1721, 2, a pamphlet entitled, "A Friendly Debate; or a DIALOGUE between ACADEMICUS and SAWNY & MUNDUNGUS, Two Eminent PHYSICIANS, about Some of their Late PERFORMANCES." This he dedicated as follows:

To my very Worthy Physician, Mr. ZABDIEL BOYLSTON.

Sir,

I know no Person so proper, to present the following Dialogue to as your Self.

Such has been your undaunted Resolution, and truly Heroic Courage, thro' the whole Course of your dangerous Enterprize; and such Your Conduct and Wisdom, as merit our highest Regards, and most public Thanks. To You under the Auspicious

<sup>46</sup> *Courant*, Dec. 25-Jan. 1, 1721 (2), No. 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Gazette*, Jan. 29-Feb. 5, 1721 (2), No. 115; also, Some further Account from *London* of the *Small-Pox Inoculated*. The Second Edition, 1721 (2).



[323] Providence of God, we are Indebted for the Blessing of INOCULATION; for you can claim the undivided Honour of Introducing it among us. And hadst not thou began it, perhaps, there would not have been found a Soul so truly great, as to have undertaken it. For this, Sir, I am bold to say, Your Name shall be mention'd with Honour, whilst those Physicians, and others, who have signaliz'd themselves by their Malice and opposition to you, shall be otherwise spoken of.

Isolated cases still occurred and the Selectmen found it expedient to make the following proclamation,<sup>48</sup>

14 April, 1722: WHEREAS sundry Evil-minded Persons have of late Industiously reported in the Country Towns, that the Small Pox is again very brief in this Town, many Persons now Sick of that Distemper, and several lately dead. This is to Certifie that the Report is false & groundless, there being but three Folks now known to have the Small-Pox; . . . Could the Inventor of such pernicious Lyes be fully discovered it would be of Publick Service. If any Families that have had that Distemper have not already aired their Houses and Bedding. It is Recommended to all such more especially Innholders and those that entertain Lodgers, that they would speedily take all proper care, in well airing and cleansing their Houses and Bedding.

On May 11, 1722, however, Dr. Boylston inoculated six persons and on May 15, 1722, it was voted<sup>49</sup>

that a gard be forthwith Set at the House of Mr Joseph Hubbard, Blacksmith to prevent the Removal of Mr Sam<sup>l</sup> Sewal and Sundry others at Said House without orders and Direction of of the Select men they having bin Inoculated for the Smal Pox.

Voted also that there be a gard Set at the House of Coll John Alford for the Same Reason Mrs Joana Alford being there and having Inoculated.

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Voted that a message be sent to Coll John Alford (by Doctr Boylston & Constable Titmarsh) to acquaint him that the Select men Doe Assigne Spectakle Island to be [the] place his Sister be forthwith Remoued unto.

At the same meeting a committee was appointed<sup>50</sup> to draw up instructions for the representatives of Boston to present to the Assembly for the purpose of preventing the practice of in-

<sup>48</sup> News-Letter, April 9-16, 1722, No. 950.

<sup>49</sup> Boston Town Records, 1722, 165.

<sup>50</sup> Boston Town Records, 1722, 165.



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oculation in any town or place without the approval of the [323] Selectmen. This vote was passed because there had been dispute whether the law relating to the spreading of smallpox gave full power to the Selectmen to do what was needful to prevent the spreading of any contagious distemper and remove persons who may be infected.

On the same day the Selectmen applied<sup>51</sup> for a warrant to remove Mr. Sewall, his wife, two children and one other of his family who had been inoculated from Mr. Hubbard's house to Spectacle Island, also to remove Joan Alford.

The committee appointed at the town meeting of May 15, 1722, reported<sup>52</sup> three days later:

We also in a Special manner Recomend to your Consideration what Refers to the preventing the Spreading of any Contagious Distemper And whereas the Inoculating or Transplanting of the Smal pox has of late bin practised among us to the Terror of many of the Inhabitants.

