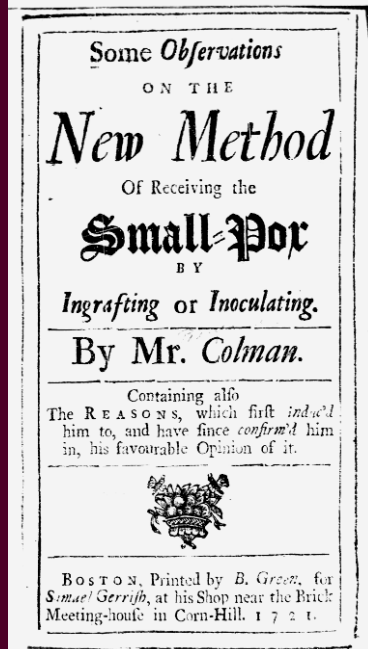




Early American Imprints



Rev. BENJAMIN COLMAN  
 Pro-Inoculation

By the time the *Town* was full of the Sickness, and the Deaths that began to multiply led a few more into this *Means of Safety*, as they hop'd by the favour of GOD to find it. The Blessing of GOD went along with it; 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 them recover fast . . . We saw this with wonder and Joy at what GOD had wrought for us. We saw *Scores* thus recover, even as many as went into the happy practice, and it appear'd to us more and more to be *the Lord's Doing and marvellous in our eyes*. . . .

Know then, That the *Incision* which the *Dr.* makes in the Arm or Leg are the least you can well imagine, and but Skin deep; the quantity of

*“angry Debate and fierce Contention”*  
*“Falsities and Absurdities”*

## INOCULATE FOR SMALLPOX?

The paper war during Boston’s smallpox epidemic of 1721 \_\_\_\_

The most dreaded disease in colonial America was smallpox.<sup>1</sup> When the highly contagious disease entered a colonial port city, up to sixty percent of the people might fall ill, and from five to twenty percent would die. Residents fled to the countryside to avoid contamination; towns would be virtually abandoned for weeks.<sup>2</sup> This was Boston in 1721 during its sixth major smallpox epidemic since its founding in 1630.

When Rev. Cotton Mather and other Puritan clergymen promoted the experimental procedure of inoculation — injecting a small dose of the smallpox virus in the skin to stimulate the body’s immune response — controversy erupted over its risks, efficacy, and morality.

- The “pro-inoculators” were led by Puritan clergymen Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman, with the physician who performed the town’s vaccinations, Dr. Zebediah Boylston.
- The “anti-inoculators” were led by physician William Douglass, who founded Boston’s third newspaper, *The New-England Courant*, to promote his views. (The *Courant* was published by James Franklin, Benjamin Franklin’s brother.)

A paper war ensued as each side published pamphlets and newspaper articles to argue its position and refute its opponents. At times the debate became personal and biting, each side accusing the other of bias and falsification. Newspaper excerpts are presented in the text below, pamphlet excerpts in the sidebars.

**ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER** by “W. Philanthroper,” [Dr. William Douglass], *Boston News-Letter*, July 17-24, 1721, excerpts.

SIR,

The *Inoculation* ingrafting or Transplantation of the *Small Pox*, having lately so much amused this Country [colony], it may be agreeable to some of your Readers to know the History of this affair from its Origins; . . .

Its Origin was in *Thessaly in Greece*, from thence spreading to Constantinople [Turkey], began to be practiced there by *Old Greek Women* on Turks and others above 50 Years ago. By private Letter, commerce, and information of Travellers, this Method has been, among the Learned, Universally known in *England* above 20 Years, but being deemed *Wicked and Felonious*, was never practiced there. . . .

B——n’s<sup>3</sup> first Practice was on his own Child and two Negroes. *The Child narrowly escaped* with his Life, had the Fever so violent that our Operator [Boylston] was obliged to have recourse to a confused course of Methods and Medicines, viz.

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<sup>1</sup> Introduced by Europeans, smallpox was a virulent killer of Native Americans, whose population east of the Mississippi decreased, it is estimated, by 75-95 percent before 1800.

