

CRAWFORD, John (1746-1813)

John Crawford was born in northern Ireland on 3 May 1746, and died in Baltimore, Maryland on 9 May 1813. As the second son of a clergyman, the fabric of his upbringing infused him with a refined moral conduct and respect for all creation -- the principles which framed his life's outlook and energized his professional practice in medicine.

At the age of seventeen, Crawford pursued his formal education at Trinity College in Dublin, an experience which helped nurture his later medical studies. His classical education included studying the ancients and mastering languages such as Latin and Greek as well as the more modern German and French. Along with his favorites, physick and divinity, he also pursued philosophy, history, and natural history, the science which ultimately molded his professional thought and teaching. He subsequently went on to the University of Leyden, where he earned his M.D. in an undisclosed year.

Crawford was appointed ship's surgeon aboard the East India Company's ship *Marquis of Rockingham*, making two voyages to Bombay and Bengal between 1772 and 1774. In 1779, he became Surgeon to the naval hospital on the island of Barbados. When the island suffered hurricane devastation in 1780 and all around him lay in rubble, Crawford distributed his sole supply of medicines according to the need, without personal compensation. In 1790 he removed to the Dutch colony of Demerara, assuming the influential position of Surgeon-Major. The military hospital then under his charge afforded abundant opportunities for observation and performing autopsies, and accordingly, the seeds of his theories regarding the causes of disease began to germinate.

As an avid student of Linnaeus, Crawford embraced the entire universe of animal and plant creation. Even the tiniest microorganisms prevalent in his tropical locale tantalized his scientific curiosity. He believed that nature's living creatures supply the reasons for everything that occurs, and they all have their influence on one another and on us. Observing the workings of animalculae in nature reinforced his reading of the works of parasitologists such as René-A.-F.

de Réaumur. In his book *A Lecture, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on the Cause, Seat and Cure of Diseases* (1811), Crawford stated how his observations and experimentation convinced him that worms infest the human body and cause disease by disrupting our normal functions:

It is observed by the ingenious and indefatigable Reaumur in his history of Insects ... that an infinity of these little animals desolate our plants, our trees, and our fruits. It is not alone in our fields, or our gardens, that they commit their ravages ; they attack us in our houses, our goods, our furniture, our clothes, our poultry ... they do not spare us, even ourselves. (p. 49)

This central thesis also framed the natural history course he taught in the University of Maryland's School of Medicine. Throughout the book, Crawford repeatedly points out the fallacy in accepting past conjectures routinely, a practice prevalent in a system of medical diagnosis that he believed was lacking in true philosophical reasoning. The contemporary philosophy of disease held that disease was attributed to the absorption of offensive atmospheric vapors. Crawford repudiated that tradition as one that he felt shunned a correct focus on the irrefutable truths inherent in natural history, a focus which he maintained was the only responsible one, and which lay at the core of his own thinking. He accordingly lamented the similar deficiencies found in the prevailing medical training curricula and textbooks. Frequently acknowledging Francis Bacon, Crawford advanced a neo-classic approach in interpreting the causes of disease. Keeping the Creator ever before his eyes, Crawford cited the courses of nature and its creatures as the foundation of all truth. The medical establishment's contemporary reliance upon conjecture necessarily was erroneous without a thorough and responsible observation of the natural order. Crawford's view of disease as a process intimately connected to the life cycles of the living flora and fauna around him was firmly rooted in his faith-based psyche:

There is one course I shall pursue which has been strangely neglected by medical writers, and yet from such writers it might have been most naturally expected, and that is, never to lose sight of the Creator. (p. 36-37)

Renouncing the a priori popular beliefs of the medical community, Crawford unqualifiably rejected their misdirected outlook as deficient and unacceptable:

The principles, then, of true philosophy are, upon no consideration to indulge conjectures concerning the powers and laws of nature, but to make it our endeavour, with all diligence, to search out the real and true laws, by which the constitution of things is regulated. (p. 20-21)

Crawford preached investigation and observation, directly applying those principles to the pathogenesis of infestation by parasitic living microorganisms. Nature and his Creator hold the keys, and responsible medical reasoning must observe and interpret accordingly. Well ahead of his time with his thinking, his theories unfortunately would not receive proper acceptance until well after his death.

Scorned by his medical peers, Crawford ultimately received the accolades he never sought, but which he very much deserved, at the hands of his brother Masons. Following his death, the Grand Lodge held a formal memorial ceremony in his honor, conducting a somber procession in the streets of Baltimore. In a lengthy *Eulogium* (1813), Tobias Watkins, Crawford's succeeding Right Worshipful Grand Master, extolled the numerous virtues of his Brother John Crawford's life of selflessness and service to his profession, his community, and ultimately to his Creator. John Crawford lies buried in Westminster Presbyterian Church Cemetery, his grave marked by a large inscribed stone erected there in 1896 by his brother Masons. Through the efforts of his University of Maryland colleagues, his private book collection posthumously established the university's Health Sciences and Human Services Library, the founding library in the University of Maryland System.

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*Further Reading*

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