

EDWARD OCTAVIUS HOCKEN (1820–1845)
LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF A FORGOTTEN MAN

by

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IN the obituaries of those who die young it is customary to dilate on what might have been achieved if their lives had been spared. Rarely is the anticipation of future success in a person dying in his twenty-fifth year so firmly founded as in the case of Edward Octavius Hocken.

He was born at Falmouth, Cornwall, on 3 September 1820, the eighth and youngest son of one Joseph Hocken. With a brother three years his senior named Charles Augustus, who later entered the ministry, he was educated at Blundell's School, Devon. He left in June 1834, and was apprenticed to Philip Chilwell de la Garde (1797–1871), at that time a general practitioner in Exeter, though styling himself 'Surgeon Oculist'. In 1836 de la Garde was appointed surgeon to the Eye Infirmary, and it is therefore not surprising that Hocken subsequently showed great interest in this subject.

Like de la Garde, Hocken proceeded to St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London to complete his medical education. He is first mentioned in the records there as a visitor to a meeting of the Abernethian Society held on 18 October 1839, of which he became a most active member. He was formally admitted to the Society on 8 November 1839 by one of the Presidents, Holmes Coote (1817–72), who subsequently became surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital and joint lecturer on surgery with Sir James Paget. Two weeks later, on 22 November 1839, he read his first paper to the Society on 'The influence of the constitution on the immediate causes of disease'. It provided his second publication, a volume of 64 pages in duodecimo, entitled *An Essay on the influence of constitution, in the production of disease* (London, 1840). The extent to which constitution influences disease was considered 'under four heads—namely, alterations in the quality, or quantity, or both, of the circulating fluid—the blood; secondly, diseased conditions of the nervous system, as a whole; thirdly, of both these systems; fourthly, and lastly, the constitutional disturbance induced by local, functional, or organic disease'. Together with another small publication, *An exposition of the pathology of hysteria: elucidated by a reference to the origin, &c., of hysterical amaurosis* (London, 1842), it was not unfavourably reviewed in *The British and Foreign Medical Review*. The author 'appears to have talent and is doubtless young', but was advised by the reviewer 'to be more chary, in the future, of printing his lucubrations, unless they contain a considerably greater share of important or novel matter than the present ones can lay claim to'.

The next paper entitled 'Rigidity during Delivery' was read on 11 January 1840. Other papers that he read were on 'Amaurosis', 14 February 1840; 'Strabismus', 9 October 1840; observations on 'The supply of blood to the cornea and aqueous membrane', 7 January 1841; 'Injuries to the head', 14 and 21 January 1841; 'Introductory address', 4 November 1841; and 'The physiology of the orbital muscles', 27 January 1842.

On 1 April 1841 he was elected one of the six Presidents of the Society, and on 14 April the following year he took the chair at the last meeting which he attended.¹

The records of the Hospital show that Hocken was a brilliant student. Possibly his apprenticeship at Exeter, extending to more than four years, added to a certain precocity as well as seriousness of purpose and great ambition, helped him to gain nine prizes, including first prizes in Medicine, Surgery and Midwifery.

On 23 July 1841 Hocken acquired the diploma of the Royal College of Surgeons of England; it is probable that he ceased being a student at St. Bartholomew's Hospital at about this time, although even in the previous year in one of his two papers in the *Lancet* he had described himself as 'Surgeon, Exeter'.

In a paper published 27 March 1841 the letters M.D. appear for the first time after his name; *The London Medical Directory* (1846)³ described this as 'a foreign honorary diploma', but it has not been possible to ascertain from which university the degree was obtained. In *The London Medical Directory* of 1845⁴ he was described as 'corresponding member of the Medical Society of the Grand Duchy of Baden', which may give a clue to its origin.

Hocken's original intention had been to specialize in ophthalmic surgery, which indeed remained his prime interest. However, in deference to the opinion of many of his professional friends, he entered for and was elected to the post of physician to the Blenheim Street Infirmary and Free Dispensary, Oxford Street, London, instituted in 1834. Several of his publications relate to cases seen in his practice there. In 1842 he was elected a member of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, and the following year a member of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association.

In 1845, fearing that the new medical reform bill if passed would disqualify him from practising as a physician unless he possessed a British M.D., he travelled north to St. Andrews, where degrees could still be obtained on payment of a fee and presentation of letters of recommendation. There, on 6 May, in company with fifty-two other candidates, he was admitted Doctor of Medicine.