<sup>2</sup> John Duffy, *From Humors to Medical Science: A History of American Medicine* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Zebediah Boylston, who performed the inoculations. His reputation is defended in the next letter, of July 27-31, 1721.

the *variolous matter* which I have seen him use to good effect has been but a single and very small drop upon a bit of Lint. After twenty-four hours we threw it entirely away and put on a dressing [bandage] of Cabbage leaf from day to day. For six and sometimes eight days the Patient continues perfectly well; then a gentle Fever rises, accompanied with all the Symptoms of the Small-Pox, but in a low degree: an aching head and back, and pains in the bones, &c. This makes him dull and heavy for a Day or two, and presently he finds himself well and the Pock appears, rises, turns, and goes off without more illness or pain, save what the burning and soreness of the Pock may occasion to him, or some external Fever in the Flesh without any inward one. . . .

IT is now some Months, four or five, since many of the Inoculated are come abroad [outside], and they find neither boil nor sore upon them, but are in as good a state of health as ever they enjoy'd in their Life. Nay, some have found a much better Complexion and Stomach than ever they had before, and particularly my own *Child* has found so through the favour of GOD.

Library of Congress

Gen Small Pox.	
First	1640
Second	1666
Third	1677
Fourth	1680
Fifth	1702
Sixth	1721
Seventh	1730

Boston smallpox epidemics, map inset in *A New Plan of the Great Town of Boston*, 1769

[namely] Blistering, Suppedanea (Kidneys to the Feet) Vomits, Saffron, Cordials &c. One of the Slaves also suffered much, he doubts the others receiving the Infection.

It happened unluckily that the *Undertaker* [Boylston], being *illiterate*, was not capable of duly Understanding the Writings of those Foreign Gentlemen, *being Ignorant*, for by his own Confession never had but small Opportunities of seeing Practice in the Small Pox, and at the time of Publishing his *dangerous quack Advertisement* had not one Patient in that Disease tho' then Epidemical in the Place, must therefore be very unfit to manage any Symptom that might happen to his *Laborants* [patients].

**PRO-INOCULATION LETTER** signed by Puritan clergymen Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Benjamin Colman, Thomas Prince, John Webb, and William Cooper, *The Boston Gazette*, July 27-31, 1721, excerpts.

**SIR,**

IT was a grief to us, the *Subscribers*, among Others of your Friends in the *Town*, to see Dr. *Boylston* treated so unhandsomely 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 [colony] and hath finally own'd in the Successes which he has had. . . .

The *Town* knows and so does the Country how *long* and with what *Success* Dr. *Boylston* has practis'd both in *Physic* [medicine] and *Surgery*, and tho' he has not had the honour and advantage of an *Academic* Education . . . yet he ought by no means to be call'd *Illiterate, ignorant &c.* . . .

Nor has it been without considerable *Study*, expense in *travel*, a good *Genius*, diligent Application, and much Observation, that he has attain'd 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 to their Country.

**ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER**, unsigned letter by Dr. William Douglass (founder of the *Courant*), *The New-England Courant*, August 14-21, 1721, excerpts.

**SIR,**

FINDING the *Infatuation* of engrafting the Small Pox *not altogether stifled*, we present the *Town* with some Animadversions [criticisms] on a *late Advertisement*, published by the four inoculated Men, and a further *Dissuasive* from that rash, sometimes hazardous and always dubious Practice.

This Advertisement, drawn up by \_\_\_\_\_ and signed by the four inoculated *Objects* [people], were it more correct and not too

Some ACCOUNT  
Of what is said of  
Innoculating or Transplanting  
THE

## Small Pox.

By the Learned  
**Dr. Emanuel Timonius,**  
AND  
**Jacobus Pylarinus.**

With some Remarks thereon.

To which are added,

A Few Queries in Answer to the Scruples  
of many about the *Legitimacy* of this Method.

Published

By DR. ZABDIEL BOYLSTON.

BOSTON: Sold by S. GERRISH,  
at his Shop in Corn-Hill. 1721.

