

THE LIFE AND TRIALS OF T. R. ALLINSON EX-L.R.C.P. ED.  
1858-1918

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INTRODUCTION

Few may be aware that the Allinson whose name appears on the wrappers of loaves of bread and packets of flour was once a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (Figure 1). Indeed, the name of Thomas Richard Allinson (Figure 2) has been almost completely forgotten in medical circles, but during the last decade of the nineteenth century he was a well-known and controversial figure. His views on health and the treatment of disease, as well as his commercial practices, led him into years of conflict with the Victorian establishment, including this College, the General Medical Council and the Courts of Law. He was struck off the Medical Register and spent many years unsuccessfully seeking re-instatement through the courts. His case created for the first time a clear legal definition of 'infamous professional conduct'. And, of course, he made flour and bread.

EARLY LIFE

Thomas Allinson was born near Manchester on 29 March 1858. As a child he developed a keen interest in natural history and was an omnivorous reader. He was educated in Lancaster and Manchester, and is said to have won many school prizes. After leaving school at the age of 15, he worked as a chemist's assistant until he had saved sufficient money to study medicine. In 1874, with the money he had put aside and financial help from his stepfather, he went to Edinburgh to study medicine at the College of Surgeons, where he later claimed to have won a medal in practical chemistry and a special prize in public health.<sup>1</sup> He subsequently qualified as a Licentiate of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1879. For three years he was assistant to a general practitioner in Hull, and may also have spent some time as a poor law doctor, a police surgeon and a ship's doctor.<sup>2</sup> He then settled in London as an assistant to an East End general

"	James Barr	Manchester	A. Hall
"	Henry Wolfe	Kensington-on-Ford	A. Hall
"	James Thompson Lague	Dean Mills, Lancashire	L. Bell
"	Thomas Richard Allinson	Hulme, Manchester	L. Bell
"	Richard Williams	New York City	L. Bell
"	Henry James Rice	Mountfield	L. Bell
12	John Peter Elliot	Bellinigham	D. W. M.
"	Jan Adolph Avid.	Krommme (Holland)	D. W. M.

FIGURE 1  
Allinson's entry in the Licentiate Register of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

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FIGURE 2  
T.R. Allinson, Ex-L.R.C.P. Edin.

practitioner and in 1885 he set up his own practice at No. 4, Spanish Place, Manchester Square, Marylebone, where he lived for the rest of his life. He married the same year and eventually had one daughter and three sons.<sup>1,2</sup>

ALLINSON AND HYGIENIC MEDICINE

Naturopathy is a system of medicine which avoids the use of drugs and the consumption of anything but natural foods. By chance Allinson came across the works of Sylvester Graham, an American naturopath, soon after qualifying and, although unconvinced at first, went on to develop his ideas into what came to be known as hygienic or Allinsonian medicine. He opposed the medical use of drugs, arguing that 'nature of herself was able to perform the work of cure, provided that sick men and women did not hinder her efforts by meddling therapeutics',<sup>3</sup> and went so far as to accuse orthodox doctors of 'being in the ranks of professional poisoners'.<sup>4</sup> He was also an outspoken opponent of vaccination against smallpox, and it was this that first brought him to the notice of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Both prevention and treatment of disease could, in his view, be brought about by attention to diet, exercise, rest, baths and fresh air. So sure was he of the benefits of his treatments that, in 1889, he challenged conventional doctors and homeopathic practitioners to each put up £1,000; he would put up the same sum and a hospital ward would be opened where patients would be treated by the different methods until £2,000 had been spent. Whoever proved to be the most successful healer would receive the remaining £1,000. There is no evidence that anyone responded to his challenge but, in 1890, with

contributions raised from readers of *The Weekly Times and Echo*, for which he wrote a medical column, he started a Hygienic Hospital in London, charging ten shillings (50 pence) a week for each patient.<sup>1</sup>

