

## **Jack of All Trades (and Master of All) Dr. Hutchinson's Practice in Africa and Latin America, 1851-1874**

By Edmundo Murray

### **Abstract**

*Nineteenth-century British explorers like David Livingstone, Richard Burton, Mary Kingsley, Henry M. Stanley, and others inspired new ways of perceiving the world, and at the same time reinforced the values associated with Victorian morality and its imperialistic attitude towards other cultures. Many elements in the biography of Thomas Hutchinson are remarkable, but the most notable feature is his versatility in undertaking different endeavours at the same time. Physician, diplomatist, explorer, travel writer, business entrepreneur, and archaeologist were his most constant occupations: a jack of all trades and master of all. This article covers some of the medical research conducted by Dr Hutchinson during his consular appointments in Fernando Po, Argentina, and Peru. (1)*

### **Ireland, England and Africa**

Thomas Joseph Hutchinson (1802-1885) was born on 18 January 1802 in Stonyford, Kilsoran parish of County Wexford. (2) His father, Alfred Hutchinson, was a petty landowner from an Anglo-Irish family with a Protestant background. Although it was reported that Thomas Hutchinson studied on the European continent and graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Göttingen in 1833, there are no surviving records in this institution that could confirm this. He graduated on 2 January 1836 from the Apothecaries' Hall, Dublin. By May 1843, Hutchinson was practicing as a physician and surgeon at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Dublin, a training ground for doctors and nurses. Six years later he worked in the Poor Law Union of Wigan, Lancashire (England).

Between 1851 and 1855, Hutchinson was the senior surgeon on board the *Pleiad*, for the expedition to the rivers Niger, Tshadda and Binue, led by John Beecroft. On 29 September 1855, Thomas Hutchinson was appointed British consul for the Bight of Biafra. That year he married Mary, his lifelong wife, with whom he arrived on 29 December 1855 in Port Clarence (later Santa Isabel and present-day Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea), formerly a Spanish dominion. Most of the business managed by Hutchinson in Fernando Po was related to British affairs in the region, which included chiefly the production and transport

of palm oil and occasionally other products. He also represented, albeit unsuccessfully, a group of freed slaves and their families who wished to be recognised as British citizens, and was a constant arbiter between the ship masters and the local producers of raw materials. (3)

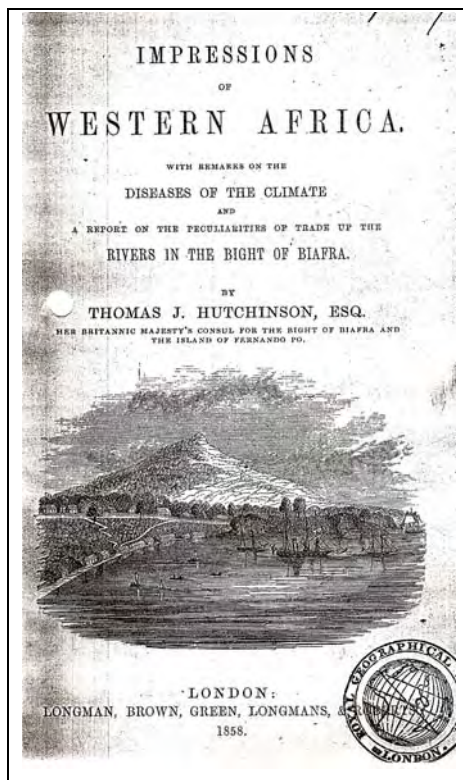
A pioneer of African cotton production, Hutchinson obtained in 1858 a tonne of seeds from the Manchester Cotton Supply Associations to undertake experiments on the continental coast of West Africa. In his affairs, he was frequently partial to the interests of certain Liverpool merchants, a practice for which he was reprimanded by the Foreign Office. Hutchinson remained in Africa until June 1860, when he and his wife returned to England for health reasons, together with Fanny Hutchinson, an African girl they had adopted. On 9 July 1861 he was replaced by Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), the celebrated explorer and translator of *The Book of One Thousand Nights and a Night*. (4)

### **Malaria**

During the journey of the *Pleiad*, Hutchinson conducted research on the use of quinine as a preventative measure against the effects of malaria. He insisted that, in small doses, quinine had a favourable effect in preventing fever.