"Dr. Timonius": Rev. Cotton Mather.  
Pro-Inoculation

It is Objected, That you *Presume upon Providence* in this Essay for the Prevention of the *Small Pox*,\* for you don't know whether you shall ever have the *Small Pox*, or no. I answer, But what if it be as likely that I shall have it, as it is that my House will take Fire, when my Neighbour's, an Inch and half off, is in Flames. *Pray, sit still, my Neighbour, your House is not yet on Fire: The Almighty can preserve it.* But I Inquire whether this Objection will not lie against all the *Preventive Physic* [medicine] in the World? I don't infallibly know that I shall ever suffer the Disease I am going to prevent. . . .

When the use of the *Jesuits' Bark*† was first introduced, was there not as loud a Cry against it as can be imagined? Yea, Do not many to this Day ruin themselves by the use of it, with an indiscrete and preposterous management? But since Hundreds of Thousands of Lives have been saved by it, are not they generally counted very *odd Physicians* who do not use it as often as they have occasion!

\* i.e., that you resist the will of God by this attempt to avoid smallpox.

† cinchona bark, source of quinine, used in treating malaria and other diseases.

tedious, ought to supercede that ancient *Fable of the Fox*, who by Misadventure losing his Tail, advises his fellow Citizens (or Foxes) to part with their Tails, that the Calamity, being universal, he might no more be hooted at.

The long Advertisement runs in such a *silly indistinct Strain*, with a *partial Representation* of the matter, tho' under a Cloak of Piety and Devotion, concluding with a *Quack Recommendation* of the Operator [physician], that to give it any serious Answer or Animadversion would be debasing your *Courant* and imposing on your Readers, if this Affair were not countenanced by *some*, whose proper Business is of another Nature [i.e., religious].

They begin by insinuating that the Town may think this a *desperate Remedy*, the Small Pox being a *very desperate Disease* requires no less. *The Small Pox in Boston* (say they) *is a terrible Distemper, whereby many were severely and dreadfully handled and whereof so many died, . . .* And as a *false Rumour* may tend to obstruct the Town's being supplied with Provisions from the Country, and interrupt all Trade, Commerce and Communication with our Neighbouring Colonies, we reckon it our Duty to expose this as *imprudent* and *notoriously false*. We find that from the Arrival of the Small Pox here about the middle of *April* last, to the Date of this Advertisement, the *Burials* in Town have not exceeded those (*communibus annis*) of other Years for the same space of time. Few Epidemics or Popular Fevers of any Sort have been more *favourable* . . . the greatest Part of our Patients at present having a *fair, large distinct Sort*, and many not requiring Confinement. . . .

How boldly do they tell the greatest Part of the Town that, tho' many asserted Inoculation to be a Case of Conscience [moral question] &c., few if any really believed it. This in plain English (pardon the Indecency of the Expression) is *calling the Town Liar*. They say the Experiment had been successfully tried on several amongst our Selves; tho' these were only *B———n's* [Dr. Boylston's] Child and his own two Negroes, and with what Success has been formerly represented. They suffered only *something of a Fever*: witness old Mr. *W———b's* Case. The Continuance of their running Sores is by them reckon'd a good Prevention of Boils, &c., with other such *Falsities* and *Absurdities* obvious to every Reader, require no other Answer than setting them in a clear Light.

By Affidavit and Declarations lately published, we find that the Inconveniencies or *Diseases* proceeding from the Inoculation are of *three Sorts*. The First are the high Fevers and other dangerous Symptoms *immediately attending the Inoculation*. . . The other two Risks are what our *inoculated Objects* have still to apprehend, viz. Impostumations and Ulcers in the Vicera or Bowels, Groin, and other glandulous Parts, Loss of the Use of their Limbs, Swellings &c., occasioning Death or miserable Remnant of Life, much analogous to that of *Veneral Infection* which . . . in process of time [results in] sordid Ulcers, Caries or rottenness of the Bones, *destroys or renders the Patient miserable for Life*.

***ANTI-INOCULATORS' NOTICE***, *The New-England Courant*, August 14-21, 1721.

Whereas it was Reported some time last Week that the Gentlemen who opposed the Novel Practice of Inoculation had now fallen in with it, These therefore are to inform the World that the Report is utterly false.

***ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER & POEM***, by "Frank Scammony," *The New-England Courant*, August 21-28, 1721, excerpts.