We desire you to use your best Endeavor that it may be under a proper Regulation, and not practised in any Town or place without the approbation of the Select men of Such Town, And in as much as there has bin some late Dispute about the meaning of the Law that Refers to preventing the spreading of the Smal pox, etc., whether the Select men have full power to doe what is needfull to prevent the Spreading of any Contagious distemper and Remoue persons that may be Infected. It is therefore proposed that the Select men of Every Town may be Clothed with full power to obtain the great End & Designe of that Law, which is for the Preservation, Health and Safety, of the Inhabitants.

In the *Courant* of May 14-21, 1722, No. 42, the following notice is inserted:

By the Select-Men of Boston

Whereas it is reported in the Country Towns, That great Numbers are now sick of the Small Pox in Boston, not only in the Common Way, but also that greater Numbers are inoculated for that Distemper, These are therefore to signify That the said Report is false and groundless; for that according to the best Informations, there are not above three or four now sick in the [324] Town in the Common way; and the Select Men having sent for Dr. Boylstone, he solemnly declared in the publick Town-Meeting,

<sup>51</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, 1722, 97.

<sup>52</sup> Boston Town Records, 1722, 166.



[324] that there were no more than six Persons in Boston under Inoculation of the Small-Pox, and that it was performed on them on *Friday* and *Saturday*, the 11th and 12th Instant; And the said Doctor Boylstone then also did solemnly declare and promise That he would not either directly or indirectly inoculate any Person within said Town for the Future *without License* and Approbation of the Authority of the Town.

Whereupon they may also certify, That the said Six Persons under Inoculation, were by Order of said Select Men, and Warrant from Two Justices of the Peace, immediately sent down to the Hospital on Spectacle Island.

According to Hutchinson,<sup>53</sup> the Representatives passed a bill prohibiting inoculation, but the Council refused to agree to it. It took special action, however, with reference to the inoculated persons at Spectacle Island by ordering,<sup>54</sup>

2 June, 1722. That the persons so Inoculated shall not Come up to the Town of Boston during this present Session of the General Assembly without Leave first obtained.

The simultaneous introduction of inoculation in England, although meeting with decided opposition, was not attended with such excitement and fear as in Boston. At this time Sir Hans Sloane was one of the most distinguished physicians in London. He was President of the Royal College of Physicians, Physician-General to the Army, one of the physicians to Queen Anne and present in her fatal illness. He was also the physician of the Princess Caroline, wife of George II. He had been Secretary to the Royal Society, and it was at his instigation that Pylarini had written the account of inoculation published in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1716.

His participation in the introduction of inoculation into England led him to prepare a statement which he intended should be published in 1736, although it was not printed until some twenty years later.<sup>55</sup>

It appears that the Princess Caroline had become interested in the subject on account of the dangerous illness of her daughter whom Dr. Sloane was treating for smallpox, and

<sup>53</sup> Op. cit., II, 249.

<sup>54</sup> Province Laws, X, 161.

<sup>55</sup> Phil. Trans., 1755, XLIX, 516.



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doubtless had been made acquainted with the communications [324] in the Philosophical Transactions. She knew of the successful inoculation of the Montague children and requested that the experiment might be tried upon some condemned criminals who were to be freed in case of its success. This was done by Mr. Maitland, the surgeon who had inoculated the Montague children. In order to test the protective influence of the inoculation Sir Hans Sloane and Dr. Steigerthal, physician to George I, hired one of the inoculated criminals to act as nurse and bedfellow to a patient with smallpox. Princess Caroline also caused several charity children to be inoculated. The success of these inoculations and of others led the princess to ask Dr. Sloane for his opinion of the expediency of inoculating her daughters. Through his statements to her and to George I, two of her daughters were inoculated,<sup>56</sup> April 19, 1722, by Sergeant-Surgeon Amyand under the direction of Sir Hans Sloane. Two years later two of her sons were inoculated, one in Germany by Mr. Maitland, the other in London by Sergeant-Surgeon Amyand, again under the direction of Sir Hans Sloane.

