

# MATTHEW ALLEN, M.D. (ABERDEEN)

1783–1845

by

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UNTIL recently little has been known about this man who was the medical attendant of John Clare, the labourer-poet of Northamptonshire, the friend of Thomas Carlyle and the 'friend' of Alfred Tennyson, whom he ruined financially in 1841–3. More creditably, Dr. Allen has a small place in the history of psychiatry.

Biographical information has been discovered which sheds light on his views and behaviour, and allows a rather startling and unexpected character to be seen more clearly. A bulky manuscript volume of memoirs and letters has been found in the York Reference Library.<sup>1</sup> They were written by Oswald Allen (1767–1848), a well-known doctor in the city and first apothecary to York Dispensary. In it there is frequent mention of Matthew Allen whose problems and behaviour were a source of anxiety and distress on many occasions.

Oswald was the eldest and Matthew the youngest son of the ten children of the Rev. James Allen and his wife, Margaret (*née* Wilson of Newby Head) of Gayle, a village practically adjoining its larger neighbour, Hawes, in Wensleydale. Incidentally, it is only a mile from Burtersett where Dr. William Hillary (1697–1763), the pupil of Boerhaave, spent his childhood, and three miles from the birthplace of Dr. John Fothergill (1712–80).

The family of Allen have been settled in the district for over four hundred and fifty years. Most of them were small farmers, and in the eighteenth century many were engaged in lead-mining and in the woollen industry which flourished in the district. Oswald and Matthew were born at Scarrhead Farm on the steep road leading out of the village over to Langstrothdale. Their father was a Dissenting Minister of the Sandamanian sect which had several chapels in the dales. He was a remarkable man, much esteemed in religious circles.

The boys went to the Free School in Hawes which had been founded by their grandfather, Oswald, learning Greek, Latin and Arithmetic from the schoolmaster who was also Minister of Hawes Church. At the age of thirteen, Oswald was apprenticed to a relative, Francis Whaley, Apothecary of York. He describes vividly the hard work at the large pestle and mortar, delivering medicines, learning to bleed, bullied by the senior apprentices, and ignored by his master. Mr. Whaley would not lend him books, but insisted that he copied out word by word textbooks such as Cullen's *Physiology*. Food was meagre and money very short. The young man was supported by the strength given by his religion. After completing his training, becoming established in practice in York, and apothecary to the Dispensary, he sent for Matthew in 1799 to become his apprentice.

Even at the age of sixteen, Matthew was clearly very different from his

brother. He was negligent, unreliable and soon found a circle of unsuitable friends. Whilst still a pupil he married, at the age of nineteen, a young relative, Mary Wilson, of Leck. Oswald bought them a cottage near by on Peaseholm Green and made them an allowance of £40 a year. He was afraid that their housekeeping arrangements were haphazard, so he invited them to his own home in Colliergate for meals several times a week. Oswald's brother-in-law, Dr. Thomas Withers, the senior physician in York, took an interest in the young couple and would 'occasionally condescend to drink a dish of tea with them'.

Of course they had a baby very quickly; perhaps it was not surprising that it was overlaid, and there was difficulty in keeping the matter quiet. In 1806 Mary died of 'brain fever'.<sup>2</sup> Matthew then left York 'like an individual released from restraint', as his brother noted acidly. For a while he became an itinerant preacher and then settled in Edinburgh to attend lectures but soon became involved in religious arguments.

In 1809 Dr. Withers died warning Oswald against bringing his brother back to York. However, he left the young man £500 and some textbooks. Matthew wrote demanding the legacy at once, grumbling that it was no larger. He was by this time in London attending lectures and took the opportunity of complaining that introductions to friends of Oswald's had only been worth a dish of tea!

Matthew married again—this time a Miss Snape of Chester, and by 1811 was running a shop in Princes Street, Edinburgh. This news reached York when the landlord wrote to say that he had been instructed to apply to Mr. Oswald Allen for payment of the rent. The business failed and Oswald had to use all his savings to pay off debts of £2,000.

