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STAMPS IN PAEDIATRICS.....

Smallpox vaccination



It is known that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu occupies an important place in the medical history for her efforts in smallpox vaccination. While in Turkey with her British ambassador husband, she vaccinated her 5 year old son. After returning to her own country she performed the same thing on her daughter (in 1721) and subsequently caused the widespread increase of vaccination in England.

She contributed just one identified text to the war against smallpox, writing not under her own name, but as “a Turkey merchant”—a pseudonym that misrepresents her class as well as her gender, but makes no claim to medical qualification. No wonder: her essay, published in the *Flying Post* at the height of the controversy, is an outright attack on the medical profession.

The procedure was quite safe in the hands of Turkish women. According to her notes, the old woman in Turkey made a tiny scratch with a needle and inserted a tiny quantity of smallpox virus just under the skin.

Interestingly, the Royal Society heard a paper on Turkish inoculation in 1714. As a result, although Jenner was shown to be the inventor of the vaccine, the efforts of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, deserving more appreciation than Jenner, should not be forgotten.

The stamp, from Turkey in 1967, depicts the 250th anniversary of the first smallpox vaccination.

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