

FOUNDER OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL HOSPITAL AT VENTNOR

Part 1

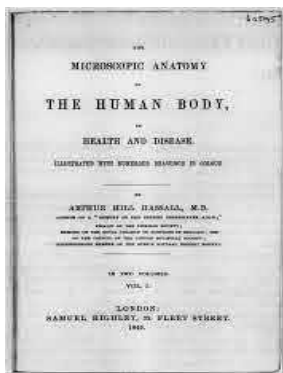
Arthur Hill Hassall was born to a medical family in 1817, youngest child of five, his Mother dying soon after his birth. He followed a distinguished career in medicine, first apprenticed to his Uncle in Dublin in 1830 and then returning to London. He was a polymath, not only in medicine but also in his initial hobby in the study of Natural History especially of microscopic organism, when it was unusual for an amateur scientist to use a microscope. He wrote numerous papers on micro flora and fauna of salt and freshwater. Also on the structure of pollen grains as a means of classification (anticipating future work) and a two volume work called 'The History of Fresh Water Algae' published in 1845. He also studied the part played by fungi in the decay of fruit.



When he qualified as a doctor in 1842, his immediate interest was in Botany, his home at the time was in Richmond conveniently close to the 'Royal Botanic Garden' at Kew. He seized the opportunity to study there and became acquainted with Sir William Hooker the Director and also Professor Forbes in Edinburgh. Dr E.A. Gray, who wrote the biography of Hassall called 'By Candlelight' said of his two volume work 'The text is lucidly written and has the nostalgic charm of Victorian works on Natural History penned for more leisurely days, while certain plates have been the added attraction that they were signed by his future wife'.

His work on Botany must have been carried on at the same time as his medical researches, both involving the intensive use of the microscope, for in 1849 he published 'The Microscopic Anatomy of the Human Body in Health and Disease' – a pioneer account of what is now known as histology. This book was translated into German and went through three editions in America.

In 1851 he published a paper entitled 'A Microscopic Examination of the Water Supplied to the Inhabitants of London and the Suburban Districts'. It was the first of a long series of papers dealing with the pollution of water supplies and the adulteration of foods. His work on foods involved taking samples of food (in the presence of a witness) from shops and analysing them and keeping meticulous notes. He was able to demonstrate a high degree of pollution in the water supplies and a serious amount of intentional adulteration in many of the food stuffs he investigated.



These papers were mostly published between 1851 and 1862 in the Lancet and he was appointed as the Analyst to the Lancet Sanitary Commission. In 1851 he was

elected as a Fellow to the Linnaean Society and also became a member of the Royal College of Physicians and Honorary Physician to the Royal Free Hospital; equivalent to a Consultant Physician today. Some peculiar structures in the spleen he discovered are called Hassall's corpuscles.

In 1857 in acknowledgement of the value to the public of his work, a public dinner was given attended by many people of distinction including Sir Ernest Chadwick, the Sanitary Commissioner for London and Sir John Simon, the first Medical Officer of Health for London. It also included members from both Houses of



Parliament and at the dinner he was presented with a fine silver statuette, weighing 400 ounces, a design founded upon some lines in 'Paradise Lost'. It had panels upon the pedestal, one of which showed the microscope and chemical apparatus Hassall used in his studies.

*To be continued.*