There is a letter from Mrs. Matthew Allen with quite an air of Mrs. Micawber. It was written 'From Our Northern Metropolis . . . Matthew is hoping to restore his circumstances and we are hoping for something to turn up'. What does turn up is Oswald, probably unable to resist the appealing picture of 'Dear little Oswald your namesake, who is cutting a tooth'. Oswald hurried up to Edinburgh again to find the family's situation distressing. Matthew heard of a small chemical works for sale in Leith. It made amongst other things soda-water. Against his better judgement Oswald bought it for £500. Perhaps it was not surprising that the solicitor, a friend of Matthew, should have absconded with the money, which had to be paid over again. Not content, Matthew then demanded £800, but Oswald remembering his wife's warnings escaped from Edinburgh 'like a bird from the net of the fowler'.

In January 1814 Mrs. Matthew wrote to announce that her husband had been imprisoned for debt. 'The horror of his situation is unsupportable . . . our lovely children, the victims of our misfortunes, have not a bed to lie in but are boarded with a poor woman in the Old Town.' Once again Oswald apparently gave help. Their troubles were not over for at Christmas 1816 Matthew was again imprisoned, this time for selling soda-water without paying stamp-duty, and the police seized their belongings. Mrs. Matthew was five months pregnant and would have liked to go home to her mother, but had to remain in Edinburgh in order to take food to Matthew in prison. With a final echo of

Mrs. Micawber she stoutly declared that she 'would never desert Mr. Allen'. After release from prison the family moved to Perth where the poor woman died during her confinement, and Matthew again became an itinerant preacher and lecturer.

In 1819 the post of Apothecary to York Lunatic Asylum became vacant as the previous holder had been dismissed 'on account of his having taken an improper liberty with a female patient'. Oswald recommended his brother to apply for the vacancy. Matthew replied by letter that it was the dearest wish of his heart to serve the sick and the poor—but not at £150 a year. He had by now been discharged from bankruptcy and wished to have his family with him. Oswald canvassed industriously and successfully for the support of the governors, including the Archbishop who was one of his patients. He also managed to get the salary raised. So Matthew became Apothecary to the Asylum which in 1813 had been the subject of disquieting reports and scandal as a result of terrible neglect of patients. It had now been reorganized by Dr. Baldwin Wake, the physician, and it was hoped that the institution might, in some respects, reflect the ideas of The Retreat. In this atmosphere it could only be hoped that Matthew might become a more responsible person. Oswald committed his thoughts to paper and his prayers to Almighty God.

The 1823 York Directory records 'Mr. Matthew Allen, Apothecary, York Lunatic Asylum'. But on 11 July 1821 he had been granted the degree of Doctor of Medicine at Marischal College, Aberdeen. At this period the whole procedure was purely formal, provided the candidate could obtain two sponsors and the necessary certificate of professional competence, together with the requisite fee. Matthew's sponsors were Dr. Barclay and Dr. Sanders of Edinburgh, and George Kerr of Aberdeen. It is strange that he did not use this title whilst in York.<sup>3</sup>

In 1822 Mr. Snape of Billinge near Wigan wrote to Oswald complaining that he was looking after Matthew's children and had not received the promised £30 a year. Instead Matthew had only sent £3 and four yards of cloth during the past year. Oswald was asked to use his influence with Matthew or pay for the children himself.

Whilst lecturing on phrenology at Kirkcaldy in 1817 Matthew had met Thomas Carlyle. In 1820 he wrote offering him £80 a year to tutor a patient at the Asylum in mathematics. Carlyle asked for £150 and after assuring himself that the post did not call for constant attention and sympathy he came to see his prospective pupil. Liking neither the young man nor the city and its inhabitants, he declined the post.<sup>4</sup>

By 1824 Matthew was becoming restless again. According to his brother he was dismissed from the Asylum for behaving improperly to the physician, and going off to London and Paris without permission. Matthew's version was that he was awarded the thanks of the governors for his constant and successful efforts to install the mild system of treatment. There is a letter of Oswald's which ends: 'I cannot conceive why your quondam friend S. W. Nicholls is refusing your remaining at the Asylum. I suppose he has his reasons.' This would be Samuel William Nicholls, Recorder of York. He was one of the

governors of the Asylum who had endeavoured to clean up the Augean stable of the 1813 scandal.

Matthew asked his brother for the use of the latter's country house, Mill Crook, in the suburbs, as a private asylum. As there were already at least twenty of these institutions of varying size and suitability in York it is doubtful if another would have been financially successful. On this being refused, Matthew said cheerfully that he thought there was more money to be made out of phrenology. And so he set off to seek his fortune elsewhere.

