

**A MEMOIR OF
CHARLES HUTTON,
LL. D. F.R.S.**

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**A MEMOIR OF
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A

Memoir

OR

CHARLES HUTTON, LL.D. F.R.S.

IN connecting the name of Dr. Hutton with the subject of this paper, it will be necessary, in order to prevent expectations being raised which will not be gratified, to disclaim the intention of presenting a continued biographical narrative of our celebrated townsman. Supposing that I even possessed abilities for such a task, I have neither sufficient materials for the purpose, nor do I possess sufficient leisure for arranging them in their proper form. And I feel the less desirous to make the attempt, as I know it is in the hands of one every way qualified to do justice to it—of one who has been for more than twenty years the most intimate friend of the subject of the memoir which he is preparing, and for a considerable portion of that time, his fellow-labourer in the work of education—and now his successor in the Royal Military College. It will be immediately seen that I allude to Dr. O. Gregory, whose eminent attainments in the mathematical and philosophical sciences, as well as in the general walks of literature, eminently qualify him for presenting to the world a faithful picture of the abilities and character of our lamented friend. My attempt is of a humbler kind—to present a few

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detached events of the life of Dr. H. chiefly as connected with his native town, and especially to represent to this society the great interest, which the Doctor always took in its concerns, and also in the other institutions in this town connected with education. If I am able to do this in a proper manner, I shall feel satisfied, and though I may attempt to form a connecting chain to my narrative, yet that is not my chief object.

In some of the memoirs which have appeared in the public journals, an anxiety has been shown to dignify the Doctor through means of his ancestors, as if he required any borrowed ornaments. Surely no great anxiety needs be exhibited to trace the ancestry of a man, whose great abilities were exerted for between sixty and seventy years in the dissemination of knowledge in his native country, whose writings are in every seminary of education, and with whom the nobles of the land thought it an honour to associate.

It is surely better to allow him to stand upon the firm pedestal which he has formed for himself, than to attempt to exalt him upon a tottering fabric of hollow ancestry, which may fall to the ground. I express myself the more decidedly upon this point, from the personal knowledge I had of the real character of Dr. H. He was sufficiently conscious of his own abilities, and of the rank which he held in society, to make him feel quite at ease, as to what might be said with respect to his origin.

Charles Hutton is said to have been descended from a family in Westmoreland, but he himself was born in Side-gate, now named Percy-street, Newcastle upon Tyne, August the 14th, 1737, and was the

youngest son of Henry and Eleanor Hutton. His father was employed in the coal works in the neighbourhood; and though he is stated in some of the London journals to have been a viewer of collieries, it is evident, if he were a viewer at all, he must have been an under-viewer, who is generally one of the most intelligent of the workmen, employed to superintend the others. He had the misfortune, however, when only five years of age, to lose his father, who, as appears from the register of St. Andrew's church, died in June, 1742. His mother married again, Nov. 13th, 1743,* to a person of the name of Francis Frain, whose employment was that of an overman in the collieries, and who is said to have proved a kind father to Charles.

When about seven years of age, Charles had the misfortune, in a quarrel with some children in the street, to get the elbow joint of his right arm put out.

Being afraid to tell his parents of the accident, he concealed it from them for some days, and when at last they discovered it, it was too late for any surgical assistance thoroughly to restore it. This was a heavy affliction to his parents, especially to his mother, who lamented that her son Charles would never be able to procure for himself a livelihood. He was accordingly sent to school, whilst his brothers were employed working in the pits. The first school he was sent to, was kept by an old Scotch woman in Percy-street, in a house, that projects into the street close to the turn into Gallowgate; and here

* These and some other dates have been obligingly extracted by the Rev. H. D. Griffith, from the Registers kept in St. Andrew's Church.

he remained till he had read the Bible and Testament two or three times through. This school-mistress, according to the Doctor's account, was no great scholar, as it was her practice, whenever she came to a word, which she could not read herself, to desire the children to skip it, for it was Latin.

Having learnt to read at this school, he went, on his parents removing to Benwell, to a school at a place a little below that village, called Delavel, and here he learned to write—the schoolmaster's name was Robson. He did not remain long here, for his parents shortly after removing to High Heaton, he went to school at Jesmond; and this may be considered the principal place of his education. The school was kept by the Rev. Mr. Ivison, a clergyman of the church of England. How long he was at this school, or in what manner he was otherwise occupied for a few years about this time, cannot now be ascertained. From the circumstance of his having got his arm lamed, and thus being rendered unfit for manual labour, I was inclined to think the common report of his having worked in the pits was incorrect—and that it arose from his brothers having been employed as ordinary pitmen; and I would here observe, that I have had considerable difficulty in tracing this part of his history. Since I had the honour of reading this memoir before the Literary and Philosophical Society, I have had, through the kindness of Mr. Wood, of Killingworth, documents put into my hand, which prove the correctness of the report, that he had been employed in his youth, at least for a short time, as a common workman in the pits.