. . . If Infection is communicated to another by means of *Self-Infection*, and this *Contagion* spreads itself among others, and any of these thus infected perish, at whose hands shall their Blood be required? Since it was probable they might have escaped the *Natural Pock* when they fell by means of the *Inoculated Pock*, and thereby come to an untimely End. . . .

But *Epidemeal Distempers* [epidemic diseases], as they more immediately proceed from a *Divine stretched-out Arm*, and as sent as Judgments from an *angry and displeased God*, so they require a different *Physic* [medicine], a different Way of Prevention, *Being the greatest Marks of the greatest displeasure*, so they call for the *greatest Humiliation* [before God], *the Observation of the strictest Duties of Repentance*. . . .

It may be replied the *Artificial Pock* is not of that spreading *Infectious* Nature. It may be, but I fear some may have experienc'd the Contrary. This, Gentlemen, you should have consider'd before you proceeded to the Practice.

In short, I affirm it unlawful for a Person in *Health* upon any Account [for any reason] to receive a less *Infection* to avoid a greater, because Our blessed Saviour, the Great, the Skillful Physician says, *He that is whole needs not a Physician, but he that is Sick*. He allows of Application to Physicians in Cases of *Illness*, but Health has no need of Recourse to them.

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***On the Distress of the Town of Boston, occasioned by the Small Pox***

Long had the Rulers' prudent Care  
(Which Heaven kind vouchsaf'd to bless)  
From quick *Infection* kept the Air,  
And sav'd the Town from deep Distress.

But cursed S I N with rapid Feet,  
And quicker Flight spread thro' the Town,  
Taints every Soul in every Street,  
And calls the hov'ring Vengeance down.

Endeavours now no more succeed,  
Tho' Justice long had shook the Rod;  
Our crying Sins for Vengeance plead,  
And dare to Blows an angry GOD.

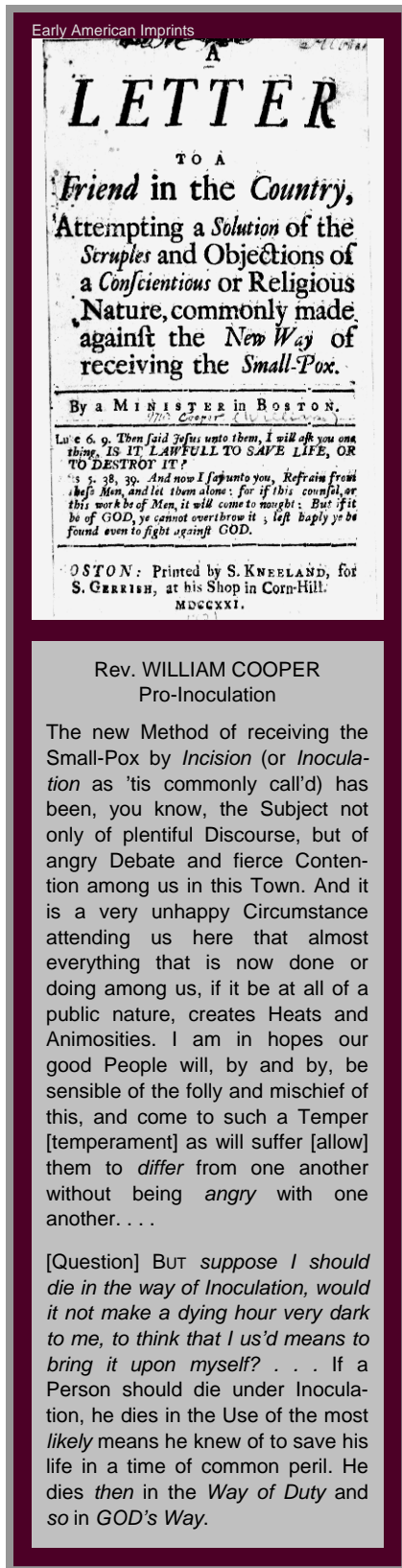
Repeated Deaths the Town within,  
With fearful Crowds the Country fill;  
Some with their Fear th' Infection bring,  
And only shun the Doctor's Skill.