Within a year Dr. Matthew Allen, M.D., had opened a licensed lunatic asylum at High Beech in Epping Forest. There is no information as to how he obtained the money to set up the establishment. Probably with his powers of persuasion he found a willing backer; or perhaps Oswald helped him once more.

From now on information about Matthew has to be sought from other sources. These show a character so different as to be hardly recognizable as the irresponsible and rather amusing scoundrel of his brother's memoirs. One might wonder if Oswald's account was distorted. Undoubtedly he was often exasperated and indignant that his help was accepted without thanks. However, Oswald Allen was a just and truthful man with a strong sense of duty to his family. His account of Matthew's adventures was probably correct, or at the worst only slightly exaggerated.

In view of Matthew Allen's work in the south of England, it is interesting to speculate on the people in York who may have influenced his views on the treatment of the insane. There were two older physicians in the city who were neighbours, close friends and counsellors of both the Allens when they were young men. Dr. Thomas Withers (1750–1809), Oswald's brother-in-law, had many sensible as well as entertaining views on the training of doctors and on treating the mentally ill. He stressed the part the physician's own personality could play in helping a patient's recovery. He advised giving patients various forms of occupational therapy rather than mere entertainment to fill in their time.<sup>5</sup> The second physician was Dr. Thomas Fowler (1736–1801) who gave his name to Fowler's Solution. He was the first physician appointed to The Retreat to carry out the ideas of the Quakers for treating the insane by mild methods in small institutions where patients were under the physician's constant supervision. He wished patients to be relieved of fear as much as possible. Mild treatment with few restrictions, teaching the need for self-restraint, and giving encouragement were far better methods.<sup>6</sup> He discouraged the contemporary fashion of treating the insane by bleeding, blisters, and evacuants. He strongly recommended warm-bath treatment. Another idea of Dr. Fowler's was that these patients should have a nourishing diet, decently and attractively served. This was not the accepted principle at that time. He treated insomnia by giving a good meal of bread, cheese and porter before the patient went to bed.<sup>7</sup>

In early nineteenth-century York there was a group of outstanding men and women devoted to social reforms, especially to improvements in the care of the insane. Foremost amongst them were the Tuke family and other Quakers; Dr. Newcombe Cappe, a Dissenting Minister, and friend of Oswald Allen, and his son, Dr. Robert Cappe, who succeeded Dr. Fowler at The Retreat.

Mrs. Catherine Cappe (1744–1821) was an ardent campaigner for many worthy causes and was a visitor to The Retreat and York County Hospital; and after the 1813 scandal to York Lunatic Asylum. She recommended the system of regular, and often unannounced, visiting by experienced ladies who spoke to every patient, heard complaints, noted the condition of the wards and the standard of nursing. By such means alone, much could be done to humanize conditions in lunatic asylums.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. W. S. Nicholls (1769–1823) has been mentioned previously. In 1816 he published a collection of correspondence concerning York Lunatic Asylum, outlining abuses and suggesting remedies. He recognized the dangers of asylums being run for profit.<sup>9</sup>

James Pigott Pritchett (1789–1868), the architect, came to York in 1813 and was closely connected with charitable and humane movements in the city. A friend of Oswald Allen, he was deacon and Sunday school superintendent for fifty years of the chapel which they both attended. With his partner, Mr. Watson, he prepared plans for an asylum at Wakefield.<sup>10</sup> These were published in 1819 and it is known that Oswald Allen possessed a copy; so Matthew would have had the opportunity of studying them. The book is interesting as it contains the recommendations of Samuel Tuke to which they had to conform, and also their own ideas. They stressed the need for large, airy day-rooms, with open views, made as cheerful as possible; each with a privy leading off it. Separate sleeping rooms should have iron bedsteads and hair mattresses. Water-closets were to have an adjoining wash-room with a sink supplying hot and cold water; those attached to rooms for dirty patients to have a small washing-machine to deal with dirty linen. Windows should have wooden glazing bars with small, easily replaced panes of glass. The whole building, etc., must be fireproof. The plans contained an ingenious heating and air-conditioning system worked by steam which also provided hot water, heat for cooking, and worked an engine to pump water, turn a washing-machine and mangle. An important suggestion was that patients should be classified according to the type and severity of illness, with the convalescents separated from those who were seriously ill.<sup>11</sup>

Another person in York who worked to improve conditions for the mentally ill was Jonathan Grey, who published a history of the lunatic asylum outlining defects in the older methods of treatment and suggesting new ideas.<sup>12</sup>