The benefits of quinine were originally discovered by the indigenous peoples of Peru, who extracted it from the bark of the cinchona tree (*quina quina* in Quechua). An effective

muscle relaxant, quinine was used to halt shivering brought on by cold temperatures in the Andes, and was brought to Europe by the Spanish in the early seventeenth century. The bark was first dried, ground to a fine powder and then mixed with wine. It was first used to treat malaria in Rome in 1631. Large scale use of quinine as a prophylaxis started around 1850, when it played a significant role in the European colonisation of Africa. It was the prime reason Africa ceased to be known as 'the white man's grave'.



Hutchinson explained that

*My first experience there having been in a Medical capacity, I made the subject of African malaria and fever my continuous and attentive study. The truth of the old maxim that "prevention is better than cure," with which I commenced my professional duties at Old Kalabar in the year 1850, which I followed up in the Niger Expedition of 1854, and which I still practise as well as preach, has been abundantly confirmed in my experience (Hutchinson 1858: v).*

He 'was puzzled to understand how malaria could be generated. [...] Malaria and fever are cause and effect in Africa [...] Endemic fever

attacks a large proportion of the crews of nearly every ship sent out for the purpose of trading' (Hutchinson 1855: 192). Therefore Hutchinson dedicated his efforts to understanding how and when quinine should be administered to the crew members. 'As soon as the expedition crosses the bar of the river, [Niger] they should commence taking quinine, in the proportion of six to eight grains per diem, one half in the morning and one half in the evening' (211).

In this period, some believed that malaria was caused either by submarine volcanic action or the action of vegetable matter upon the sulphates. It was not until 1898 that Ronald Ross in India proved that malaria was caused by mosquitoes carrying the protozoan *Plasmodium sp.* Without knowing the cause of the sickness, Hutchinson recommended prevention and a hygienic environment.

Reflecting Hutchinson's entrepreneurial spirit, in the late 1850s Bailey & Wills of Horsley Fields produced 'Dr. Hutchinson's Quinine Wine', marketing it to ship owners and crews. (5)

### Argentina and Uruguay

With friends and connections in the Foreign Office and various scientific and business associations, among them George William Frederick, Earl of Clarendon, and William Bingham Baring, Lord Ashburton, Thomas Hutchinson managed to balance his consular work and medical practice with exploration, travel writing and scientific research. From 1858 to 1867 he was appointed Fellow of some important institutions, including the Royal Geographical Society, the Ethnological Society, the Royal Society of Literature and the Anthropological Society. During his long life, he was also elected honorary vice-president of the African Institute of Paris, an honorary member of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society, foreign member of the Paleontological Society of Buenos Aires, and founding member of the Society of Fine Arts in Peru.

Hutchinson's next appointment was as consul in Rosario in the Argentine province of Santa

Fe. On 12 July 1861, he arrived with his family to this city - at that time a small provincial town - where he also acted as agent for Lloyds. According to Thomas Murray there were rumours in Buenos Aires 'that Hutchinson got his appointment and preference from the English Government for betraying his friends. He was an Irishman and was, it is said, one of O'Connell's secretaries' (Murray 1919: 310).

Hutchinson's ideological platform was quite distinct from Catholic emancipation and Irish home rule. Therefore it is unlikely that he had worked as O'Connell's secretary. Hutchinson's connections and friends, and his own record of service, were the principal cause of his appointments in the consular service. This suggests that the 'rumours' were probably the product of Murray's marked dislike of anything English.

Between 25 November 1862 and 10 March 1863, with the merchant Esteban Rams and official support, Thomas Hutchinson organised an exploration from Rosario to the River Salado in search of wild cotton. As a result of this journey, he wrote *Buenos Ayres and Argentine Gleanings: with extracts from a diary of the Salado exploration in 1862 and 1863*, published in London in 1865.