Allinson himself was a vegetarian and his first recorded publications were a series of lengthy letters to *The Times* in which he advocated a vegetarian diet as not only being healthy, but cheap enough to be affordable by the poor and those with civic responsibility for the poor such as workhouse governors and clergymen.<sup>5-7</sup> He was also teetotal, and avoided tea and coffee as being unnatural stimulants, and advocated the use of wholemeal bread rather than white bread, which had become popular at the time. He was a non-smoker at a time when medical journals thought smoking in moderation was beneficial, claiming that 'those who live to be old and smoke, attain their old age in spite, and not in consequence, of using tobacco'.<sup>2</sup> He was one of the earliest to link smoking with cancer.<sup>2</sup>

#### ALLINSON AS WRITER AND PUBLIC SPEAKER

From 1885 Allinson was medical editor of *The Weekly Times and Echo*, writing a weekly column and answering readers questions; in all he wrote more than 1,000 articles on health. He also wrote a number of books and pamphlets expounding his theories of diet and exercise, including *A System of Hygienic Medicine* (1886), *How to Avoid Vaccination* (1888), *The Advantage of Wholemeal Bread* (1889), *Medical Essays*, and *A Book for Married Women* (1901). In addition he wrote pamphlets on rheumatism, lung diseases and digestive disorders. Most of these were published by himself (Allinson Publications), and all were aimed at lay people and written in simple language.<sup>2</sup> He travelled throughout the United Kingdom giving public lectures on the same topics.

#### ALLINSON AND THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH

Allinson's dealings with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh can be traced through the minutes of the College Council. In 1888 he issued a leaflet entitled *How to Avoid Vaccination*, which went so far as to advocate breaking the law, including the use of such means as not registering births and bribing vaccination officers. In July 1888 the Council wrote to Allinson giving him 'an opportunity of averting the consequences of his conduct by requesting him to stop the issue of further copies of the leaflet and to recall those already in circulation, and to apologise to the college for having published it'. Allinson replied saying he had stopped issuing copies and would not allow the occurrence to take place again. Apart from expressing dissatisfaction that Allinson had not gone so far as to apologise, no action was taken by the College at this time. However, substantially the same pamphlet but without Allinson's name continued to be issued under the imprint of the Anti-Vaccination Society, and he continued to advise people to obtain it. He also later published the College's letter of censure, commenting that 'if to do good was worthy of censure, he would still further deserve it'.<sup>1</sup> In August 1892, after his name had been removed from the Medical Register, the College revoked Allinson's Licence.

#### ALLINSON AND THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL

On 28 May 1892 Allinson appeared before the General Medical Council (GMC) charged with 'systematically seeking to attract practice by a system of extensive public

advertisements containing his name, address, and qualifications, and invitations to persons in need of medical aid to consult him professionally, the advertisements so systematically published by him being themselves of a character discreditable to a professional medical man' and therefore being guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect. The case was brought at the instigation of the Medical Defence Union (MDU) and was extensively reported in both the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet*.<sup>4,8</sup>

The substance of the case against him was that he advertised in the press, used his name to endorse products in the press and on billboards, and sought to attract patients from other doctors to himself through his column in *The Weekly Times and Echo*. In his advertisements he 'never lost an opportunity of depreciating [*sic*] all other members of the medical profession by calling them "drug doctors," and almost charging them with murder'.<sup>4</sup> Allinson denied that this constituted infamous conduct, claiming that he was advertising his system of medicine and not himself, and that he was attacking the system of orthodox medicine, not individual doctors. He was questioned at length on his attitude to vaccination, although this had not been part of the original charge against him and, as Allinson argued, should therefore not have been discussed. Allinson's counsel also claimed that he was not having a fair hearing as at least one member of the GMC was also a member of the MDU, who were his accusers. Technically this was true. The doctor concerned had resigned from the MDU on being appointed to the GMC, but the MDU's rules meant this resignation had not yet taken effect. Allinson's arguments were not accepted. He was found guilty of 'infamous conduct in a professional respect' and his name was erased from the Medical Register.