The chief influence in shaping Matthew Allen's views was undoubtedly the work of The Retreat, although he did not fully acknowledge that debt. In 1813 Samuel Tuke published his book about that institution. In it he recommended segregation of the sexes but with mixing for reading and devotion, etc.; small groups helping each other in useful activities. Attendants should sit with their charges in the day-rooms; accommodation should be comfortable, warm and well ventilated, and meals wholesome and attractively served. Patients should be encouraged to work and take exercise. They should be allowed to attend their own place of worship and visit friends in the city, accompanied by attendants. Excessive security was not essential and must not be obvious. Iron window bars should be disguised to look like wood. Everything must be done to relieve a prison-like atmosphere.<sup>13</sup>

The Rev. Sydney Smith, living near York at the time, reviewed Tuke's book, commending it highly and remarking on the need to consider the needs of the patient rather than those of the keeper.

The York Medical Library was founded in 1810, and its collection was later taken over by the York Medical Society. There is an old committee book 1810–61 which records many of the books donated to the library as well as those purchased. Matthew Allen was elected to membership in October 1819 and in the following year he became Curator of the library. The books on mental illness to which he had access up to the time when he left York include the most important and up-to-date books of the period (for list see Appendix p. 26).

### *High Beech*

In the Essex County Record Office there are plans printed in 1829 with delightful watercolour illustrations of the three houses—Fairmead, Springfield and Leopard's (or Leppit's) Hill—which formed Dr. Allen's private asylum at High Beech, Epping Forest. There is also a brief description in Allen's hand of the houses and the amenities provided. Fairmead was for twelve and Leopard's Hill for twenty-four patients. The houses were ventilated and warmed by fires and a hot-air stove. The windows had iron frames made to resemble wooden bars. They had hot and cold water baths, also medicated vapour baths. There were 'many water closets'. Leopard's Hill was for the more serious cases. The doctor lived at Fairmead with the convalescents who were allowed more association between the sexes. They joined together for amusements, music, lectures and cards. They even produced their own newspaper! They took part in family activities. There were no airing courts, but they could wander in the gardens, pleasure grounds and up to sixteen acres of fields, as well as the whole forest, provided they were accompanied by attendants.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Essay on the Classification of the Insane* Allen began with a flourish, describing himself as a member of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London, the Meteorological Society of London, the Phrenological Societies of London and Edinburgh, and honorary member of the Literary and Philosophical Societies of Leeds, Hull and Wakefield. It was all most impressive and was followed by a list of his other publications, *Cases of Insanity* and *Observations on the Lunatic Act*, which suggested a man of wide knowledge and experience. When it could be seen that he was also the author of *Outlines of a Course of Lectures on Chemical Philosophy*, *Lectures on the Temper and Spirit of the Christian Religion*, *A letter on Christian Forbearance* (which characteristic he himself so sadly lacked), and *Devotional Lectures*, the reader might be persuaded into thinking that Allen was a deeply religious man. A cynic might doubt their attribution if he were aware that the Rev. James Allen had written sermons and essays with very similar titles many years earlier. Dr. Allen elaborated his theories.<sup>15</sup> But first he indulged in a slight flight of fancy by emphasizing his lifelong interest in mental illness.

As early as 1807 I visited lunatic asylums 'con amore' and in 1816–19 I was engaged in lecturing on the Mind and Its Diseases. From 1819–24 I continued medical resident and

superintendent of York Lunatic Asylum and on leaving it I was again engaged in lecturing on the Mind and Its Diseases. . . . I was voted thanks by the Governors for constant and successful efforts in installing the mild system of treatment.

This was perhaps only a half-truth as he was only Apothecary to the York Asylum and would have little influence on its policies. Dr. Baldwin Wake, the Physician, acted as superintendent since his appointment in 1815 and would have been the person responsible for methods of treatment, etc.<sup>16</sup> Also, Oswald Allen's version does not suggest that his brother left York with the praises of the governors ringing in his ears.

Allen went on to describe the gloom and misery in establishments where the legal code allowed the poor-insane to be treated as animals, for it was the popular impression that all the insane were violent.

It would seem that these prejudices and horrors of the insane exist in a much higher degree in this part of the kingdom than they do in Yorkshire. There I was in the constant habit of taking convalescent patients with me into family parties of the first respectability, and members of these families were also in the constant habit of visiting as friends and inviting them to tea and to spend an evening in their homes, and this practice in most instances had a very pleasing and beneficial influence.

