

The humanitarian and scientific interests of Thomas Hodgkin (1798 - 1866), discoverer of a disease

H. Dubovsky

Thomas Hodgkin is generally famous for the discovery of a lymphoma in 1837, but not for his remarkable relationship as physician and friend with the philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore (1784 - 1885), and their six shared journeys to Europe, the Near East and North Africa to alleviate the plight of religious and ethnic minorities. Also less well known are Hodgkin's humanitarian activities, inspired by his being a Quaker: his assistance of freed slaves, and his involvement in the movement for the abolition of capital punishment and in mental hospital and prison reform. His wide range of scientific interests included medical education, geography, ethnology and social anthropology. He is buried in Jaffa, Israel, where he died of dysentery while on a trip with Montefiore.

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Thomas Hodgkin is famous as the eponymous discoverer of a lymphoma in 1837 at Guy's Hospital, London. Less well known although documented by Sakula¹ and Kass² are his long association with Sir Moses Montefiore (1784 - 1885), both as personal physician and as friend, and their journeys to Europe, the Near East and North Africa in shared ventures to assist distressed minorities. Still less well known is the extent of his humanitarian and scientific achievements.

Medical work

As a student Hodgkin became fluent in French, Spanish and Italian as a result of visits to hospitals in Europe. This proved useful in his travels with Montefiore. He learned the new art of auscultation in Paris from Laennec (1781 - 1826), its originator, and wrote a paper for the Physical Society of Guy's Hospital on the use of the stethoscope; this facilitated its introduction in England, where some opposition had existed. He also brought the concept of relating morbid anatomy to disease as observed clinically to Guy's Hospital from the French school of medicine.

In 1827, 5 years before Corrigan's clinical description of aortic regurgitation in Dublin, Hodgkin described² the *post mortem* appearance of this condition as 'retroversion of the valves of the aorta . . . which allows of their dropping in towards the ventricles, instead of effectually closing the vessel against a reflux of blood'. While appendicitis was already known, Hodgkin, in 1836 in his book *Lectures on the Morbid Anatomy of the Serous and Mucous Membranes*, recognised its disease progression of 'partial inflammation', perforation, appendix abscess and general peritonitis.³

Although a pathologist, he had advanced views on medical education, as outlined in his address as President of the Pupils' Physical Society in 1827.³ He mentioned the dangers of excessive detail in the teaching of pre-medical subjects and the necessity of emphasising basic principles in clinical teaching. Hodgkin suggested that students in medical wards do clerking of patients like the dressers in surgical wards, given that 'the histories taken by the pupils would not merely assist them in making valuable remarks on the progress of the diseases, but would be highly beneficial to the students by sharpening their powers of observation'.

These fundamental views on medical education from a pathologist and a junior member of staff could not have been well received by the senior physicians of Guy's, where Hodgkin was already in disfavour because of his role as a founder member of the University of London and a member of its senate while working at Guy's. The latter regarded the conferring of degrees by the University as competitive. Hodgkin had been motivated by his being a Quaker, and had therefore been viewed as a dissenter by the Anglican church, which controlled Oxford and Cambridge universities and prohibited the entry of Quakers. A stipulation for admission to the University of London was that no religious test was required.

As was to be expected, Hodgkin was unsuccessful in applying for a post as physician at Guy's Hospital. He also could not relate well to colleagues. After another unhappy period as morbid anatomist at St Thomas's Hospital, where he experienced 'miserable intrigues', he entered private practice. He failed in this because his fees were inadequate, but was saved financially when he became full-time personal physician to Montefiore. Despite Montefiore's strict adherence to Judaism and Hodgkin's strong commitment to Quakerism, they were drawn together by their civic disadvantages as non-Anglicans in a country with a national religion, and by a commitment to the social upliftment of the disadvantaged and the persecuted.

Hodgkin's humanitarian and other interests

These were largely motivated by his Quakerism, a breakaway movement from the Anglican church. The Society of Friends practised a blend of Christian mysticism and social responsibility dedicated to living in accordance with 'a direct apprehension of the Lord'. Quakers were leaders in opposition to slavery, prison brutality, and military service, and pioneered mental hospital reform. They refused to pay tithes to the Anglican church and to take oaths. Medicine, commerce and agriculture were the only avenues open to them.

Hodgkin was a founder member of the Aborigines' Protection Society, which faced an immediate problem⁴ in England when slavery was abolished and 10 000 blacks employed as flamboyantly dressed flunkeys in stately homes were freed. Many were shipped to Sierra Leone and Liberia without adequate planning, and attempts were made to exploit their labour in cotton plantations. Hodgkin was in direct contact with these areas, in order to help alleviate the disastrous results of colonisation.

As Vice-President of the Ethnological Society, Hodgkin held advanced views on African education:⁵ that early schooling should be conducted in the vernacular with English introduced later. The more able pupils would later be sent to England to master English and some of the ways of European society and could return to transmit this culture bilingually. He felt that a study of native languages and the codification of their grammatical structure afforded an opportunity to determine how man had developed in diverse cultures; he thus presaged modern social anthropology.