It is said that he was never strong physically and had often been advised to moderate his activities. But 'no persuasion could induce him to relax from his course of study. It was his one, his only, pleasure'.⁵ During his visit to Scotland he developed symptoms of pulmonary phthisis, and returned to London a sick man. Dr. P. M. Latham (1789–1875), physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, advised complete rest in the country without, however, informing him of the

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true nature of his illness. Hocken therefore went to his brother, then Vicar of Chacewater in Cornwall, where he died six weeks later on 12 August 1845, and was buried in the local churchyard. Fortunately for him, he ‘constituted another example to the many extant, of the want of recognition in themselves, by many of our eminent physicians, of a disease that had occupied their earnest and anxious attention to dilate upon in others’.³

He had in September 1841 married Georgina Coward of Kingsland, by whom he left one son.

Dr. W. F. Chambers,² at that time physician to the Queen, in his presidential address delivered before the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London on 2 March 1846, lamented ‘the removal of another individual from our ranks by that merciless disease which we see every day grasping the most intelligent and the most interesting of our fellow creatures. . . . I allude to Dr. Hocken, a young physician of great promise and very early reputation.’ He spoke of Hocken’s publications as ‘highly creditable to his precocious talents, and giving us an earnest of future eminence and success, never, alas! to be realized’.

WRITINGS OF E. O. HOCKEN

Although an obituary notice of Hocken mentions ‘upwards of sixty’ published books and papers by him, and an advertisement in one of his books states that translations of many of his papers were published in several German, French and other continental periodicals, the following are the only ones we have traced. Some of them appeared either in full or in abstract in more than one journal, and the *Jahrbücher der in- und ausländischen gesammten Medicin* (Schmidt) also contains many abstracts of Hocken’s writings.

1839

1. ‘Local nervous disturbance simulating meningitis, peritonitis, and sciatica, in an hysterical female, from abdominal irritation’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 1, 496–7.

1840

2. ‘Amaurosis from hysteria’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 11, 751–3.
3. ‘Classification of ulcers of the cornea’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 11, 935–6.
4. *An essay on the influence of constitution in the production of disease*, London, Samuel Highley, 1840, pp. xii, 64.
This was reissued in 1841 with a new title-page, and a review of it appeared in *Brit. & Foreign med. Rev.*, 1842, XIII, 520.
5. ‘The hydrecephaloid affection of infants’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 1, 758–9.
6. ‘On the results of different degrees of violence to the eye’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 11, 711–12.
7. ‘Peculiar form of acute anasarca’, *Lancet*, 1839–40, 1, 643–4.
8. *A treatise on amaurosis and amaurotic affections*, London, Samuel Highley, 1840, pp. viii, 359. American edition, Philadelphia, Haswell & Johnson, 1842, pp. vi, 5–201. A German translation by ‘Dr. Scherrer, of Constance’ was announced, but we find no proof that it was published. Reviewed in *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1841, LVI, 253–67.

1841

9. ‘Illustrations of the pathology diagnosis and treatment of ophthalmic affections’, *Lond. med. Gaz.*, 1841–2, N.S. 2, 5–11, 169–73; 1842–3, N.S. 1, 251–6, 285–7.

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1841-2

10. 'On the diagnosis, pathology, and treatment of amaurosis', *Lancet*, 1840-41, II, 7-10, 38-42, 153-7, 223-5; note to editor, 318, 357-61, 470-4, 534-7, 713-16, 775-9, 916-19; *Lancet*, 1841-2, I, 349-52, 696-9; *Lancet*, 1841-2, II, 81-4.
Parts II-X bear the title 'Illustrations of the pathology and treatment of amaurosis'; Parts XI-XIII, 'Illustrations of the pathology, diagnosis, and treatment of ophthalmic affections'.

1842

11. 'Amaurosis from an excess of circulating blood, affecting the visual nervous system generally (Hyperaemial amaurosis). Active, passive, mechanical, and sympathetic forms: explaining their symptomatology, causation, diagnosis, pathology, and treatment', *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1842, LVII, 324-56.
12. 'Amaurosis from hysteria, acute and chronic, its diagnosis, pathology and treatment', *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1842, LVII, 49-69.
13. 'Amaurosis from pressure on the retina: the symptoms, causes, pathology, diagnosis, and treatment of some of the affections reducible under the foregoing head', *Lond. & Edinb. mon. J. med. Sci.*, 1842, II, 235-57.
Abstract in *Retrospect of pract. Med. & Surg.* . . . Ed. W. Braithwaite, 1842 (2nd ed., 1845), V, 190-1.
14. *An exposition of the pathology of hysteria: elucidated by a reference to the origin, diagnosis, symptomatology, pathology, and treatment of hysterical amaurosis*, London, Samuel Highley, 1842, p. 32.
Reviews in *Brit. & Foreign med. Rev.*, 1842, XIII, 520; and *Med.-Chir. Rev.*, 1842, XXXVI, 491-4.
15. 'Observations on pericarditis and endocarditis, and on the best modes of treatment in these diseases', *Lond. & Edinb. mon. J. med. Sci.*, 1842, II, 813-27.
Abstract in *Med.-Chir. Rev.*, 1843, XXXVIII, 277-8.
16. 'Observations on the adjuvantia of the systemic circulation', *Lond. med. Gaz.*, N.S. 2, 1841-2, 724-5.
17. 'Observations on the separate and combined actions of the muscles of the eye and its appendages, with their uses and physiological employment in the animal economy', *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1842, LVIII, 310-26.
18. 'Observations on the separate and combined actions of the orbicularis palpebrarum', *Dublin J. med. Sci.*, 1842, XXI, 57-65.
19. 'On the diagnosis and pathology of ophthalmic affections; developing a new plan of treating strumous conjunctivitis', *Lancet*, 1842-3, I, 282-7, 366.
Abstract in *Retrospect of pract. Med. & Surg.* . . . Ed. W. Braithwaite, 1842, VI, 201-4.