Again it would seem that credit for such ideas and methods should be given to Dr. Wake.

The arrangement of the houses was then described with the front or family part, and the galleries behind with appropriate rooms for patients requiring more restraint. The idea was that the latter would have an incentive towards recovery by seeing the convalescents leading as normal a life as possible, joining in family life and various social activities. The matron, Mrs. Davies, came from Liverpool Asylum. One house was for men; another for women under Mrs. Allen's care, and the third for those needing more constant supervision by the doctor. Some patients had a sitting-room and bedroom at a cost of 5–7 guineas per week. It was expected that they would have their own attendants as well as those provided by the establishment.

There is some discrepancy between the descriptions given by Allen of his methods and the actual plans. In spite of his theories of mild treatment and his description at one point of Fairmead as the house where he lived with the convalescent patients, it is disconcerting to find a cottage in a secluded part of the grounds, described in the plan 'for noisy patients'. Another room, behind the coalhouse and in between the stables and the coach-house bore the same label. It would seem that the old methods still prevailed. Although he emphasized the 'many' water-closets, a study of the plans shows that at Fairmead in order to visit the privy it was necessary to cross the yard, pass the coalhouse, coach-house, hen-house, laundry, and pigsty, as well as braving the dog whose kennel was marked so conspicuously on the plan.

In the book many interesting ideas are discussed. Allen deplored the large, crowded asylums with their objectionable noise, disturbance, and prison-like atmosphere. He discussed the part that marital strife played in the causation of mental illness. He stressed the value of occupational therapy—women

patients helping in the house, men working in the gardens and fields, all made happier because they were being useful. One of the most remarkable suggestions at such a time was that a patient should be admitted on a voluntary basis early in illness, rather than waiting until he was seriously ill and being certified insane.

The records of the Court of Quarter Sessions give lists of patients—name, age, sex, dates of certification and admission, occupation, and parish. Soon the three houses seem to have been filled with gentlemen, spinsters, merchants, solicitors, medical gentlemen and medical students, as well as farmers, ferrymen, oyster-dredgers, shoemakers, innkeepers and even an occasional pauper. Most of them came from London or East Anglia, but a few were from the North of England. The youngest appeared to be Emily Daniel, aged seventeen years, of Colombo, Ceylon. It is interesting that the first two patients in 1825 were David Beattie, Surgeon of York, and his sister, Janet. They had been certified at York Asylum by Dr. Wake and Dr. Hodgson (Allen's successor as apothecary) and were still in Allen's care in 1844. Another transfer from York Asylum was Mary Ann Hurdstone, wife of Lieut. Hurdstone, R.N. Nearly all patients were said to be cured, although some were discharged 'not cured' or were removed to St. Luke's, and of course a few died.<sup>17</sup>

The visiting magistrates' reports were lavish of praise. Typical entries were: 'This asylum is in every respect calculated to promote the cure of patients placed in it' (1832). 'All are treated with care, kindness and attention' (1833). Often they noted with admiration that while some convalescent patients visited the parish church, others attended Divine Service conducted by Dr. Allen. One wonders if he preached from his worthy father's collection of rather heavy sermons.

In 1832 he was involved in a case heard at Chelmsford Quarter Sessions, and rushed into print to publish his account of the affair 'at the request of the friends of Dr. Allen'. It was concerned with the non-payment of fees and was rather a storm in a teacup. Allen made the most of it, expressing righteous indignation and pious platitudes. He must have been well known by this time for he brought to court an impressive selection of testimonials as to his character. The list included William Sotheby of Fairmead Lodge (a minor poet and friend of Walter Scott); Admiral Sir George Cockburn; Charles Augustus Tuke of Duke of York Street, Westminster; William St. Julian Arabin of High Beech, Sergeant-at-law; Basil Montagu of Bedford Square, Barrister; Thomas Campbell of 10 Duke Street, St. James's, and Samuel Ashwell, Surgeon of Guy's Hospital. He won his case.<sup>18</sup>

In the book there is a reference to his wife and young family; so he had married for the third time. In Oswald Allen's diary for that year there was also a reference to his brother's family. Matthew had turned his older son—by his second marriage—out of the house. The young man had joined the army, and on the eve of his departure to serve in the West Indies he wrote a pathetic letter to York asking for thirty shillings. As usual Oswald responded generously, but knowing only too well the family with whom he was dealing, he sent a substantial sum of money to the colonel of the regiment, asking him to use it in

the best possible way for his nephew's benefit. He was distressed to think that one of his family was serving as a common foot-soldier.