The progress of inoculation during the epidemic in Boston had been followed in England. The Reverend Mr. Mather sent a statement,<sup>57</sup> dated March 10, 1722, showing the mortality of inoculated smallpox to have been only one in sixty, although at a later period in England there were but two deaths in 182 cases. This contrast led Dr. Jurin, then Secretary of the Royal Society, to consider that the operators in England were more cautious. That this was not the universal opinion appears in an extract from the letter of Dr. Thomas Robie written from Salem, June 4, 1723. In this he states:<sup>58</sup>

We don't as yet See any ill Effects of Inoculation, but the Inoculated are as yet as well, and some of them a great deal better than ever; as for the ill Consequences that have been in England, I can't tell what they may arise from, but I can hardly think they are the genuine effects of Inoculation, but may arise from some

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<sup>56</sup> *The History of the Inoculation of the Small-Pox in Great Britain*, etc. William Woodville, 1796, I, 104.

<sup>57</sup> *Phil. Trans.*, XXXII, 1724, 213.

<sup>58</sup> *Phil. Trans.*, XXXIII, 1726.



[324] previous Disposition to such Distempers as you mention or for want of due Evacuation after Inoculating and too soon healing the places of Incision.

With the diminution in the mortality from smallpox in England came a lessening in the frequency of inoculation, but in 1725 the number of deaths from smallpox in London was 3188, one-eighth of the total mortality,<sup>59</sup> although during this year only 151 persons were inoculated in Great Britain and only 105 persons in the following year.

It was at this time that Zabdiel Boylston spent a year in England. He was then the inoculator with the largest individual experience, although his publications on the subject were but few and brief. It is quite possible that he had been invited to visit England for the purpose of presenting this experience, especially as he had made no further communication since the cessation of the Boston epidemic in 1722. Douglass<sup>60</sup> suggests that he went to England to seek profitable employment as an experienced inoculator on account of lack of business at home. This slur was immediately answered<sup>61</sup> in a communication dated March 3, 1729, 30, in which it is stated that Dr. Boylston, though often asked, refused to inoculate persons while in London.

It is quite probable that Sir Hans Sloane invited him to visit London, certainly he urged him to publish his experience. The latter is made apparent in his preface to the "Historical Account." In this he declares that

Writing is a Talent which, of all Things, I never made any Pretensions to and little thought of giving at this Time the  
[325] Publick an Account of my Practice; but being again importuned thereto, by a great and worthy Physician, and having also receiv'd a Message from a Superior Person that an Account of my Success of inoculating the Small-Pox in New England might be grateful, as being of great use, and beneficial to the Publick, I esteem'd it as the strongest Obligation upon me so to do, and in Compliance to that Command I have done it faithfully. If I had

<sup>59</sup> Woodville, op. cit., 175.

<sup>60</sup> Dissertation Concerning Inoculation of the Small-Pox, 1730.

<sup>61</sup> A LETTER to DOCTOR ZABDIEL BOYLSTON; Occasioned by a late DISSERTATION CONCERNING INOCULATION; Printed at Boston, MDCCXXX.



proposed any Advantage to myself, in the Practice here, I should [325] have done it above a Year past, on my Arrival in London, and not now on my return home.

It is surmised that Dr. Boylston first presented his experience to the Royal College of Physicians of which Dr. Sloane was President, or to the Royal Society of which he was made a member in July, 1726, but direct evidence upon this point is lacking. The only published<sup>62</sup> communication made by him to the latter is on "Ambergris in Whales," reference to which and to his love for horses is to be found in a MS. letter in the Massachusetts Historical Society from him to Benjamin Colman, dated London, February 26, 1724, 5.

