

Correspondence

To the Editors:

Birth of immunisation (*Based on the observations of a nature lover*)

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*The sun drove off the twilight gray
And promised all a cloudless day
His yellow beams danced o'er the dews
And changed to gems their pearly hues*

*The song-birds met on every spray
And sung as if they knew the day
The blackbird piped his mellow note
The goldfinch strained his downy throat*

*To join the music of the plain
The lark poured down no common strain
The little wren, too, left her nest
And striving sang her very best*

*The robin wisely kept away
His song too plaintive for the day
'Twas Berkely Fair, and Nature's smile
Spread joy around for many a mile*

*The rosy milkmaid quits her pail
The thresher now puts by his flail;
His fleecy charge and hazel crook
By the rude shepherd are forsook;*

*The woodman too, the date to keep
Leaves Echo undisturbed in sleep;
Labour is o'er – his ragged chain
Lies resting on the grassy plain¹.*

The writer was obviously a great lover of nature with acute powers of observation. It is said that as a boy he could name every plant by the roadside and recognize the cry of every bird. These lines were written by Edward Jenner (1749-1823).

It is his love of nature that made him abhor sickness that deformed beauty. To him scars were sacrileges. Steeped in the countryside surrounded by farmlands, he noticed that milkmaids had smooth unscarred faces. The country-belief that "infection with cow pox prevented small pox" triggered in him a discovery of far reaching importance.

Long years of research by the writer of these lines culminated in mankind eradicating a once rampant communicable disease and controlling many more childhood infectious diseases.

P.S. The last paper read by Edward Jenner at the Royal Society (of which he was a Fellow). was on "Migration of Birds".

References

1. Canning J. 100 Great Lives. 3rd ed. New Delhi, Rupa & Co. 1988.

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