These documents are two of the pay-bills of Old Long Benton colliery, in which Chas. Hutton's name appears among the hewers, Francis Fraim, his step-father, being overman. The first is headed thus, "Pay ending Sept. the 2d. Fran. Fraim—Rose Pit." The year does not appear on the face of the bill, but on comparing it with the colliery books, Mr. Wood finds it to be 1755. In this bill the name of Chas. Hutton is placed the last among the hewers, and from the small quantity of work (compared with that of the other workmen) standing opposite his name, he seems to have been a very indifferent hewer; the lameness in his arm, rendering him unfit for so laborious an employment.

The other bill is "Pay ending March the 16th, Francis Fraim—Rose Pit." The year, on comparison with the colliery books, is 1756. It appears from this bill that Hutton only worked the three first days of the pay, and his name is not to be found in any subsequent pay-bill. Indeed, we may safely state, that these were the last days he ever worked in the pits. He was now more than eighteen years of age, and we know from other circumstances, that it was about this age he commenced teaching a school.

I do not consider it would be an act of kindness to the memory of Dr. H. to suppress this part of his early history. We know, that the lower any man's origin is, the higher and the more honourable is his subsequent elevation. And here I would observe, although it is anticipating a part of this narrative, that it is perhaps the first time in the annals of British biography, that a person once employed in the situation of a

common workman in a colliery, rendered himself so celebrated, that a Lord Chancellor of England considered it as one of the many blessings which he had enjoyed in life, to have had the benefit of his instructions.

It was on Mr. Ivison's leaving Jesmond, which he did on his being engaged as a curate at Whitburn, that Mr. Hutton entered upon his school. In a short time, his school at Jesmond, increased so much, that his school room became too small, and he removed to a larger room in an old house, called Stote's Hall, at a little distance from Jesmond.

The assiduity with which he applied to his studies at this time was very remarkable. Whilst he taught school at Stote's Hall during the day, he attended, in the evening, at a school in Newcastle, kept by a Mr. James, to prosecute his studies in mathematics, and so careful was he not to lose a moment of time, that he scarcely allowed himself sufficient leisure to take his ordinary meals; and his mother has often been heard to express her fears, that her son would injure his health by too great application. Whilst he was attending the evening school of Mr. James, he formed an acquaintance with Mr. George Anderson, at that time serving his apprenticeship as a bricklayer, and a close intimacy continued between them, during Mr. Hutton's residence in Newcastle.

On Mr. James's declining school, Mr. H. embraced the opportunity of coming into Newcastle, and commenced school in the Flesh Market. In the advertisement, which he published, he boldly professed to teach the whole circle of the mathematical sciences. Some

of his friends, whom he had previously consulted, advised him to be more moderate in his pretensions, lest he should injure himself by being found to have professed more than he was adequate to perform. But, confident in the strength of his powers, he fearlessly published the advertisement; and he had no reason to repent doing so, as appears from the following circumstance.

Mr. Shafto, living in Benwell Hall, having seen this advertisement, sent a card to Mr. H. requesting him to call upon him. Pleased with the interview, he engaged Mr. H. to go to Benwell in the evening, or at such other times as he could spare from his public school, in order to teach his children. Mr. Shafto, who possessed an excellent library, and who immediately saw what advantage it would be to a person of so inquiring a mind and promising abilities as Mr. H. to have access to a good library, liberally offered him the use of it. In order to judge of the benefit, which Mr. H. would derive from this kind offer, we must take into the account the great want there was at that time, even in large towns, of public libraries; especially libraries well furnished with scientific and philosophical works. We were not then what Dr. Johnson calls a nation of readers. Mr. H. in his attendance at Benwell, got a pupil to instruct, that at first he did not anticipate—this was Mr. Shafto himself, who proposed to Mr. H. to revise with him the mathematics that he had formerly read at college. And taking Mr. H. into the library, he pointed out to him the works he had read, and which he wished to re-peruse. In order that Mr. H. might be qualified to take upon him the office of tutor, he allowed him to take the books home,