The "Historical Account" is printed in almost a sumptuous manner as compared with the second edition published in Boston in 1730. Its form suggests that Dr. Boylston's affairs were in a prosperous condition at the time, and additional evidence on this point, as well as of a kindly if not forgiving disposition, is afforded by Ward Nicholas Boylston's statement<sup>63</sup> of his interview with Benjamin Franklin. While near Paris in 1783, Mr. Boylston was introduced to Franklin who said to him,

"I shall ever revere the name of Boylston; Sir, are you of the family of Dr. Zabdiel Boylston of Boston?" to which I replied that he was my great-uncle, "then, Sir, I must tell you I owe everything I now am to him. . . . When Dr. Boylston was in England, I was there reduced to the greatest distress, a youth without money, friends or counsel. I applied in my extreme distress to him, who supplied me with twenty guineas; and relying on his judgment, I visited him as opportunities offered, and by his fatherly counsels and encouragements I was saved from the abyss of destruction which awaited me, and my future fortune was based upon his parental advice and timely assistance. Sir, I beg you will visit me as often as you find you have leisure while in Paris."

Little remains to be recorded of Dr. Boylston's career subsequent to his return to Boston, which he reached before the end of October, 1726. He resumed his practice, which must have been greatly in demand after his reception in England.

<sup>62</sup> Phil. Trans., 1726, XXXIII, 193.

<sup>63</sup> N. E. Hist. & Genealog. Reg., 1881, XXXV, 150.



325] Indeed it is called <sup>64</sup> "great in town and country" and "every Practitioner gives him the preference to Douglass in curing disease." The practice of inoculation had become so well established that in the epidemic of 1729-30, imported from Ireland, the Selectmen no longer were urged to remove the inoculated to the pesthouse, but precautions were recommended to protect the inhabitants from those inoculated within the town. The following extract <sup>65</sup> from the Town Records illustrates this change of sentiment. At the town-meeting of March 10, 1729, a petition was presented by some of the inhabitants

That the Town might Consult proper methods for preventing the spreading of the Small Pox by Inoculation.

Since the Date of which Petition a Considerable Number of the Inhabitants within a few days past have bin Inoculated, and Sundry Others are preparing therefore, In Consideration whereof the Town came unto the Following Vote,

That it be Earnestly Recommended to the Inhabitants and Freeholders and in an Especial Manner to Masters of Families. That all Proper care be taken That Such Persons as Shall for the Future be Inoculated for the Small Pox do Immediately keep in their Houses First giving notice to the Neighborhood of Such their Designs, And that during the Operation of the Distemper all proper Methods be taken to prevent it's Spreading. And that they would not come or walke abroad in the Streets, Lanes or Alleys within the Town Until their Incisions are well clensed and Healed: Further that the Practitioners in Physick would give to the Select men or to the Town Clerk, the number of Persons by them Inoculated once a week at least, with an Impartial Account of the Operation on their Several Patients in the Course of their Inoculation.

Of the physicians who originally had opposed inoculation, Dr. Williams <sup>66</sup> entered upon its practice in 1730 "with the

<sup>64</sup> A Letter to Doctor Zabdiel Boylston, etc., 1730.

<sup>65</sup> Boston Town Records, 1729, 14.

<sup>66</sup> The METHOD of Practice in the SMALL POX with Observations on the Way of Inoculation. Taken from a Manuscript of the late Dr. Nathaniel Williams, etc. Edited by Thomas Prince, MDCCLII, 13.



utmost caution." Dr. Cutler<sup>67</sup> writes to Dr. Gray of London, [325] May 30 (1730?):

The Small Pox is now overspreading this town and strikes terror into the whole country. The Contagion has proved mortal to many, and has therefore inclined great numbers to venture upon inoculation, which has been attended with great success. I have submitted my wife and seven children and a servant to the practice. The most visible effect of this affliction is to *set us in parties*. The main of the church are against it; and it seems that he is no Churchman or Christian who is for it.

