

SIR JONATHAN HUTCHINSON

(1828-1913)

The Early Years

Jonathan Hutchinson was born in Selby, Yorkshire on July 23rd 1828. He was second son in a large family of twelve. His father was a prosperous business man who acted as middleman between Yorkshire farmers and the Leeds manufacturers who bought their flax for making linen. The family were Quakers, who followed strictly and consistently the Quaker discipline. Jonathan was well educated, first by governesses and then at the school kept by Mr Beillby in the town.



Sir Jonathan Hutchinson as a young man

After his school days, Jonathan decided that he wished to take up medicine as his profession and was apprenticed to Caleb Williams of York, apothecary and surgeon, for five years. He attended the York School of Medicine and the York County Hospital during the last two years of his apprenticeship. Jonathan Hutchinson had never passed any examinations in general subjects and was advised that during his final year of apprenticeship he should matriculate in London, where he studied Latin and other subjects on top of his medical studies. On returning to York he kept up his reading in French, Latin, German and Greek.

In the Spring of 1850, Jonathan and his brother, Massey, came up to London to prepare for their careers. Massey wanted to be a dentist and

Jonathan wanted to be a surgeon. Jonathan studied at St Bartholomew's Medical School under James Paget where he passed his examinations for Membership of the College of Surgeons (MRCS) and the Apothecaries Examination (LSA). The year was one of great importance in his life. In September the two brothers took a holiday in France, the first time either of them had been abroad. On returning, Jonathan began teaching at the Ragged School in Clerkenwell, laying the foundations of what was to become the Bedford Institute. He was very conscious of the problems of the great city and was most interested in the Working Men's Institute in Westminster. His brother left London to start up in practice as a dentist and Jonathan missed him greatly. However, his loneliness in London was not to last long as a vacancy arose at York County Hospital and he applied and got the job, returning to his old haunts and rejoining the family circle.

He began to think about his future, and he decided against a private practice. He wanted to work among the poor, perhaps as a medical officer of health, as social problems interested him and he felt a call in that direction. In March his father wrote him a long letter that was meant to give him some practical advice, but was almost entirely religious in purport. It invited him to spend some time at home to discuss where he might best further his studies. He was still a student of St Bartholomew's under James Paget, so London was decided upon. He arranged to work for 12 months at Moorfields Eye Hospital.

He shared lodgings with a young Quaker Friend, Daniel Hack Tuke, in Charterhouse Square and became active among the London Quakers. His inspiration in those early years was James Paget, his teacher at St Bartholomew's, to whom he felt he owed both his intellectual and his moral attainments. His first appointment in London was as clinical assistant at Liverpool Street Chest Hospital. There are hardly any records of the next five years. In July 1853 when he was just 25 years old, we hear in a letter to his mother that he is giving up the idea of becoming a medical officer to a charity and he now has the ambition to become a consultant surgeon in London and has the wish to join the higher ranks of the profession.

Hutchinson became a member of the Pathological Society, Abernethian Society and the Hunterian Society and it was through these Societies that he became known to the Profession. He read several papers to these learned societies and gradually built up his reputation. He was a keen debater and had a marvellous memory for past cases that had come under his notice. However, the immediate question of a livelihood must have been pressing, because he obtained an appointment on the staff of the Medical Times and Gazette and attended as reporter all the most important cases and operations in London Hospitals. The work was of immense educational value. His principle income during these four or five years came from medical journalism, though he eked this out by starting a small private practice.

In December 1855 Jonathan wrote to his parents to announce his engagement to Jane Pynsent West, whom he had met at the home of mutual friends, the Abbots of Hitchin. She was the younger daughter of William West of Leeds, a distinguished chemist and founder of the firm known as Reynolds and Bramson Ltd. of Leeds. At the time of her marriage, Jane was living with her widowed mother in somewhat strained circumstances. Her father had died five years previously and the business had passed out of the family.

The West family were south country in origin and were a cultured and well-educated family. William West went to Leeds to start in business and as he was a man of great energy, the business prospered. He became Public Analyst Lecturer in Chemistry at Leeds Medical School and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was a religious man and belonged to the Society of Friends. Jane was born in Leeds and was educated at the Moravian School at Fulneck, near Leeds, and later at the Quaker School at York.

Jane married Jonathan Hutchinson on 31st July 1856 at the Stoke Newington Meeting House. They were earnest young people with the same religious beliefs and they entered happily on the serious tasks of building a life together. During their early married life Jonathan's work was almost entirely with the poor, and in the study of diseases that resulted from dirt and vice. He remained optimistic about civilisation in general and his aim was to help conquer these diseases

for the benefit of the poorest and most degraded of mankind. In this, he was supported and encouraged by his wife.