Many people admired Dr. Allen's Asylum. Mrs. Thomas Carlyle in a letter to Helen Welsh dated 26 October 1831 wrote:

One day I went with Mrs. Montagu to Epping to visit Dr. Allen, a Scotsman, who has a lunatic establishment in the midst of the forest—a place where any sane person might be delighted to get admission. The house, or rather houses are all overhung with roses and grapes and surrounded by gardens, ponds and shrubberies without the smallest appearance of constraint. The poor creatures are all so happy and their doctor such a good humane man . . . I am going to pack and stay some day. Dr. Allen is an old friend of Carlyle's and his wife is an excellent woman.<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. Carlyle's admiration for the doctor was not dimmed by a doubtful compliment which he paid her. In a letter to Eliza Stoddart she wrote: 'Dr. Allen said to Carlyle in a complimentary tone as I left the room, "Mrs. Carlyle has the remains of a fine woman".'<sup>20</sup> She was aged about thirty years at that time. It would appear that it was Allen who was responsible for introducing Alfred Tennyson to the Carlyle family.

In the biography of John Clare<sup>21</sup> there is a description of how the poet was brought to Leopard's Hill in June 1837. He improved for a time and was happy working in the fields and gardens. He was encouraged to continue writing. Allen reported that on admission Clare's mind 'did not so much appear lost and deranged as suspended in its movements by the oppressive and permanent state of anxiety . . . extreme poverty and over-exertion of body and mind'. It is to Allen's credit that, realizing that poverty was one of the causes of the poet's mental illness, he helped to raise money in 1840 to provide an annuity. Amongst subscribers were the Queen Dowager, the Marquis of Northampton, and Lord Fitzwilliam. Unfortunately, the appeal fell short of £500 so the money was mainly used for Clare's upkeep at High Beech.

In 1841 Clare's restlessness increased, and he began to hint that conditions were not so ideal as Allen described them to be. In one of his notebooks he wrote a verse:

Nigh Leopard's Hill stands Allen's hell,  
The Public know the same. . . .  
A man there is in prison there  
Locked up from week to week.

And there is the draft of a letter to Eliza Phillips headed: 'From This Hell of a Madhouse.'

Clare outwitted Allen's supposedly unobtrusive watchers and escaped to tramp the eighty miles to his home, with no money, no food, only a pint of beer, and a piece of tobacco to chew. He slept under hedges of the Great North Road and on the third day he ate grass to satisfy his hunger. Apparently he remained at home in the care of his wife. Allen wrote to him inviting him back 'with liberty to come and go . . . you might lead the life of a hermit as much as you choose and I would contrive to give you some place for the purpose'. Later he was transferred to St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton. Allen recorded

Clare's discharge from Leopard's Hill on 16 October 1841 with misleading optimism as 'much improved'.<sup>22</sup>

In 1837 the Tennyson family moved to Beech House, Epping, where they became friendly with Allen. Soon a different side of the character of the enlightened Dr. Allen appeared; one which was only too familiar to his brother in earlier days. In his life of his grandfather, Charles Tennyson writes:

Allen succeeded during the Tennysons' residence at Beech Hill in obtaining a great influence over them. He was an able man with sound and progressive ideas about the treatment of mental disease, and it is to his credit that he received the poet, John Clare, at Fairmead for a nominal sum. . . .

Unfortunately Allen was a speculator as well as a doctor and he had become interested in a patented process for carving wood by machinery. . . . The classical trade-name 'Pyroglyphs' which the doctor coined for it cunningly re-inforced the cultural appeal and Lord Brougham was said to have expressed the view that all England ought to be acquainted with this new industrial miracle. Allen succeeded in interesting Alfred in Pyroglyphs about the middle of 1840 and he decided to make a substantial investment in the scheme. If this succeeded, as the promoter insisted it must, it would be the solution of all difficulties. . . . His whole fortune he handed over to Allen. His brothers and sisters were eager to follow his example. Some money of theirs was committed and his mother was, during his absence, induced by Allen to sign an agreement to invest her entire capital in the enterprise, but Alfred had by this time become doubtful about Allen's bona fides and compelled him to release her from her undertaking by threatening to make a public exposure of his methods. Allen was particularly hot in his pursuit of Frederick who was the wealthiest of the family.<sup>23</sup>