Even Dr. Douglass<sup>68</sup> regarded it as "a considerable improvement in Physick." He states that most of those opposed acknowledge that inoculated smallpox is easier than when the disease is accidentally received, that the former is less fatal and that the symptoms are more favorable. He finds that it is the custom for the practitioners to inoculate when requested, but not to persuade or dissuade the applicant. In the last years of his life he became a more earnest advocate and recognized<sup>69</sup> that

The novel practice of procuring the Small-pox by inoculation, is a very considerable and most beneficial improvement in that article of medical practice . . . . The small-pox received by cuticular incisions has a better chance for life and an easy decumbiture; that is, the small-pox so received is less mortal and generally more favourable, than when received in the accidental or natural way.

He continues<sup>70</sup> to credit Cotton Mather with no other motive [326] than "the desire for the *imaginary honour* of a new-fangled notion," and his sentiments towards Dr. Boylston remain unchanged. For he adds in a foot note,<sup>71</sup> "This undaunted operator imagined that by going to London with a quackbill of his inoculation performance in New-England, he might acquire a fortune in London; but so it happened, that void of common

<sup>67</sup> A Brief Memoir of William Douglass, M. D. By Timothy L. Jennison, M. D., Mass. Med. Soc. Comm., 1834, V, 236.

<sup>68</sup> Dissertation Concerning Inoculation of the Small Pox, MDCCXXXI, 8.

<sup>69</sup> A Summary, etc., op. cit., II, 406.

<sup>70</sup> Summary, etc., II, p. 409.

<sup>71</sup> Summary, etc., p. 409.



326] discretion to couch his ignorance and silly mean assurance, he returned to Boston without being called upon to perform any inoculation."

By way of contrast his friend, Dr. Isaac Watts, writes to Dr. Boylston from Newington in a letter of April 25, 1735, reproduced by Peter Thacher<sup>72</sup> in his memoir, "The inoculation was a glorious and successful retreat, or if you will, a victory over the powers of death in Boston, when it was first practised under your conduct. It has not been so happy among us in England, nor do I find it has been equally happy in New-England since, but the want of conduct in the undertakers, may be are considerable cause of it."

After the publication of the American edition of Boylston's Historical Account, in 1730, there was no further epidemic of smallpox in Boston until 1752. Douglass relates<sup>73</sup> that

A ship from London, Capt. Cousins, with the small-pox aboard, was bulged Dec. 24, 1751, in Nahant bay near Boston; the people of Chelsey, the adjacent town, compassionately assisting to save the ship's crew, received the small-pox; about one in four or five died. . . . It arrived in Boston in January following, by a sailor belonging to the Ship, and got into five or six families, but did not much spread till the twentieth of March, 1752, and Monday the twenty-third, inoculation was let loose; some greedy practitioners indiscriminately inoculated any persons who could be persuaded to receive it, even pregnant women, puerpeas, old negroes, and the like.

Of the 15,734 residents of the town 1800 fled through fear of the smallpox; of those remaining 7,653 had smallpox; of these 2109 were inoculated.<sup>74</sup> The mortality among those not inoculated was one in ten or eleven, while of the inoculated only one in sixty-eight died. In England under Daniel Sutton and his assistants, between the years 1764 and 1766, nearly 20,000 persons were inoculated with but three deaths and these were not fairly attributable to the inoculation.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup> *Summary*, etc., II, 347.

<sup>74</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, 1752, 283.

<sup>75</sup> *The Practice of Inoculation Justified*, A Sermon by Robert Houlton, M. A., Chaplain to the Earl of Dorchester and officiating Clergyman of Mr. Sutton's. Essex, 3d Ed., 1767.



Dr. Boylston thus lived long enough to see inoculation well- [326] established and successful and to know that he was recognized as one of the world's benefactors.

