

Edward Jenner (1749 – 1823)

He worked for twenty years to establish at last his principle of vaccination, which was recognized as an effective preventive of smallpox.

Edward Jenner was born at Gloucester, England on May 17, 1749. He was the son of the Vicar of Berkeley, and at the age of thirteen was apprenticed to a surgeon. He spent all his life in his father's vicarage at Berkeley.

Before Jenner published his discovery, after more than twenty years of research, Sir Walter Farquhar said to him that if he chose to preserve it a secret, he might make 100,000 lbs by it. But Dr. Jenner determined to give it to the world.



Edward Jenner was modest by nature and yet impervious to unscrupulous opposition. He had two kinds of opposition to face. The first was the direct attack of the conservative medical men of the time, who regarded vaccination as a dangerous practice; the second was much more difficult to deal with. No sooner he published his results, the village quacks offering “the genuine vaccine operation of Dr. Jenner”, and the people that were thus infected with disease were innumerable.

Jenner wrote a letter and Empress Josephine went to plead for the release of some English prisoners. At first the Emperor was adamant, but when Josephine said it was Jenner who was pleading, Napoleon said, “Ah! We can refuse nothing to that name”. So highly was the name of Jenner thought of that certificates signed by him acted as passports and secured the release of other prisoners in countries as far apart as Mexico and Austria.

In 1810 his eldest son died, and this loss and the strain of his labors caused Jenner to have a breakdown. He retired to Berkeley only going up to London on important business. Although to all appearance he seemed destined to live many years longer, his unflagging industry and care for others had taken its toll of his strength, and he was found on the morning of January 24, 1823, unconscious on the floor of his library. His right side was completely paralyzed. The next day this benefactor of mankind passed to his reward.