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978-1-108-01932-3 - A Sketch of the Life and Labours of Sir William Jackson Hooke

Joseph Dalton Hooker

Excerpt

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A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND LABOURS  
OF  
SIR WILLIAM JACKSON HOOKER.

(*With Portrait*).

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CHAPTER I.

NORWICH AND HALESWORTH, 1785-1820.

WILLIAM JACKSON HOOKER was born in St. Saviour's parish, Norwich, on July 6, 1785. He was the younger of two sons, the only children of Joseph and Lydia Hooker, of that city. His father was a native of Exeter, the home of many generations of the Devonshire Hookers<sup>1</sup>, where he had been a confidential clerk in the house of Baring Brothers, wool-staplers, with whose family his was distantly connected. From Exeter he went to Norwich, and into business there, where he had a collection of 'Succulents,' the cultivation of which class of plants was a favourite pursuit of many of his fellow citizens<sup>2</sup>. He was mainly a self-educated man, and a fair German scholar. My father's mother was a daughter

<sup>1</sup> Descendants of John Hooker, alias Vowell, First Chamberlain of Exeter and member for the city, editor of Holinshed's Chronicles, for which he wrote the history of the Irish Parliament and translated the Irish Histories of Giraldus Cambrensis, &c. He was uncle of Richard Hooker, whom he sent to college. My grandfather was seventh in descent from John, whose ancestors (fide Heralds' College) date back for six generations to a Seraph Voell, of Pembroke; but except John, Richard, and a John who was M.P. for Exeter, temp. Edward V, Richard III and Henry VII, not one of the long line, in so far as I know, emerged from obscurity.

<sup>2</sup> The best known of these collections was that of Thomas Hitchin, a dyer of Norwich, after whom Wallich named the noble Burmese plant *Hitchinia glauca*. In 1882 I could hear of but one collection remaining in the city, that of Dr. Masters, since dispersed, some of the contents coming to Kew.

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of James Vincent, Esq., of Norwich, a worsted manufacturer, grandfather of George Vincent<sup>1</sup>, one of the best of the Norwich School of artists, and whose works are now much sought for. Thus my father presumably derived his love of plants from his father's side, and his artistic powers from his mother's.

Of my father's early childhood I know no more than that he went to the Norwich Grammar School, under the then well-known pedagogue, Dr. Foster, but the records of that school having been destroyed it is impossible to say what progress he made there; at home he devoted himself to entomology, drawing, and reading books of travel and natural history. When only four years old he inherited the reversion to a fair competency in landed and personal property in Kent, through the death of his cousin and godfather, William Jackson, Esq.<sup>2</sup>, of Canterbury, a young man of great promise. After leaving school he was sent to reside with a Mr. Paul, of Starston (a village on the borders of Suffolk), a gentleman farmer, who instructed sons of the landed gentry in the management of estates. Early in life he devoted himself to ornithology, visiting the Broads and sea-coast of Norfolk, which abounded in rare birds, shooting, stuffing, and drawing them, besides learning their habits and songs. Sixty years later he knew the birds in Kew Gardens by the eye and the ear, and in a manner which surprised me. Though a keen ornithologist and as keen an entomologist, he was almost morbidly averse from taking life; he never shot for sport or for the pot, and many years afterwards when instructing me in entomology he was ever urging me to kill with the least suffering, and never to take more specimens than were necessary. His was one of those temperaments that later in life

<sup>1</sup> George Vincent was well educated and brought up, but lost himself. My father, his cousin, vainly endeavoured to trace his end in London.

<sup>2</sup> He was killed in 1789, being thrown from his horse at his father's door; see Hasted's Kent, iv. 427, and, for a long *Éloge*, the Gentleman's Magazine, lxii (1790), 859. A sermon is to this day annually preached, in memory of him, in St. Mildred's Church, Canterbury, where is also his monument by the sculptor Bacon.

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could not look on blood without a feeling of faintness, or on a wax model of the human face with equanimity.

That his entomological pursuits were, when still in his teens, appreciated by the veteran Kirby is evidenced by the latter having in 1805 dedicated to him and his brother a species of *Apion* with these words: 'I am indebted to an excellent naturalist, Mr. W. J. Hooker, of Norwich, who first discovered it, for this species. Many other nondescripts have been taken by him and his brother, Mr. J. Hooker, and I name this insect after them, as a memorial of my sense of their ability and exertions in the service of my favourite department of natural history<sup>1</sup>.'