Dr. Thomas Boylston, the father of Zabdiel, owned a homestead of ninety-six acres in Brookline which after his death was deeded and sold to Peter Boylston by his brothers and sister. About the year 1736, Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, who is said to have accumulated a handsome fortune, bought the homestead of his brother Peter, who removed to Boston and opened a shop.<sup>70</sup> After purchasing the homestead, he built the mansion still standing in excellent preservation and now the residence of Mr. George Lee. In 1741 his brother Peter's pew was transferred to him, and in 1744 he voted at a town meeting in Brookline. It is known that he continued to practise medicine until he was over seventy years of age, for among the MSS. of the Boston Public Library is a certificate which Zabdiel Boylston of Boston gave to Thomas Fleet in November, 1752, to the effect that the physical disability of the latter was such as to prevent his being exposed as a watchman in bad weather. This library also possesses a receipt from him for medicines and attendance dated Boston, April 23, 1753. It is probable that Dr. Boylston resided continuously or interruptedly in Brookline during this period, but eventually he retired to his country seat where, according to Peter Thacher, "enfeebled by age and disease he passed his last days in the dignity which ever accompanies those who have acted their part well in life."

Inscribed on his tomb in the old cemetery at Brookline, not far from his boyhood's home, are the words:

Sacred to the memory of Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, Esq., physician and F. R. S. who first introduced the practice of inoculation into America. Through a life of extensive benevolence, he was always faithful to his word, just in his dealings, affable in his manners, and after a long sickness, in which he was exemplary for his patience and resignation to his Maker, he quitted this mortal life in a just expectation of a happy immortality, March 1, 1766.

The following is the text of the manuscript letter of the Reverend Benjamin Colman in the possession of the Boston Medical Library which seems to have served as the original of

<sup>70</sup> Selectmen's Minutes, July 7, 1737.



[326] that published in the *Boston Gazette* of July 27, 1721, and signed by Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Benjamin Colman, Thomas Prince, John Webb and William Cooper.

To the Reverend Mr. . . . . of *Boston*.

Sir, It was a pleasure to me yesterday to hear you express the Sense you have of the unworthy Treatment which Dr. *Boylston* has received this week in the *Boston News-Letter*. The angry & contemptuous Letter there is below the Learning & Worth of the *Gentleman* who is said to write it. It breathes nothing of that native Modesty & Meekness which adorns Dr. *Douglass*, nor discovers that purity of Style & Diction which one wd expect from his Erudition. Besides, He has met with so kind & cordial an Esteem in the Town, as were enof to subdue the heart of a rough & unpolished Stranger (the Reverse whereof he is) to ye most humane & placid treatment of every body belonging to it. I Entirely dismiss ye tho't therefore that one of his Silence & Civility is capable of this sudden & angry Effort against a *Son* of the Town, whom Heaven (he knows & we all know) has adorn'd with some very peculiar Gifts for the Service of his country, & has signally own'd in the Success which he has had.

If Dr. *Boylston* was too suddenly giving into a new practice & dangerous Experiment & and also was too confidant of the Innocence & Safety of ye Method & of the benefit wch the Public would reap thereby; altho' in that case we are highly obliged to any learned & judicious Person who kindly informs us of the hazard & warns against the Practice; yet what need is there any injurious words, or mean detracting from the known worth of the [327] *Doctor*? Especially how worthy & unjust (to say no worse) is it to attempt to turn *that* to his reproach which has been & is a singular honour to him & felicity to his Country? I mean those words in the Letter—a *certain Cutter for the Stone*. Yes, thanks be to God that we have such a *One* among us, & that so many poor Miserables have already found the benefit of his gentle & Dextrous Hand. We that have stood by & seen his tenderness, courage & skill in that hazardous Operation cannot enof value ye Man & give praise to God. And I could easily speak of other Cases of equal hazard, wherein the Doctor has served with such Successes, as must render him Inestimable to them yt. have been snatch'd from the jaws of Death by his happy hand.