In 1864 and until 4 June 1865, Hutchinson was also Acting Consul for Uruguay. In Montevideo, he owned the *Farmacia Británica* at the corner of 25 de Mayo and Ituzaingo. On Hutchinson's initiative, the governor of Santiago del Estero, Gaspar Taboada, began testing to produce cotton in his province. In October of 1870 the family left Rosario for England.

### **Cholera and Native Diseases**

Two cholera epidemics broke out in Rosario in from March to May 1867 and from December 1867 to February 1868. Cholera was a frequent visitor during the summer heat and the rainy season. This time the outbreak was out of control. In April 1867 alone there were 462 victims buried in the church cemetery. Hutchinson was assisted by his wife and the Sisters of Mercy. They established a sanatorium

in their own house and rendered a great service to the poor of the city by administering free medicines and clothing. According to Richard Burton, Thomas and Mary Hutchinson were scorned in the press by the local doctors. They used bleeding as the basic treatment and sent dozens to the grave, but Hutchinson cured his patients by administering chloroform, chlorodyne, brandy, and turpentine (Burton 1870: 324).

Hutchinson observed that 'in some cases, the process just described occurred in a period of five or six hours from the appearance of the first signs of symptoms' of the disease (Hutchinson 1867: 110). He added that the cause was unknown, as 'it has been since cholera broke out in 1665 in London or in 1807 in Jessore, Hindustan, when it extended to Asia and took millions of lives' (115). (6) He insisted on the use of quinine as the only prophylactic medicine.

For his great services during the epidemic, the governor of Santa Fe province Nicasio Oroño gratefully mentioned Hutchinson in his message to the provincial parliament. Furthermore, in July 1867 Hutchinson was presented with a gold medal by the Union Masonic Lodge of Rosario.



During a journey through the northern part of Argentina, Hutchinson also studied an intermittent fever, locally known as 'chuchu'.

(7) 'Muleteers going from either of the latter [La Rioja] to one of the former provinces [Catamarca], and having already suffered from the mild species of this disease are most predisposed to take it on coming within its sphere of germination. In such cases it proves fatal to a large per-centage' (Hutchinson 1865: 182-183).

His observations on the South American flora were significant and completed his medical practice. Yerba mate (*Ilex paraguarensis*), a highly-caffeinated tea regularly drunk in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, and other countries, has been the object of frequent commercial enterprises to export it to Europe. Hutchinson wrote that

*there are two qualities of this herb of the Paraguaya, styled respectively the caa-guazu (large herb) and caa-mi (small herb). [...] When the leaves are fit to be pulled, they are gathered, toasted, and pulverized. This is done under a shed, made of posts and covered with the branches of trees. [...] The quantity of yerba exported from Paraguay in a year is incalculable* (Hutchinson 1865: 142).

### Peru

In 1870 Thomas J. Hutchinson was appointed British consul at Callao, the port of Lima, where he arrived with his family on the *Cordillera* on 22 April 1871. Most of his work in Peru had to do with shipping, in particular with the problems of crimping by British and other ship captains. (8) He also dedicated time to travel and to exploring vestiges and the burial grounds of the indigenous peoples previous to the Spanish conquest, an experience he recorded in the two volumes of *Two Years in Peru, with Exploration of its Antiquities* (1873).

In his book, Hutchinson focused on the shipping trade and also on his new archaeological interests. He regarded the Andean nation as 'a mine of archaeological lore, as inexhaustible as her treasures of silver and gold' (Hutchinson 1873, I: vii). A good portion of the first volume includes extracts of his consular reports about the trade in Callao, with details of agriculture and mining in Peru.

Most of the second volume is dedicated to the archaeology of ancient cultures in the Andes.

