

## John Edmonds Stock

He was born in Bristol in 1774/5, the son of an apothecary who kept a paper warehouse in Bristol. He studied medicine at Edinburgh and in 1794 he was associated with Robert Watt, a Republican, and had to escape to Philadelphia in the USA to escape arrest. There he continued his medical studies and graduated there and returned to England in about 1803 to work with Dr John Beddoes as an assistant at his Medical Institution for the Benefit of the Sick and Drooping Poor at the Hotwells, Bristol. Here he also worked there with Dr John King. In 1803 he married Charlotte Shapland and their son, John Shapland Stock was born in 1804. He set up in practice in Park Street, moving subsequently to Royal York Crescent.

After the death of Dr Beddoes he was asked to write a biography of the great man by his wife and *Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Beddoes* was published in 1811. It was not well reviewed and has been described as a 'worthy but dull tome' and his colleague John King described him as a 'literary undertaker'.

In 1810 he competed for the position of physician at the Infirmary with Drs Carrick and Prichard and came second in the contest (448, 216 and 81 votes respectfully) but when the next vacancy occurred in the next year, Stock was appointed. During the seventeen years that he was physician, according to Munro Smith', he did a lot of work on the wards and in Outpatients but became noted as a good lecturer. He gave a famous series of lectures on Physiology, Pathology and the practice of Physic with Dr *JC Prichard* in 1816. He was a great believer in tonics and food and apparently munched biscuits as he visited his patients. He took a prominent part in the social life of the city and became a member of the Bears Cub Club where he initiated a discussion on one occasion in 1809 on the Rowley poems by Thomas Chatterton and in 1816 was President of the Anchor Society.

He resigned from his post at the Infirmary in 1828 and died in 1835 being buried in the Lewins Mead burial ground, which was surprising as in 1816 he left the Lewins Mead Unitarian church in a very public way. He wrote a letter to the Rev John Rowe, the minister of Lewin's Mead chapel announcing that he was to withdraw from membership of that Unitarian church in view of his belief in the divinity of Christ. He copied the letter to a friend and it was leaked to *The New Evangelical Magazine* This change in belief was all the more surprising as only three months before Stock, as a leading Unitarian, had drafted a letter inviting Dr Lant Carpenter of Exeter, to join Rev Rowe as an additional minister of Lewin's Mead. Inevitably this letter caused a lot of interest and about a year later an anonymous correspondent sent a copy of it to the *Bristol Mirror*. Dr Lant Carpenter, the Unitarian Minister, wrote saying that he regretted Stock's change of belief, believing it was from truth to error.' The event which was called *Dr Stock's Conversion* became the talk of Bristol. According to Lant Carpenter's son Stock had been professionally attending a Baptist Minister, Mr Vernon of Downend Baptist Church and during discussion with him had decided that he could not retain Unitarian beliefs. 'Dr S had been converted to Unitarianism from Scepticism, into which he had been driven by the errors of Calvinism. Though perhaps deficient in comprehensiveness, his mind was active and penetrating, and he was held in much estimation in the city. His conversion was with an exultation, which showed

the unusualness of such an event; and the most singular reports were afloat, of the effects it was supposed to have produced on his former associates.'<sup>6</sup>

He was baptised at Broadmead Baptist Church on October 23 1817 and became a member there. He was at the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Education Society on August 6 1817 and also at a meeting in 1818 and 1821. He donated £10 to the Society in 1817 as did Dr Bompas.

In 1835 he died at his brother-in-law's home in Tewkesbury aged 61 having moved to Bath a few years before his death. He made no mention of his Christian belief in his will and did not leave any legacy to the Baptists or Unitarians.

Medical. Collections on the Effects of Cold as a remedy in certain Diseases. 8vo. Lond. 1805.

Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Beddoes, M.D., with an analytical account of his writings. 4to. Lond. 1811.

- 1 Jay M The Atmosphere of Heaven Yale University Press 2011 p276
- 2 Letter in Bristol Journal 30 Sept 1836
- 3 Munro Smith G History of the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1905 p182
- 4 Anonymous letter about Stock's letter Bristol Mirror 13 September 1817
- 5 Carpenter, Lant letter in Bristol Mirror 27 September 1817
- 6 Carpenter, Russell Lant, Memoirs of the Life of Rev Lant Carpenter Philp and Evans, Bristol 1842 p238