Within days he appealed to the courts against the GMC's ruling, arguing that the hearing had been unfair, and that the real reason for the erasure of his name from the Medical Register was his views on vaccination. His appeals continued over a number of years and were extensively reported in the medical and lay press (Figure 3).<sup>9-19</sup> The final hearing, in February 1894 before the Supreme Court of Judicature Court of Appeal, became a landmark case because Lord Justice Lopes, one of the three appeal judges, developed for the first time a definition of infamous conduct in a professional sense:

If a medical man in the pursuit of his profession has done something with regard to it which will be reasonably regarded as disgraceful or dishonourable by his professional brethren of good repute and competency, then it is open to the General Medical Council, if that be shown, to say that he has been guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect.

In other words the standard should be that of the profession, not of the public at large, and the measure should be that of the best of the profession not the lowest. Agreeing with this definition, the Master of the Rolls, Lord Esher, considered that there was evidence that Allinson had tried to defame medical colleagues and encourage patients, and their fees, to come to him rather than to other doctors.<sup>17-19</sup> The GMC's decision to erase his name from the medical register was upheld.

At this time Allinson ceased his actions against the GMC. Loss of his registration did not mean Allinson could not practise medicine, only that he could not sign birth and

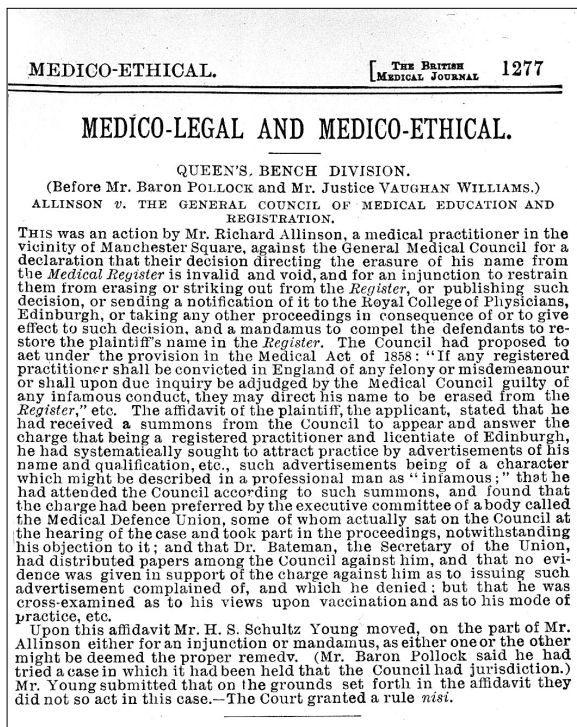


FIGURE 3

A report of one of Allinson's appeals against the removal of his name from the Medical Register.<sup>10</sup>

death certificates or hold public office, and that the collection of his fees could not be enforced by the courts.<sup>20</sup> He continued to practise, but committed an offence by using the suffix L.R.C.P. after his name and describing himself as a licentiate in medicine: in June 1895 he appeared at Marylebone Police Court and was fined £20 with £10 10s costs or a month's imprisonment.<sup>21-24</sup>

He then altered his brass doorplate to read 'Ex-L.R.C.P.', but continued to use the title 'doctor' in his correspondence and publications. In 1899 he again appeared at Marylebone Police Court at the instigation of the GMC for having 'wilfully and falsely pretended to be a doctor of medicine and licentiate in medicine and surgery and general practitioner, and also using the title of "doctor" and Ex-L.R.C.P. Ed.'. The case, as reported in *The Times*, was that a farm labourer's wife from Essex, named Crow, who appeared as a witness, claimed to have been misled by the letters after his name. Her husband suffered from diabetes and she had written to Allinson seeking advice. He had replied that if she sent him five shillings he would give his advice on treatment and he also enclosed some printed matter in which he styled himself 'Doctor'. The woman had taken this correspondence to her local parish rector, who explained to her what 'Ex' meant, and advised her not to send any money; she followed the rector's advice. Allinson argued that he was entitled to style himself 'Doctor' out of courtesy since he had qualified in medicine and had not deliberately tried to deceive the public. However, the magistrate agreed with the GMC that simple people may not understand the significance of the 'Ex' and fined him £5 with £5 5s costs.<sup>25,26</sup>