Ye pious Fathers [clergy] mourn the Loss  
Of Youths, whose undisguised Truth  
Copy'd your own, who did engross  
An Age of Virtue in their Youth.

Sinners, secure your Peace with GOD,  
Accept your Saviour's kind Relief;  
Nor let your Guilt (a heavy Load)  
Oppress you with unbounded Grief.

Saints are secure of Life above,  
And only mourn the Sinners' Doom;  
They know their Saviour's dying Love  
Will save them here, or call them home.

In early October *The New-England Courant* reports a house-by-house count, ordered by the town council, of the sick and dead from smallpox: 2,757 ill, of which 1,499 recovered; many others on way to recovery; 203 persons buried, including "174 Whites, 14 Indians, and Fifteen Negroes." [NEC, October 2-9, 1721]



**PRO-INOCULATION LETTER**, probably by Rev. Cotton Mather, *The Boston Gazette*, October 23-30, 1721, excerpts.

A Faithful Account of what has occur'd under the late Experiments of the *Small-Pox* managed and governed in the way of *Inoculation*. Published partly to put a stop unto that unaccountable way of Lying, which fills the Town & Country on this occasion, and partly for the Information & Satisfaction of our Friends in other places.

I. The Operation within these four Months past has been undergone by more than Threescore Persons, Among which there have been *Old & Young, Strong and Weak, Male and Female, White & Black*, Many Serious and virtuous People, some the Children of Eminent Persons among us.

II. Concerning five or six of these, we had all possible Demonstration that they *first* received the Infection of the *Small Pox* in the *Common way*,<sup>4</sup> and these (as none would imagine otherwise) underwent the Distemper [disease] in the *Common way*. However, there is cause to think that the Discharge at their *Incisions* was of use unto them. Only One Gentlewoman 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.<sup>5</sup>

*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* [died]. 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* . . . The Reasons of this can be as yet no more than *Conjectured* at. But these have undergone so little Sickness that they declare, *They would much rather come under the Operation many times over than suffer the Small-Pox as they see it suffered in the Common way*.

V. For the most, by far, have endured in a manner, *Nothing*. Their *Pustules* have been very few. . . .

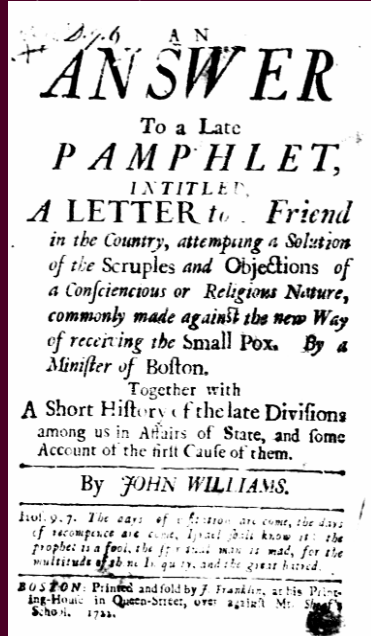
VI. The Stories about the peculiar *Stench* attending these Persons are malicious Inventions. There is *not a Syllable of Truth* in them.

VII. The Patients return to the *perfect Health Immediately*, and suppose themselves rather better than they were before the Operation.

VIII. The Formidable Stories we have had about their *Sores* are Egregious Fictions and Falsehoods. They Heal as *kindly* and as *quickly* as could be wish'd for, and some of them have had nothing but a *Cabbage-Leaf* from first to last applied unto them [at the incision]. . . .

<sup>4</sup> I.e., exposure to a person afflicted with the disease.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., those who developed smallpox from natural exposure may have yet benefited from the treatment. Only one such person died, and those familiar with her case believe that the vaccination did not cause her death.



