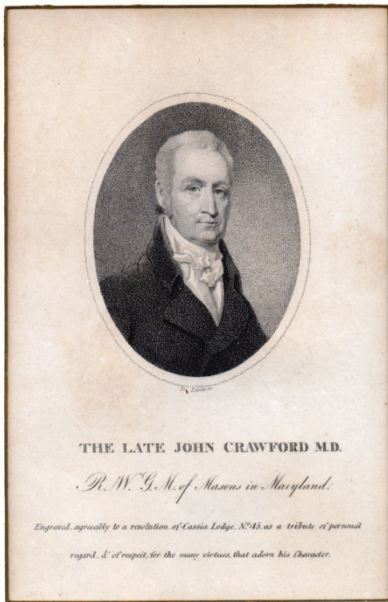


John Crawford

1746-1813

By Richard Behles



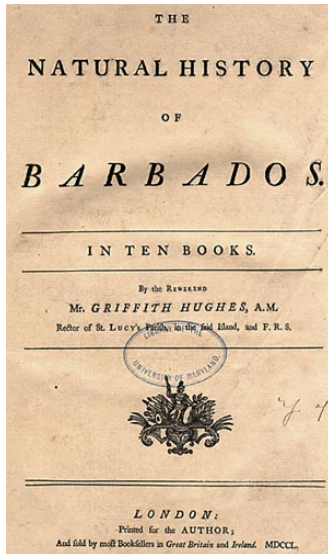
In the history of men eminent for genius, talents, or learning, it is always an interesting inquiry, to trace the progress of the mind, from the earliest dawning of intellectual light, to the full blaze of its meridian vigour - to see the first operation of the reasoning faculties - to discover the first impressions on the youthful heart, at the contemplation of the glorious and stupendous fabric of surrounding nature - to watch the formation of that connecting chain which leads the thought from Nature up to Nature's God - and to hear the first lisplings of unfeigned reverence for the great Creator of all... 1

Such was the essence of the man whose bibliographical treasures provided the basis of our Library. John Crawford, learned physician, student of nature, and benevolent public servant, left to us not only his treasured collection of medical texts, but also his innate spirit of service, scholarship, and the quest for scientific truth.

Crawford was born in Ireland on May 3, 1746, the second son of a clergyman. The fabric of his family upbringing infused him with the most refined sense of moral conduct and respect for the whole of creation, principles which framed his outlook and energized his practice throughout his entire life.

At the age of seventeen, Crawford pursued his formal education at Trinity College in Dublin, an experience which helped provide the genesis of his medical studies. In the finest tradition of a classical education, he became steeped in the learning of the Ancients, mastering languages such as Latin and Greek, as well as the more modern German and French. He enthusiastically studied not only his favorite subjects of physick and divinity, but also philosophy, history, and eventually natural history, the science which ultimately comprised the core of his professional thought and teaching. This training surely instilled in him a serious appreciation for the highest standard of scholarship, a quality which continually underscored the later pursuit of his own

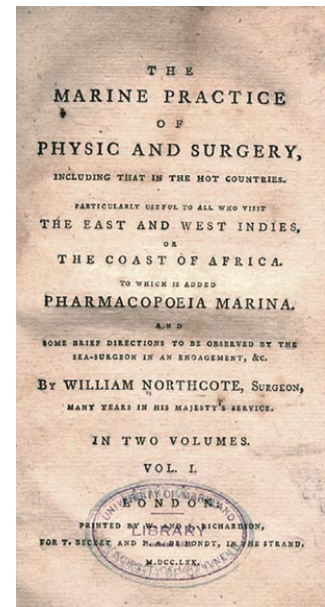
scientific inquiries. His later education included study in Holland at the University of Leyden, where he earned his M.D., and he subsequently would have multiple opportunities to travel between the European continent and the new world. As a result of his career appointments, and as evidenced by many of the selections in his library collection, the Dutch language and culture were significant underpinnings in his intellectual makeup.