I do not know the age at which my father took up botany. The first evidence of his having done so is the fact, that he was the discoverer in Britain in 1805 of a very curious moss, *Buxbaumia aphylla*; but it may be inferred from this and from his correspondence with Mr. Turner (which I possess) that he had at the age of twenty-one thoroughly studied not only the flowering plants, but the mosses, Hepaticae, lichens<sup>2</sup>, and fresh-water Algae of Norfolk. The *Buxbaumia* he took to his friend Dr. (afterwards Sir James) Smith<sup>3</sup>, of Norwich, the possessor of the Linnean herbarium, who advised him to send specimens to Mr. Dawson Turner, F.R.S.<sup>4</sup>, of Great

<sup>1</sup> Transactions of the Linnean Society, vol. ix (1808), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter dated March, 1806, he mentions having a cabinet made for his collection of lichens with twenty-eight or thirty drawers, each two inches deep with thirty-six partitions, in which to place cards with mounted specimens.

<sup>3</sup> In 1808 Sir James Smith dedicated a genus of mosses to him in the following words: 'I have great pleasure in dedicating this genus (*Hookeria*) to my young friend, William Jackson Hooker, F.L.S., a most assiduous and intelligent botanist, already well known by his interesting discovery of *Buxbaumia aphylla*, as well as by his scientific drawings of *Fuci* for Mr. Turner's work; and likely to be far more distinguished by his illustrations of the difficult genus *Jungermannia*, to which he has given particular attention' (Trans. Linn. Soc. ix. 1808, 275). The plate accompanying Sir James Smith's paper is of four species of the genus, signed 'W. J. Hook. delin<sup>t</sup>.'

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Turner was a partner in Gurney's Bank, Great Yarmouth, of which his father was one of the founders. He was eminent as a scholar, botanist, antiquarian, and bibliophile. His collection of royal autographs and his illustrated copy of Blomfield's Norfolk are in the British Museum.

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Yarmouth, author of 'Muscologiae Hibernicae Spicilegium,' and, with L. W. Dillwyn, F.L.S., of 'The Botanist's Guide through England and Wales.' This he did, and it was immediately followed by an invitation from Mr. Turner to visit him, which led to the colouring of his future life.

In 1806, when only four months over his majority, my father was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society, probably the youngest individual so honoured. In the same year he visited London, and was introduced to Sir Joseph Banks, König, Brown, and other naturalists. The years 1806-9 were passed between Norwich, Yarmouth, and London, with intervals of travelling in Scotland and Iceland. In London he had rooms in Frith Street, Soho, to be near the British Museum, Linnean Society's rooms, his friends, R. Brown, Leach, König, Edward Foster, Macleay, and above all the Banksian library and collections, and Sir Joseph Banks himself, who treated him with great kindness, stimulating his zeal as a naturalist and his desire to travel. At Yarmouth, where he was a frequent guest for protracted periods, he devoted himself mainly to aiding Mr. Turner in his great work, the 'Historia Fucorum<sup>1</sup>,' of which aid the latter makes frequent grateful mention in his correspondence with Mr. Borrer. During the same period he was occupied with preparing his 'British Jungermanniae' for publication<sup>2</sup>, and in studying Buchanan-Hamilton's Nepal mosses in Sir James Smith's herbarium, upon some of which he wrote his first published paper. It is entitled 'Musci Nepalenses,' and was read before the Linnean Society in June, 1807 (Linn. Trans., ix. 1807, pp. 26-8, with three plates).

In 1807, when botanizing in the neighbourhood of Yarmouth, he was bitten by a viper. Fancying he had been pricked by a thorn he paid no heed to the pain till giddiness came on,

<sup>1</sup> Of the 258 coloured plates of this work, 231 are inscribed 'W. J. H., Esq<sup>r</sup>. delt.' in minute letters; 12 signed 'M. T.,' or 'D<sup>na</sup> T.,' are by Mrs. Turner; 7 by Miss Hutchins, of Bantry; 2 by Professor Martens, of Bremen, and 1 by Sir Thomas Frankland.

<sup>2</sup> Writing to Mr. Turner in 1808 he mentions that Dr. Smith had lent him the whole Linnean collection of *Jungermanniae* for study, together with his own.