Rev. JOHN WILLIAMS  
Anti-Inoculation

GENTLEMEN,

*I Offer this Treatise also as a Sign of  
Duty and Respects to you, with a  
desire that what is amiss in the  
Town may be mended, that there  
may be Peace in the Churches of  
Him who is the Prince of Peace. . . .*

. . . I do seriously believe that  
[inoculation] is a Delusion of the  
Devil; and that there was never the  
like Delusion in New-England since  
the Time of the Witchcraft at Salem,  
when so many innocent Persons  
lost their Lives, and afterwards  
some of them that were instrumental  
in taking their Lives away made a  
Recantation. And that this People  
may see their Error and recant is the  
sole Reason of my putting of Pen to  
Paper and Prayer to the God of  
Truth, that this People may see their  
Error. . . . But Satan may have  
another end in it, to wit, the making  
the Means of Grace unsuccessful in  
bringing the first Venders and  
Abettors and Promoters of Inocu-  
lation (which everybody knows were  
certain Ministers of this Town) into  
Contempt; tho' now some of our  
Country Ministers have imbib'd this  
Doctrine too.

Had this offered Mercy of a Gracious GOD been timely and thankfully received by the Town of Boston, it appears to many wise and good Men among us that some hundred of Lives might have been saved. GOD grant that other Towns, if endangered, may take warning by us, and come timely Into this Means of Preservation from noisomeness, corruption, distress and death, with a devout and humble dependence on GOD for His Blessing, And to His Blessed Name be all the Glory.

But let us beseech those that have call'd this Method — the *Work of the devil, or a going to the devil*, no more to allow the cursed thought, or utter the horrid word, les they be found *Blasphemous* of a most merciful and wonderful Work of GOD.

**ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER**, by "Hortensius," *The New-England Courant*, November 13-20, 1721, excerpts.

SIR,

One principal design [plan] of your Paper (if I mistake not) is to reform the present declining Age and render it more polite and virtuous; And if so, the Design is truly worthy, great and generous, for Knowledge is indeed perfective of Man's reasonable Nature and the Paths of Virtue lead to the highest Happiness.

Whoever appears in Papers of such a Nature, as I take yours to be, had need be well fortified against furious Assaults from every Quarter, which he will have reason to expect while Men's Sentiments are so various, their Interests Opposite, and their Passions fierce and irritated. He would do well to see to it that he has digested that Prudent Caution, to sit down and consider whether, with ten *Thousand*, he is able to confront him that approaches him with twenty *Thousand*. . . .

Briefly, promote Inquiries after Truth, quicken and rouse the Slothful, animate and inspire the Dull; And however the World has been impos'd on, it will soon appear that Crimes are not lessen'd and sanctifi'd because committed by Men in High Station, or of Reverend Name; nor are they enhanced because they are perpetrated by the Obscure and Mean.

**PRO-INOCULATION LETTER**, unsigned, *The New-England Courant*, November 13-20, 1721, excerpts.

SIR,

**T**HO' many, very many, *Useful and Excellent Arts, with which the World was bless'd in former Ages, are, they say, entirely lost; yet Our Age is happily favour'd with a wonderful and rare Discovery, more Worth than all of them: Shall I say, More Worth than a World!*

*The Discovery of the Way of Inoculating the Small Pox is so wonderful a Blessing of Heaven to Wretched Mortals that methinks none but an Infatuated People would reject and clamour against it. Hundreds of Lives are lost, I say, Lost! because they would not come into the Practice of it. Never one died in this Way, and 'tis*

*probable, more than probable, never will. O! Our Brethren in the Count[r]y, Be advis'd! Come into this Safe and Easy Practice — A Practive which we hope and trust will save Millions of Lives! And we dare almost warrant you that your Lives will be secure against the Malignity and Danger of this Worst of Plagues.*

**ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER**, & response to a letter in the *Courant* of Nov. 13-20, 1721 [above], by John Williams, published as "Answer to a Late Letter in the *New England Courant*," in pamphlet *Several Arguments proving That Inoculating the Small Pox Is not Contained in the Law of Physick . . .*, 2d. ed., 1721, excerpts.

O Wonderful Champion, what art thou? If I knew who thou art, I wuld treat thee according to thy merit. Art thou Dr. B—n's Champion [i.e., Cotton Mather]? or art thou some Knight of the Post, to swear what is told thee? . . . Or art thou one that art a setter forth of strange things? Art thou a Scholar and wicked, or a poor man and ironrant? . . . Art thou an old Man and grown Childish? Or art thou one that had never much Wit (a fool)? Or art thou a young Man, and boastingly would show that which thou never hadst, or that which thou always hadst.