Permeated by the spirit of illustration and progress, and influenced by the typical British perception of Latin America in that period, Hutchinson presented an enthusiastic vision of Peru as a leading country that

*has entered a new era. [...] With these we have the daily-increasing commercial spirit, chiefly called into life by the Pacific Steam Navigation Company [...]. Peru has a greater length of railways than any other South American Republic, or even than Brazil. She has reformed municipalities - made grants for bringing out schoolmasters from Europe - is putting forth educational and scientific schemes - proposes outlay for immigration purposes - and through Congress, as well as the Executive, is presenting to the world the tout-ensemble of a regenerating progress - needing only the security of permanent tranquillity to make her hold a primary position amongst the nations of the world* (I: xiv).

### Barbarous Fashions and Civilised Houses

Scarce in medical descriptions, Hutchinson's *Two Years in Peru* abounds with archaeological descriptions and commercial reports, as well as in observations and remarks about the people that are enriched by his medical experiences in Africa and the Río de la Plata region. 'The Conibos [...] have the barbarous fashion of flattening the heads of their children with two small pieces of thin board - one of which is applied to the forehead, and another behind - in such a manner that the front of the head is pushed down, and the head enlarged posteriorly, resembling the skulls that are sometimes turned out of the burial-grounds (huacas) in the sierras' (II: 83). Opposite to this 'barbarous fashion' were the works of European residents, like the hospital of Pacasmayo, in the northern part of the country. Hutchinson visited Dr. Heath's 'excellent institution, like all those built by Mr. Meiggs, with capacity for accommodating forty to fifty patients' (II: 167).

The description of houses reflects the same contrast between the 'houses at San José [...] are most miserable and uncomfortable of

residences. [...] Not whitewash, and no arches, no comfortable promenade, excepting what is built by the foreigners (II: 216).

### **Retirement and Travel Writing**

Hutchinson resigned from the Consular Service in 1874, though he had been on leave and off-duty since November 1872. On 21 April 1874 he was granted a life pension. The family went to live in Ballinescar Lodge in Curracloe, St. Margaret's parish, County Wexford, where Hutchinson dedicated himself to writing about his travel experiences. He travelled through

Germany and France, and in 1876 he published *Summer Holidays in Brittany*. Then he moved to Chimoo Cottage Mill Hill near Hendon in the English county of Middlesex, and finally to northern Italy. Hutchinson died on 23 March 1885 in his apartment at 2 Via Maragliano, Florence. He was survived by his wife Mary Hutchinson and their adopted daughter Fanny Hutchinson.

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### **Notes**

1. I am thankful to SILAS Treasurer Edward Walsh (London) for his generous hospitality and expert guidance through the intricacy and formalities of the city's various libraries and archives. I am also grateful to Roberto Landaburu of Venado Tuerto for sharing with me interesting information about Hutchinson, and to genealogist Helen Kelly of Dublin for her research on the Hutchinson family in Wexford archives.
2. Although 1820 is mentioned in some sources as the year of birth.
3. The former slaves were liberated by a British battleship and wished to become British citizens. They bore English names and spoke *pidgin*, a mix of African languages, English and Spanish. They were labelled *Fernandinos* by the local population. Some of their names are visible on the abandoned graves at the old cemetery of Barrio Ela Nguema, Malabo.
4. Later in 1865, Captain Burton followed Hutchinson to South America as the British consul in Santos, Brazil. In 1868 he visited Hutchinson in Rosario.
5. Some other quinine wine brands were Waters', Goodall's and Lyman's. By the end of the nineteenth century the quinine wines started to be marketed as tonic waters (eg. Canada Dry, Schweppes). The bitter taste of anti-malarial quinine tonic led officers and employees of the British East India Company to mix it with gin, thus creating the gin and tonic cocktail.
6. In 1866, the British epidemiologist William Farr identified contaminated drinking water as the likely source of the disease. However, only in 1883 Robert Koch identified *Vibrio cholerae* as the bacillus responsible for the disease.
7. *Chucho*. Hutchinson's writing includes frequent and startling misspellings of common nouns, toponyms and other proper names in Spanish and French languages.
8. 'Crimping' ('Shanghaiing' in American English), was the practise of conscripting men as sailors by coercive techniques such as trickery, intimidation, or violence.

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