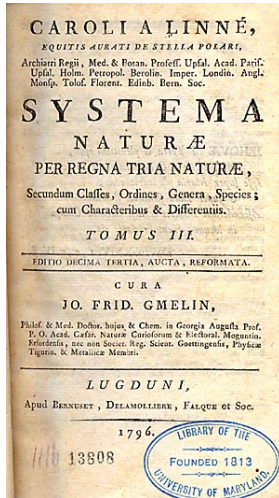


Those career appointments included a position as ship's surgeon aboard the East India Company's ship Marquis of Rockingham, making two voyages to Bombay and Bengal between 1772 and 1774. In 1779, Crawford was appointed Surgeon to the naval hospital on the island of Barbados. This position also offered to him the simultaneous responsibility of serving as a supply agent on behalf of the British ships plying the West Indies station. Mercantile enterprises such as this afford many opportunities for dishonorable practices, and misappropriation of goods and materiel for one's own benefit. Against the appeal of such temptations, though, Crawford maintained the highest ethical standards, and left to others the accumulation of personal worldly gain.

This unselfish tendency reached a climax in 1780, when the island suffered hurricane devastation. While all around him lay in rubble, his property alone remarkably escaped destruction, and the limited supply of medicines in his possession at home was all that remained for the treatment of the sick and injured. While lesser individuals might have sought to profit from inequitable sales under these circumstances, Crawford saw to it that his lone medicine supply was immediately available according to the need, and without compensation to himself.

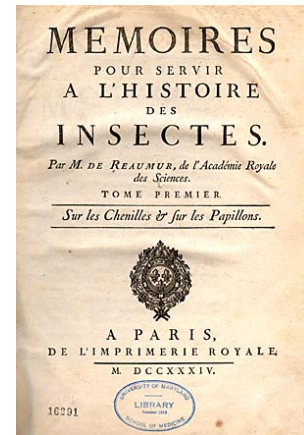
It was during this period that the burdens of ill health, coupled with the devastating loss of his wife during a sea voyage, served to test his faith and strengthen his resolve. In the midst of those physical and emotional challenges, he managed to approach the consideration of professional career options, ever mindful of the higher vocation that was the raising of two infant children suddenly left under his solo care.



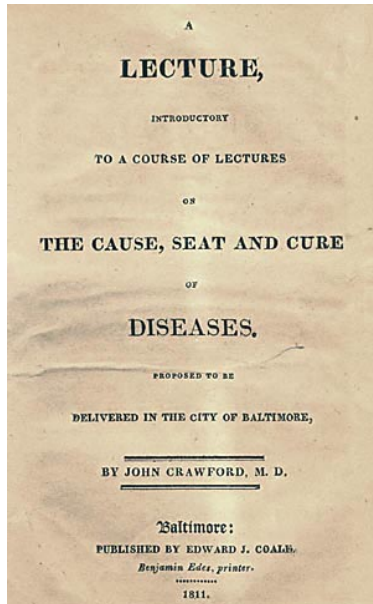


In subsequent years, he relocated in the Dutch colony of Demerara, where he held the highly-reputed and influential position of Surgeon-Major. His propensity for extending hospitality was widespread, and in his professional endeavors, the military hospital then under his charge afforded an abundance of opportunities for observation, study, and the performance of autopsies. But it was during this tenure that the seeds of his most profound medical theories blossomed to their fullest. As an avid student of Linnaeus, the whole of animal and plant creation was all too real to Crawford, and even the seemingly-inconsequential microorganisms so prevalent in his tropical locale tantalized his scientific curiosity. By observing the workings of these tiny animalculæ out in the natural environment, he became fascinated with the notion that they might find their way into the human body and disrupt the normal healthy functions within us as the cause of disease.

It is observed by the ingenious and indefatigable Reaumur in his history of insects, which consists of six volumes in quarto, 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 devour the grain in our store-house; they pierce all our wood-work; they do not spare us, even ourselves. 2



With the revered Sir Francis Bacon serving as both his inspiration and his certification, Crawford advanced a neo-classic approach in his interpretation of the causes of diseases. Drawing on the ancient, but still valid, tenets of the courses of nature as the exemplification of the true laws established and maintained by the Creator, Crawford sought to disprove much of the medical establishment's modern thinking, which in his view relied predominantly upon conjecture, and not upon natural observation and inquiry. His faith-based sense of the natural order of things ever caused him to scrutinize the matter of disease as a process intimately connected to, and necessarily resultant from, the ongoing life-process phenomena of the countless species of flora and fauna that surrounded him.