Sir, you say, *Our Age is favoured with a wonderful and rare discovery, more worth than a World!* What World do you mean, Sir; that which is in the Moon? And was you over there to know the worth of it?

Again, you say, *That none but an Infatuated People would reject and clamour against it.* . . . Sir, I perceive you have great Conscience, Sir, can you read, did you ever learn your Catechism? did you ever learn the answer to that question, What are the Decrees of God? Ans[wer]. *The Decrees of God are his Eternal purposes, according to the Counsel of his own will, whereby for his own Glory he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.* How do we read, Dan[iel] 4:35. *And all the Inhabitants of the Earth are reputed as nothing: and he doth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, what doest thou.* And is there not an appointed time for Man upon the Face of the Earth? I am sorry to see any in New-England so ignorant.

**PRO-INOCULATION LETTER**, unsigned, *The New-England Courant*, November 20-27, 1721, excerpts.

*We have receiv'd the following Syllogisms with a Desire [request] that they may be inserted as an Answer to a late Piece in Favour of Inoculation, Entitled Several Reasons, &*

Several Arguments proving, That Inoculating the Small Pox is a lawful and successful Practice, and, not only so, but a Duty. Made plain and familiar to the meanest Capacity [lowest intelligence] but withal, so strong as to convince all Gainsayers, but such as want a Purge of *Hellebore*.

*Argument I.*

A Method of preventing Death, *which I have read* is used in *Smyrna* [Greece] and *Constantinople* [Turkey] with Success is not only lawful but a Duty. But, *I have read* that at *Smyrna* and *Constantinople*, inoculating the Small Pox is practiced with Success. *Therefore*, 'Tis not only lawful, but also a Duty to practice it.

Arg. II. A Practice that the King and Prince, and more eminent Physicians in London and Dublin and elsewhere, have declared their Approbation [approval] of, Is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .

Arg. III. A Method of preventing *Death* which is approv'd of by *Magistrates* and *Ministers* is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .

Arg. IV. A Method of preventing *Death* which the known Children of the *Wicked One* are fierce Enemies to, is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .

- Arg. V. A Method of preventing *Death* which an *Army of Africans* have given us all the Assurance which a rational Mind can desire that is it used in *Africa* with Success, is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .
- Arg. VI. A Method of preventing *Death* which Dr. *I——e M——r*<sup>6</sup> and his Son, and several other Ministers say is the right Way, is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .
- Arg. VII. A Method of preventing *Death* which he who comes into must believe, *That it is not his Duty to stay till God send the Sickness on him in the Common Way, because then it will be too late to seek Relief*; such a Method is not only lawful, but a Duty. . . .

#### I N F E R E N C E S

- I. They who don't use Inoculation are in *bad Terms with the Sixth Commandment*.<sup>7</sup>
- II. They who call Inoculation the *Work of the Devil, &c.*, are guilty of a *shocking Blasphemy*.

**PRINTER'S RESPONSE** to criticism, *The New-England Courant*, November 27–December 4, 1721, excerpts.

The printer of the *Courant*, James Franklin (whose apprenticed brother was sixteen-year-old Benjamin Franklin), responds to the charge that the paper has been unfair and disrespectful to the Puritan clergy who lead the pro-inoculation campaign.

The severe Treatment I have met with on account of some late Pieces [recent articles] in this Paper is known to all who know anything of the present unhappy Divisions of the Town: And since by the Industry of some Persons, the Charge against me is made public, I hope my being public in my Vindication will find a Pardon.

About Three Weeks since, a certain Gentleman stopped me in the Street, and with an Air of great Displeasure attack'd me in Words to this Effect: *You make it your Business, in the Paper call'd the Courant, to villify and abuse the Ministers of this Town. There are many Curses which await those that do so. The Lord will smite thro' the Loins of them that rise up against the Levites. I would have you consider of it, I have no more to say to you.*

. . . I confess there were two Pieces inserted in the *Courant* (No. 3)<sup>8</sup> in Answer to the Anti-Courant, which I have since wish'd had been left out; but my Printing the Anti-Courant laid me under some Obligation to publish them. I should not have done it. But this Gentleman has endeavoured to make me an Object of *public Odium* for no other Reason that my publishing an Answer to a Piece in the *Gazette of October* 30, wherein the greatest Part of the Town are represented as unaccountable Liars and Self-Destroyers for opposing the Practice of Inoculation. . . .