I blame the Letter for gross *partiality* wch treats Dr. *Boylston* with so severe a Surmise as to say, that he understood the matter of Inoculating *without a serious tho't*; when at ye same time it has the goodness to suppose of another *Doctor*, a *Divine* among us (who push'd on ye Attempt & openly rejoiced in it) that he acted out of a *pious & charitable design of doing good*. I verily believe Dr. *Mather* did so, & why should I not hope the same of



Dr. *Boylston*? Is it that a Dr. in *Physic* or a Master in *Surgery* [327] is not capable of the like pious & charitable design with a Dr. in *Divinity*? I am sure I ought to judge ye *best* of my Nei'bours, designs, & *who art thou to forget another?* Well, but this *Boylston* is *Illiterate*, says the Letter; that is to say, He has not had ye Advantages of a Liberal Education, which Dr. *Clark*, Dr. *Williams* & Dr. *Douglass* have had. He ought to vail to them therefore on that account & congratulate them their Advantage. But must he be therefore called *ignorant & quack?* as the Letter rudely calls him: Would ye Town bear that Dr. *Cutler* & Dr. *Davis* should be so treated? No more can it endure to see *Boylston* thus spit at.

The Town knows & so does ye Country how long & with what Success Dr. *Boylston* has practis'd both in *Physic & Surgery*; & tho' he has not ye *Letters* of some Physicians in the Town, yet he has been so happy as to have had more *practice* it may be than any one, Dr. *Clark* excepted: Nor has it been without considerable Study, expence in *Travel*, a good *Genius*, diligent application & a great deal of observation, that he has attain'd unto that knowledge & successful practice wch he has to give thanks unto God for; & wherein I pray God that he may improve & grow with all humility. Then he would not fear want of Business, nor I trust of Usefulness & Esteem: for there are but too many likely to need him, even in Cases wherein none beside him can as yet equally serve.

This I have said in Justice & friendship, as to Dr. *Boylston* & his numerous *Family* to whom I ought to wish well, as likewise unto *Others* among us who have gone into favourable opinion of *Inoculating the Smal pox*, among whom I acknowledge my self to be One: But if it be an *evil & dangerous Method*, as the other *Physicians* of ye Town (to whom we owe great honour & regard) have declared it to be in their Judgment, They have done well to warn the people ag't. running into it: & for my own part I now give the *Gentlemen* my Thanks for the *Resolve* which they have lately published for this end.

The meanwhile I heartily wish Men would treat one another with *decency & charity*, meekness & humility, as becomes fallible Creatures & hearty friends to one another & to their Country; that so our prayers may be more united in this Day of common distress to ye. God of our *Health*, who is ye. God of love & peace.

#### Postscript

As to the *Case of Conscience* referred to the *Divines* in the Letter wch I have been Animadverting on, I suppose there never was the like put before to any. Wt. *heathens* must they be to whom this can be a question. Whether the trusting more the extra groundless *Machinations* of men than our Preserver in the



[327] *ordinary course of Nature, may be consistent with that Devotion & Subjection we owe to the Allwise Providence of God almighty, who knows not the profanity & impiety of trusting in Men or Means more than in GOD; be they the most learned men, or ye most proper means? But I will suppose Men of piety & learning too, (for Instance Such as Dr. Mather & Mr. Webb, who are opposite Names in the present case) after much curious Tho't come into an opinion of the Safety of the saulted method of Inoculating the Smal Pox; & being persuaded yt. it may be a means of preserving a multitude of lives, they accept it with all Thankfulness & Joy as the gracious Discovery of a kind Providence to Mankind for that end; And then I ask—cannot they give into the method or practice without having their Devotion & Subjection to ye all-wise Providence of GOD Almighty call'd in question? Must they needs trust more in men than in their Great Preserver in the use of this means than in using other means? What wild kind of Supposition is this? Do we not in the use of any Means depend on GOD's blessing? & live by that alone? & can't a devout heart depend on GOD in the use of this means, with infinite gratitude, being in the full Esteem thereof? What hand or art of Man is there in this Operation, more than in bleeding, blistering, & a score more things in Medical use, which are all well consistent with a humble Trust in our great Preserver, & a due Subjection to his all-wise Providence?*

Benjamin Colman.

Boston, July, 25, 1721.



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