As had happened so often before, Allen's scheme ran into difficulties. Alfred Tennyson became overwhelmed with fears and anxieties. In his poem 'Sea Dreams' he described the experience of an unfortunate clerk whose small fortune fell into the hands of a speculator. It is possible that it was of Matthew Allen that he was thinking when he wrote:

. . . 'Show me the books!'  
He dodged me with a long and loose account.  
. . . when the . . . Books . . .  
Were open'd, I should find he meant me well;  
And then began to bloat himself, and ooze  
All over with the fat affectionate smile  
That makes the widow lean. 'My dearest friend,  
'Have faith, have faith! . . .'  
'And all things work together for the good. . . .'  
Gript my hand hard, and with 'God-bless-you' went.

By 1843 the Pyroglyph scheme had failed and Allen wrote to Frederick Tennyson: 'I have done all that is possible for a man to do to save your family and I have utterly ruined myself in the attempt . . . every stick and stave is to be sold to pay A.T. this day and yet people boast! I ail! and I suffer! and I die! Come up, you must save something.' But nothing was saved and Alfred's whole patrimony was lost.

A friend, Edward Lushington, generously took out an insurance policy on the life of Dr. Allen for a substantial part of the sum which he had lost.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of these pressing financial difficulties, it is possible that Matthew

turned for the last time to his brother for help. There is no evidence of this except that at this time Oswald Allen added a codicil to his will revoking a legacy which he had intended bequeathing to Matthew 'on account of the losses sustained in helping him'.<sup>25</sup>

At about this time Allen was under censure from another quarter. The Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy (1844) reported that when visiting Dr. Allen in September 1842 they found a man whom they had known previously as a certified patient in another asylum, now in Dr. Allen's establishment without certification. The doctor explained that he often accepted as boarders people who were low-spirited, etc. The Commissioners pointed out that this was illegal and could lead to abuses of many kinds. They concluded by stating that it was questionable whether the proprietor of a licensed house who accepted such patients should continue to hold a licence.

Allen died of heart disease in January 1845; so Alfred Tennyson was able to recover some peace of mind and to recover some of his lost money as a result of the insurance policy. Dr. Allen, who had tried to cure one poet of his madness, had driven another to the verge of insanity.

Apparently Mrs. Allen continued to run Fairmead House. In 1848 Charles Forrest, M.D., was in charge of Springfield House Asylum, and George Rowe was the attendant at Leopard's Hill Asylum.<sup>26</sup> Nothing else is known of its affairs, and the institution was not mentioned in the next Directory of 1863.

Matthew Allen is interesting for his theories and progressive ideas for treatment of the mentally sick which he propounded at that early period. Whether they were entirely original, and whether he always carried them out in practice is sometimes doubtful. He was a strange mixture of good and bad, often exasperating, but amusing. Perhaps Thomas Carlyle summed up his character accurately when he described him as 'a speculative, hopeful, earnest, frothy man'.<sup>27</sup>

## APPENDIX

### BOOKS ON MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE YORK MEDICAL LIBRARY DURING MATTHEW ALLEN'S CURATORSHIP

- ARNOLD, THOMAS, *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes and Prevention of Insanity, Lunacy or Madness*, 2 vols., Leicester, G. Ireland, 1782-6.
- BURROWS, GEORGE MAN, *Cursory remarks on legislative regulation of the insane, etc.*, London, Harding, 1819. (Bought in 1819, price £1.)
- CHEYNE, GEORGE, *The English Malady: or a treatise of nervous diseases, etc.*, London, S. Powell for George Risk, etc., 1733. (Purchased in 1812.)
- CHEYNE, JOHN, *A Second Essay on Hydrocephalous Acutus*, Dublin, Gilbert & Hodges, London, T. Underwood, 1812. (Purchased 1815.)
- COX, JOSEPH MASON, *Practical Observations on Insanity*, London, C. & R. Baldwin, 1806.
- CROWTHER, BRYAN, *Practical remarks on insanity, etc.*, London, T. Underwood, 1811. (Purchased 1811.)
- FLEMYNG, MALCOM, *Neuropathia*, York, Caesar Ward, etc., 1740.

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