Jonathan Hutchinson and his family

In August of 1859 we hear of his first expedition to Leith Hill and his experience of Surrey moorlands. The whole family went, his wife, his daughter, then aged three, and his son aged just three months. The nurse, with perambulator, went too and as these were the days of wide and spreading crinolines, the going could not have been easy. He records that it was a great treat for everyone and that nobody seemed to be the worse for their exertions.

In July 1861 the family moved from No 14 to No 4 Finsbury Avenue to a larger and more convenient house. There was a square garden with swings and roundabouts for the children to play in and to Jane it was the home where six of her children were born and which she loved. It was with great reluctance that she eventually moved to their grander house in Cavendish Square. During these early years of married life, several young doctors occasionally lived as students with the family. By 1867 they had ceased having students as financial matters were easier. However, three eminent men who had studied and grown up around Hutchinson - Jackson, Tey and Nettleship - became close friends. Edward Nettleship and his wife were on intimate terms of friendship not only in London, but also at Haslemere, where Nettleship had built himself a house on Hindhead and where several happy holidays were spent. The family loved the Surrey countryside in that area so much that in 1866 Jonathan Hutchinson acquired a country house, Inval, near Haslemere and his time was divided between this and his London home.



Inval, Haslemere: Home to the Hutchinson Family

The Middle Years

Jonathan Hutchinson was a successful and respected member of the medical profession. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, he was President of the Hunterian Society, the Pathological Society and the Ophthalmological Society as well as Professor of Surgery and Pathology in the Royal College of Surgeons. His study was of the whole of medicine and he established an enormous and well earned reputation as a teacher.

In 1874 the family moved from Finsbury Avenue to Cavendish Square. Between town and country husband and wife were often separated, but extracts from the letters they exchanged tell us of the love and harmony that existed between them. Jonathan's religious upbringing had been very strict and for a long time he conformed to the beliefs of his parents. However, his increasing knowledge of science, evolution and heredity, whilst not diminishing his religious sense, made him think of what he called Terrestrial Immortality; the handing down of knowledge through the generations and that man continued through his offspring. Although Jane never converted to this view of evolution, she supported her husband in all his efforts. She lived a busy life, bringing up their ten children and entertaining their many friends. The life at Haslemere, with its farm and the beautiful countryside was a rendezvous for the whole neighbourhood and Jane was at the centre of it all. Jane worked hard until 1884-85 when she became ill. Her illness dragged on until 1887 when she died at the age of just 52.

Hutchinson's early career in medical journalism

led to him continuing as a prolific author for the rest of his life. He was a great naturalist and a student of all the sciences. In addition to his professional teaching he was a pioneer of science education for the public. When he arrived in Haslemere he had already reached the pinnacle of his career, but as a typical Victorian philanthropist, he wanted to share his wider interests in natural history, geology and the English poets, with his fellow men.

In 1888, he started Haslemere Educational Museum in the out buildings of his farm. The museum was started from items that he had picked up on his travels. It was a mixture of stuffed birds, fossils and an elephant's skull. In 1895 the museum moved to larger premises on Museum Hill as he kept adding to his collection. On Sundays Jonathan would lecture to the populace at the museum on scientific facts of the different ages of the universe. His lectures also covered geology, shells, birds, animals and the lives of the English poets. Some of his subjects such as life, death and immortality clashed with the views of some local churchgoers. He was a great exponent of the museum idea and in 1898 he also established a museum at Selby, his birthplace in Yorkshire.

The Later Years

Jonathan Hutchinson continued dividing his time between Haslemere and London and carried on his investigative work in medicine. He became interested in the causes and treatment of leprosy and in 1901 went to South Africa to carry on his investigations. This was followed by travel to India in 1902, for the same reason.

Back in Haslemere, in 1907 Hutchinson promoted and edited the Haslemere Museum Gazette. He accepted a knighthood in 1908, though many years previously he had refused a peerage. He loved the countryside and eventually retired to his 300-acre farm where he died in 1913. Before he died, he paid for the museum to be repaired and enlarged. The Haslemere Museum moved to its present High Street location in 1926 where it has continued to flourish to this day, carrying on the educational work started by Sir Jonathan Hutchinson.

By Mary Cooke 2006 –
Haslemere Educational Museum Volunteer