Twice more he appeared unfavourably in the press in a clinical context, both times in connection with the death

of a patient from malnutrition through following his dietary regimes to extremes. On both occasions he was criticised by the coroner but no further action was taken.<sup>27,28</sup>

#### ALLINSON AND THE OBSCENE PRINTS ACT

Unusually for a Victorian male, Allinson was a supporter of women's rights:

Women have rights as well as men, and to force a woman to have more children than her constitution will bear, or it is her desire to have, is an act of cruelty that no upright man would sanction.<sup>2</sup>

In 1901 he published a pamphlet entitled *A Book for Married Women*, which argued that 'it is sinful to bring into the world more children than you can properly feed, clothe and educate'. He set a limit of family size at four children – the size of his own family. As ever, this pamphlet brought him into conflict with the authorities and he was prosecuted under the Obscene Prints Act for selling obscene literature under guise of medical works. Copies had been obtained by a Scotland Yard detective who had described himself in a letter to Allinson as a 17-year-old girl who had just left school, and was therefore clearly not a married woman. This had been followed by a search of his home and the confiscation of all copies found there. The magistrate, with typical Victorian prudery, said that 'nothing more filthy could possibly have been written, and that they contained as much filth as could be compressed into a given space'. This was obviously considered a more heinous offence than pretending to be a doctor and Allinson was fined £250 and a 'large quantity of printed beastliness was ordered to be destroyed'. However, the prosecuting council admitted in fairness to Allinson that he 'seemed to have published a number of works many of which were probably works of utility on hygiene and sanitation'.<sup>29,30</sup>

#### ALLINSON AND BREAD

The industrial revolution had introduced roller milling of grain, which was faster and cheaper than traditional stone-grinding, and was popular with Victorians because the white flour it produced was thought to be purer than stone-ground flour. The opposite was in fact the case – the bread was often baked in insanitary conditions and adulterated with chemicals to make it whiter still.<sup>2</sup> Allinson is now only remembered as a champion of the benefits to health of stoneground, wholewheat bread, with nothing added and nothing taken away.

Initially he vetted and approved bakers who met his standards, and then in 1892 he bought the Cyclone Mill, a stone grinding flour mill in Bethnal Green. He formed 'The Natural Food Company' producing wholewheat flour for the public and approved bakers, with the slogan 'Health without Medicine'. He eventually started a bakery at the mill to make his own bread. During the First World War his views on the nutritional value of wholemeal bread began to be accepted. According to *The Times* 'he was a supporter of the view that wholemeal flour should be used in the making of bread and carried on crusades in the support of his opinions. His efforts met with a large measure of success, and he had the satisfaction of seeing many of his opinions confirmed in practice. The good results which have followed the use of 'war bread' are attributed to his demand for wholemeal'.<sup>3</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Was Allinson a charlatan or a pioneer? Undoubtedly at times his judgement was at fault, sometimes with potentially disastrous consequences, as in the case of his opposition to smallpox vaccination. He zealously advocated his opinions at every opportunity without any indication of diplomacy, and showed an arrogant contempt for both the medical profession and the law. But in other respects he was ahead of his time: he opposed smoking when orthodox medicine supported it; he supported a diet rich in bran and unadulterated by chemicals at a time when bran was considered to be 'irritating particles of husk which retard digestion';<sup>2</sup> and who nowadays could view the drug treatments of the nineteenth century, heavily based on mercury and opium, with other than horror? He surely deserves to be remembered as more than just a name on a loaf of bread, or as a disgraced doctor.

## POSTSCRIPT

Ironically, Allinson's own medicine failed him. He had once claimed that 'a man who dies under seventy is morally guilty of suicide'.<sup>2</sup> Hygienic medicine proved ineffective against tuberculosis, from which he died, aged 60, on 29 November 1918.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr J. Brown, Finance Director, Allinson Ltd and Mr I. Milne, Librarian, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, for their help in the preparation of this paper.

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