Hodgkin, as Honorary Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, had an opportunity to further his interests in this field on a visit to Morocco in 1864 with Montefiore² who successfully interceded with the Sultan on behalf of Jews who were falsely accused of murder. As the party spent 8 days in travelling through the desert from Mogador to Marrakesh, Hodgkin was able to study the countryside. His observations were published⁶ posthumously in a book dedicated to Sir Moses. He provided descriptions of the geology, antiquities, water systems, agricultural methods and animals encountered. Hodgkin was also a member of the Council of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Hodgkin actively supported the Quakers' pioneering work in mental hospital treatment,⁷ which started as early as 1796 in its 'retreats' when the then repressive management was replaced by kindness and non-restraint. He assisted the pioneers of this movement, the layman Samuel Tuke and early psychiatrist John Conolly. Hodgkin recognised the condition, schizophrenia, early — at the trial of Edward Oxford in 1840, when he gave evidence as a member of the Society for Abolishing Capital Punishment. This 18-year-old youth had fired a pair of pistols at Queen Victoria while she was taking an airing in her carriage in a park. Admitting guilt, he made no attempt to escape and showed amused unconcern at the court proceedings. Quoting from a French medicolegal work, Hodgkin explained the existence of 'moral insanity or homicidal impulse in contra-distinction to intellectual insanity'. Oxford was found 'not guilty' on the grounds of insanity and was committed to a mental hospital.

Another example of Hodgkin's advanced views was on the excessive powers of trade unions. Cremin⁴ quotes from Hodgkin's book, *The Means of Promoting and Preserving Health* (1840):

Those who join themselves to a union . . . are . . . no longer their own masters, or the servants of those from whom they receive their wages . . . but are in reality the slaves of the heads of the union . . . They are taxed by them and drained of their past earnings . . . and are restricted in the arrangements they may desire to make for the employment of their exertions to support themselves and their families and may therefore have their earnings suspended.

Hodgkin's overseas visits with Montefiore

After a successful career as a stockbroker in London, Montefiore retired at the age of 40 to concentrate on relieving the problems of oppressed minorities (both Jews and Christians) in Europe, North Africa and the Near East. On these missions Montefiore, who had been made a baronet by Queen Victoria for promoting British interests overseas, was received by heads of state as an English plenipotentiary. Hodgkin accompanied him on six of these visits from 1857 to 1866, also acting as his private secretary. He assisted Montefiore in establishing a British Syrian Relief Fund in 1860 when 1 360 Christians were killed by Druze and their villages destroyed. Hodgkin despatched medicines and remained informed of developments.

Hodgkin's non-medical abilities were utilised when he visited the Holy Land with Montefiore in 1857.² On his own initiative, he raised funds for the removal of 'the heaps of dirt which accumulate in the narrow streets of Jerusalem', which he described as a 'poor and miserable place'. He called a meeting of the Europeans there to propose the formation of a 'mechanic's institute', where improved transportation, sanitation and agriculture could be taught. He assisted with Montefiore's many benevolences — small farms, a dispensary, a girls' school and weaving works. He helped draft proposals for a railroad from Jaffa to Jerusalem and drew up the plans for an almshouse and agricultural rehabilitation settlement that were the first settlement outside the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. This was a project entrusted to Montefiore by the estate of Judah Touro of New Orleans, and which Montefiore supplemented financially. A windmill, a landmark of the area today, was intended to grind corn. The venture was not successful as the terrain was unsuitable for agriculture and the inhabitants feared brigands outside the walls of the old city at night. The almshouse, the *mishkenot sha' ananim* (dwellings of tranquillity) fell into disrepair until the state of Israel arranged its conversion into accommodation for distinguished overseas artists and writers.

Hodgkin's second and fatal visit to the Holy Land was in 1866. Word had reached London of a crop failure caused by a plague of locusts; this had been followed by an outbreak of cholera in Jerusalem where one out of six of the population died. Montefiore decided to go to Jerusalem to supervise a Holy Land Relief Fund. Hodgkin, who had been ailing on the journey, developed dysentery on reaching Jaffa. Montefiore proceeded to Jerusalem, leaving Hodgkin at the home of the British consular agent with two physicians and his own personal servant. Hodgkin died and was buried in the English cemetery. Sir Moses had an impressive 2.4-metre high obelisk of red Aberdeen marble erected with the inscription:

Here rests the body of Thomas Hodgkin MD of Bedford Square London, a man distinguished alike for scientific achievement, medical skill and self-sacrificing philanthropy. He died in Jaffa, the 4th of April 1866 in the faith and hope of the Gospel.

HUMANI NIHIL A SE ALIENUM PUTABAT. This epitaph is inscribed by his sorrowing widow and brother to record their irreparable loss.

On the reverse of the memorial is inscribed:

This tomb is erected by Sir Moses Montefiore, Bart, in commemoration of a friendship of more than forty years and of many journeys taken together in Europe, Asia and Africa.

The graveyard can be visited by taking a No. 10 bus from Ben Yehuda Street in Tel Aviv to within walking distance of a bus stop near an old clock tower, a central point in Jaffa. The key to the cemetery is kept at a hostel of a Christian Mission to Jews adjacent to the Church of Scotland Tabetha School, 21 Yavet Street, and about 40 metres off the street. The deplorable state of neglect of Hodgkin's grave and cemetery when the author visited in 1984 have improved somewhat over the years after approaches were made to relevant institutions.³

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