His A LECTURE, INTRODUCTORY TO A COURSE OF LECTURES ON THE CAUSE, SEAT AND CURE OF DISEASES appeared in 1811, just two years before his death. By his own declaration, A LECTURE was not so much the summation of his life's work, as it was a vow to continue to explore the merits of his theories before the rest of the scientific community, a community which already had reviled him for his challenge to their established mind-set. That mind-set, commonly known as the contagionist theory, had prevailed over long periods of time among the ranks of the most respected medical giants, and it preached that the cause of disease was due to the absorption of atmospheric vapors by a process known as miasma, as a result of exposure to infected areas. This tradition, which Crawford viewed as an errant deviation from the correct observations of the true plan of nature, obviously ran counter to the radical and "new" approach he was attempting to advance:

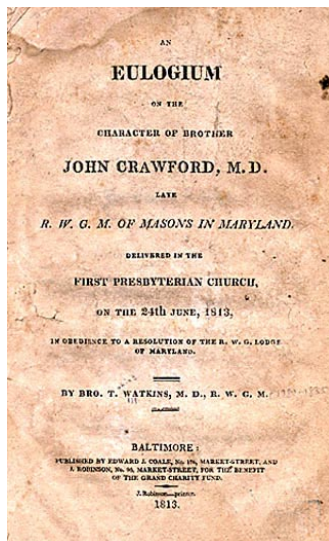
The principles, then, of true philosophy are, upon no consideration to indulge conjectures concerning the powers and laws of nature, but to make it our endeavour, with all diligence, to search out the real and true laws, by which the constitution of things is regulated. 3

As evidence that he was not inventing some unfounded line of thinking, Crawford cited esteemed predecessors such as the Viennese physician Anthony Plenciz, whose 1762 tracts demonstrated the validity of what he called the "animated animal principle." Crawford acknowledged the great opposition he had received in response to his theories, but remained firmly committed to investigating them further, in the interest of bringing real scientific truth into the realm of a more humanly-beneficial universe of medical treatment. His position as Lecturer on Natural History here at the University of Maryland in 1812 gave him a fitting forum in which to pursue that commitment. Well ahead of his time with his thinking, his theories unfortunately would not receive their proper acceptance until well after his death, when they eventually triumphed at the hands of the celebrated Pasteur and others in the school of renowned late-nineteenth century bacteriologists.

In another major endeavor, Crawford introduced the practice of vaccination into Baltimore in 1800, after receiving smallpox serum samples from Dr. John Ring of London. Coincidentally, Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse was engaging in the same practice in Massachusetts at the same time, and it was he who got the recognition for introducing the concept into America, by virtue of his follow-up in publishing accounts of his ventures. In this regard, Crawford, though equal in practice, unfortunately remained subordinate in national acclaim. But his efforts were no less significant in our region, as his practice prefigured the establishment in 1802 of the Vaccine Institute under Dr. James Smith. This agency and its network of participating physicians eventually succeeded in eradicating a smallpox epidemic in Baltimore in 1821.

In addition to that particular public-minded professional endeavor, Crawford's humanitarianism took several other forms throughout his career here in Baltimore. He was the principal founder of the Baltimore General Dispensary in 1801, and remained an active senior administrator of the facility until his death in 1813. He played a similar role in a group known as the Maryland Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge. Yet again, he helped found the Bible Society of Baltimore, and also was one of the directors of the Baltimore Library. In yet another venture, he approached the City Board of Health, volunteering to become the first practicing physician to join the ranks of city commissioners who comprised it. The city officials, however, were not at all ready to accommodate such a daring proposition, and the concept didn't materialize until many years later. Finally, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Penitentiary in 1802.

But perhaps it was his membership in the Masons that provided him with the most familial venue for the demonstration of his public spiritedness. He became actively involved in their membership shortly after he came to Baltimore in 1796, and he quickly rose to the position of Right Worshipful Grand Master of the Maryland Grand Lodge, elected to that post in 1801. From that time onward, he was re-elected unanimously each succeeding year until his death.



Rejected by his medical colleagues, Crawford ultimately received the accolades he never sought, but which he very much deserved, at the hands of his Masonic Brethren. Following his death on May 9, 1813, the Grand Lodge resolved to set aside a day on which to hold a formal memorial ceremony in his honor. They chose the date of June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist, a date traditionally devoted to regular social frivolity. In this instance, however, they conducted a somber procession of honor in the streets of the city, and assembled themselves for a much higher order of business. In a lengthy EULOGIUM, Brother Tobias Watkins, Crawford's succeeding Right Worshipful Grand Master, extolled the numerous virtues of his Brother John Crawford's life of selflessness lived out in 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 stone, inscribed and re-erected there in 1896 by his Brother Masons.

HIS NAME ALONE WILL CONSTITUTE HIS EULOGY. 4



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