The *Courant* was never design'd for a Party [partisan] Paper. I have once and again given out that both Inoculators and Anti-Inoculators are welcome to speak their Minds in it, and those who have read the *Courants* must know that I have not only publish'd Pieces wrote among ourselves in favour of Inoculation but have given as full an Account of the Success of it in England as the other Papers have done. Yet the Envy of some Men has represented me as a Tool to the Anti-Inoculators. What my own Sentiments of things are is of no Consequence, nor any matter to any Body. I hereby invite all Men who have Leisure, Inclination and Ability to speak their Minds with Freedom, Sense and Moderation, and their Pieces shall be welcome to a Place in my Paper.

I hope I have now given full Proof of my Impartiality: But if the Gentleman above-mention'd, or those influenc'd by him, think themselves wrong'd at any time and will be at the Pains to defend themselves, they are welcome to treat me as they please; I shall give myself nor the Town any further Trouble in my Defense.

J A M E S F R A N K L I N

<sup>6</sup> Puritan ministers Increase Mather and his son, Cotton Mather.

<sup>7</sup> "Thou shalt not kill" in the standard Protestant listing of the Ten Commandments.

<sup>8</sup> The *Courant*, issue #3, August 14-21, 1721; see pp. 2-3, letter from Dr. William Douglass.



***ANTI-INOCULATION LETTER***, by "Absinthium," *The New-England Courant*, December 11-18, 1721, excerpts.

**SIR,**

Since in your last *Courant* you was pleased to say that both *Anti-Inoculators and Inoculators should be welcome to speak their Minds in your Paper*, I send the following Reasons against Inoculating the Small Pox, which, I hope in pursuing of your Promise, you will insert in your next, if you have Room.

The First Reason then is, That this Operation being perform'd upon none but such as are in perfect Health and who, for anything the Doctor or Patients know, may be such who may never have that Distemper in their Lives, or if they have, not to that Degree as to make it mortal to them: and then surely it must be needless to the last Degree for any Man to have himself made sick In order to prevent that, which for anything he knows, he is in no Danger of.

But in the Second Place, much more so, when the Persons that are for that Operation cannot answer this Small Question to the Satisfaction of any rational Creature, viz., *Whether this Operation is Infallible, so that hitherto there is not any Body has perished that has had the Small Pox produced by it*. I say, this is a Point the World will find them forever tender upon. . . .

And the third Reason is that if they should say *Inoculating the Small Pox is an infallible way to preserve Life*, I say, if they should say so, yet it is false in Fact; For Dr. *Emanuel Timonius*, in his Letter to the Royal Society, owns that he saw Two die that were Inoculated; but at the same Time would fain insinuate that they died of some other Distemper, which is the every Error his Disciples on this side the Great Atlantic fall into. . .

My fourth Reason is that altho' we see sundry Persons have the Small Pox favourably that are inoculated and so escape, yet we see (and these Gentlemen own it themselves) that they are capable of infecting their Neighbours to as great a Degree as those that are smitten the Common Way [exposure to a person ill with smallpox]. And, if so, I am sure it was far from being a laudable Practice in this Town (or in any other Town) in the Condition it was in Ten Months ago, for this Reason, because they could not have inoculated Twenty Persons in the Heart of the Town, as Mr. *B—n* did, but that they must infect many of their Neighbours: how many, God knows.

Of the approximately 10,500 residents of Boston in 1721, about 6,000 contracted smallpox and 899 of those died.

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1949: Last case of smallpox in the United States.

1977: Last naturally occurring case of smallpox in the world. (The patient, a man in Somalia, was cured.)

1978: Last death from smallpox in the world. (A medical photographer in England contracted the disease in a laboratory accident.)

1979: Official certification by the World Health Organization that smallpox had been eradicated in the world.

1980: Recommendation from the World Health Assembly that all countries cease routine smallpox vaccination.