1843

20. 'The defects of vision which result from asthenic conditions of the system', *Lond. & Edinb. mon. J. med. Sci.*, 1843, III, 12-29.
21. 'Essays on the diseases of the eye', *Lancet*, 1842-3, II, 678-87, 721-30, 758-65, 888-93.
22. 'Observations on hectic fever', *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1843, LIX, 65-72.
23. 'Observations on the application of the nitrate of silver to the outside of the eyelids in superficial diseases of the eye', *Lond. med. Gaz.*, 1842-3, N.S. 2, 771-4.
24. 'Observations on the law of identity which regulates the occurrence of sympathetic and simultaneous disease in the visual organs', *Lond. & Edinb. mon. J. med. Sci.*, 1843, III, 505-15.
25. 'Should the child be placed to the mother's breast shortly after delivery?' *Med.-Chir. Rev.*, 1843, XXXIX, 280-1.

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1844

26. 'Case of immense accumulation of indurated faeces in the rectum, and complete suppression of the alvine evacuations for a month.' (Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society. Tuesday, November 26, 1844.) *Lancet*, 1844, II, 326. Also in *Lond. med. Gaz.*, 1844–5, N.S. 1, 330–1; *Med. Times*, 1845, XI, 209–10; *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1846, LXV, 24–30.
27. *A complete condensed practical treatise on ophthalmic medicine*, London, Samuel Highley, 1844, pp. 108.
The prospectus on the back states that the work is to be completed in three parts at 10s. 6d. each. Only Part I was published.
28. 'Observations on the pathological elements, and nature of constitutional and local scrofula', *Lond. & Edinb. mon. J. med. Sci.*, 1844, IV, 361–70.
29. 'On the comparative value of the preparations of mercury and iodine in the treatment of syphilis', *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1844, LXI, 294–340.
Abstract in *Retrospect of pract. Med. & Surg.* . . . Ed. W. Braithwaite, 1844, IX, 28–34.
30. *A practical enquiry into the value of medicinal naphtha in tubercular phthisis*, London, Samuel Highley, 1844, pp. viii, 72. Reviews in *Brit. & Foreign med. Rev.*, 1845, XIX, 146–55; *Edinb. med. & surg. J.*, 1845, LXIV, 459–77; *Lancet*, 1845, I, 329–31; *Med.-Chir. Rev.*, 1844, N.S. 1, 164–8.

1845

31. 'Practical remarks on the value of the operation of perforating the wall of the chest into a tubercular cavity, for the relief or cure of tubercular phthisis', *Lond. med. Gaz.*, 1844–5, N.S. 1, 481–7.
Abstract in *Retrospect of pract. Med. & Surg.* . . . Ed. W. Braithwaite, 1845, XI, 226–9.
32. 'The varieties, causes, pathology and treatment, of the inflammatory affections of the retina', *Trans. Provincial med. & surg. Assoc.*, N.S. 1, 1845, XIII, 241–84.
Abstracts in *Brit. & Foreign med. Rev.*, 1845, XX, 510–11; *Med.-Chir. Rev.*, 1845, N.S. 2, 464–7.
33. *A reply to the malicious personal attack of the British and Foreign Medical Review*, [1845?].
Not seen; mentioned in *Lancet*, 1845, I, 329–31.

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2. CHAMBERS, W. F. An address, delivered before the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London, at the Anniversary Meeting, held on Monday, March 2. *Lancet*, 1846, I, 291–4; also in *Med. Times*, 1846, XIII, 468–70.
3. DR. HOCKEN (Obituary). *London Medical Directory*, 1846, 183–5.
4. *London Medical Directory*, 1845, 79.

* E. O. Hocken's midwifery prize, gained at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, is in Col. Hocken's possession.