

## WALTER HADWEN

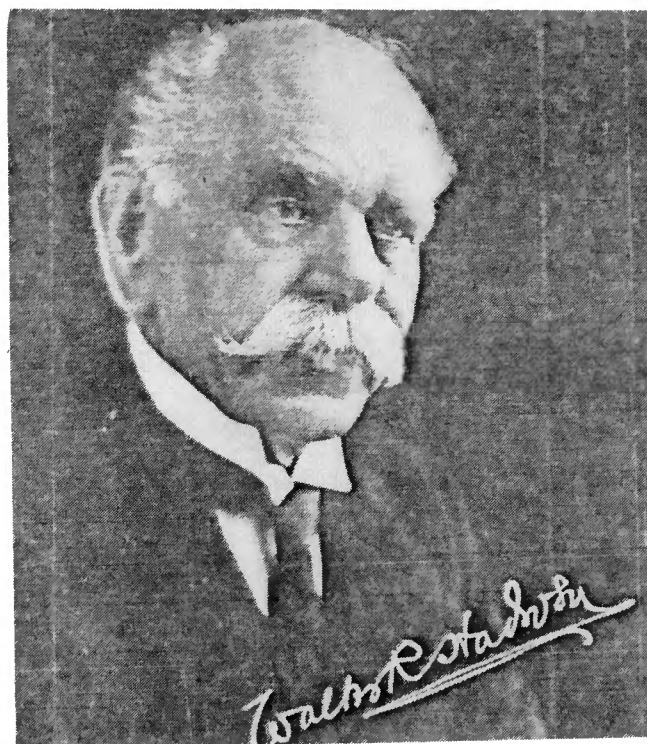
by  
*Walter Hawkins*

Walter Hadwen was born in 23rd August 1854, 23 years after the death of Jenner. In spite of the success of vaccination against smallpox there remained many who opposed it, some on religious grounds. Hadwen, however, was a different 'kettle of fish'. From boyhood he studied vegetarianism, his father had founded a temperance society and Walter remained a temperance man and non-smoker throughout his life. In 1877 he met a Dr. and Mrs Harral and their two daughters which led on to his marriage to Alice Harral in 1878. the book 'Hadwen of Gloucester' refers to a turning point when a baby daughter was born and the law demanded that she should be vaccinated. He knew nothing about vaccination but knew of cases of disease which had resulted from it, and immediately refused to allow his child to 'submit' to the poison which can produce such dire results' as he put it. He was living with his wife's family in Somerset and was brought before the Bench four times and fines of £50 in total imposed. After 5 more times for his other children the Bench gave him up as a bad job.

He was the first anti-vaccinationist ever summoned in Somerset and this led to vigorous correspondence in local papers. Soon many anti-vaccinators were being gaoled in Bristol from the Weston-super-Mare area and this was the beginning of the heyday of the Anti-Vaccination League.

After ten years working in Highbridge, Hadwen decided on a medical career; after much hard work he took an L.S.A. degree and M.R.C.S. (England) and L.R.C.P. (Lond.). He was practising in Highbridge, Somerset, when a smallpox epidemic broke out in Gloucester in 1896. There was hardly a home not affected and I remember my mother telling me that she lost her sister Emily then. Hadwen's reputation had spread across the West Country and Gloucester anti-vaccinationists invited his support: He came often and as it was put 'no hall in Gloucester was large enough to accommodate those protesting against Jennerism'. At the end of the epidemic a manifesto was sent begging Dr. Hadwen to establish a practice in Gloucester.

So began a long period when the city was roughly divided for and against vaccination and Hadwen was the controversial figure at the centre of it. My parents were against it and I was not vaccinated until I chose to be in adulthood. They were among thousands who



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claimed 'conscientious objection' to it. Finally it culminated in 1924, when I was nine years of age, in the manslaughter case brought to Gloucester Assizes against him that 'on the 10th day of August 1924 Walter Robert Hadwen did feloniously kill and slay one Nellie Christobel Burnham against the Peace.' Hadwen, in pursuit of his beliefs that anything originating through animal sources could not cure a person, was alleged to have allowed this girl to die of diphtheria. Basically this was the case against him, because he did not administer the anti-toxin to her against the disease. After a protracted trial he was acquitted. The evidence hinged round whether she had diphtheria or not, the jury thought not, so Hadwen was acquitted.

I can, all these years afterwards, remember the electric atmosphere in Gloucester. Feelings ran high because of Hadwen's popularity. The case became one of the great trials of the century. Afterwards I remember his congregation outside Albion Hall in Gloucester, where he was well known as their preacher, raising his shoulder high and singing the hymn 'Standing by a purpose true, heeding God's Command!' Everyone in the crowd was moved to tears. Later Dr. Hadwen attended a thanksgiving meeting in the Shire Hall, which was packed with over 2,000 and many left outside. His fame had spread across the country and a meeting as a tribute to him was held in the Queens Hall in London, at which letters of congratulations were read from G. K. Chesterton, Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, Margaret Bondfield and others.