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under which he succumbed. After lying for some time in a state of collapse<sup>1</sup> he was accidentally found by some friends, who carried him to Mr. Turner's, where violent fever supervened, followed by a tedious illness. On recovery he started with Mr. and Mrs. Turner on a botanical tour in Scotland. Their route was, first, Croft in Yorkshire, visiting the Rev. James Dalton, F.L.S., the discoverer of the *Scheuzeria* in England, after whom the moss *Daltonia* is named; then Carlisle, Brankesome, Melrose, Edinburgh, the Falls of Clyde, Glasgow, Dumbarton, Luss, Ben Lomond—ascended in cloud and rain, guided by the Rev. Dr. Stuart, of Luss, an excellent botanist, a friend of Lightfoot, and the translator of the New Testament in Gaelic. Thence they proceeded to Inverary, Loch Awe, Oban, Mull, Ulva, Staffa, Fort William, ascending Ben Nevis in terrible weather, Fort Augustus, Elgin, visiting Mr. Brodie of Brodie, F.R.S., the discoverer of *Moneses* and other rare plants in Scotland. Thence to Loch Tay, ascending Ben Lawers twice, Killin, ascending Ben Cruachan, Craighallach and Ben More, Stirling, Edinburgh, and Newcastle, visiting Mr. J. Winch, F.L.S., author of the 'Geographical Distribution of Northumbrian Plants,' and Mr. J. Thornhill, of Gateshead, a good local botanist; thence to Darlington on a visit to Mr. Backhouse, banker, who showed them *Cypripedium Calceolus*, and so back to Yarmouth.

In 1808 my father undertook a much longer journey in Scotland, accompanied by his friend Mr. Borrer<sup>2</sup>. On this occasion he reascended Ben Lawers, Ben Lomond, Ben Cruachan, and Ben Nevis, and for the first time Shichallion, Ben Hope, and Ben Loyal. After visiting Mr. Brodie of Brodie, they went to Caithness and the Orkneys, returning to Sutherland. In a letter to Mr. Turner he thus describes their reception in Sutherland: 'We did not leave North Sutherland with the good wishes of the inhabitants, at least

<sup>1</sup> The symptoms, as described in a letter from Turner to Borrer, were dreadful giddiness, pain about the navel, shivering, drowsiness, vomiting, purging, and exhaustion.

<sup>2</sup> William Borrer, Esq., of Henfield, Sussex, F.R.S., F.L.S., died 1862, aged 81; the Nestor of British botanists.

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the lower classes of them, most of whom took us for French spies, or, what is worse in their estimation, sheep-farmers. Daniel Forbes, who so often acted as our guide, was advised by some to conduct us by the worst way possible ; by others he was told that he might be better employed. Our lad heard some saying that we ought to be flogged and sent out of the country. They have not the least idea of persons travelling for mere curiosity, and could not be persuaded that we were not come to do them some ill.' Crossing Sutherland and Cromarty, they went by Moida and Lairg to Skye, where they found the *Eriocaulon*, and to the remarkable and little-visited cave of Slock Altramins. Recrossing the Sound to Glenelg, they proceeded to visit Sir George McKenzie at Coul, and Lord Seaforth at Brahan Castle, and again Mr. Brodie of Brodie, returning by Aviemore, Killiecrankie, and Edinburgh<sup>1</sup> to Norwich.

The journey through the North of Scotland was performed mainly on horses or ponies, and the difficulties met with were such as can now be experienced only in the out-of-the-way parts of the globe. My father made copious pencil sketches and kept a journal, which he was vainly urged by his friends to publish. I have no idea what became of it. The only recorded botanical result of the journey was the discovery of a new *Andreaea* (*A. nivalis*, Hook.) on the summit of Ben Nevis ; which probably prompted the writing of his second published paper, 'Some Observations on the Genus *Andreaea*,' read before the Linnean Society in May, 1810 (Linn. Trans., x. 381, tab. xxxi).

In 1809 Sir Joseph Banks, hearing of an opportunity for a naturalist visiting Iceland, where he himself had been in 1772, suggested my father's taking advantage of it. This he did, and all the more eagerly from having as a boy read 'Van Troil's Letters on Iceland,' with a longing to visit the hot springs and volcanoes therein described. The opportunity was the dispatch of a vessel, the *Margaret and Anne*, with

<sup>1</sup> It was probably on this occasion that my father became one of the founders of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh, the memoirs of which, commenced in 1808, were concluded in 1832, in six volumes.

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a letter of marque, chartered by a London firm, Messrs. Phelps & Co., for the purpose of obtaining a cargo of tallow. The venture was a risky one, for Denmark, to which country Iceland belonged, was at war with England, and the firm were enticed to undertake it by a Danish prisoner of war, Jorgen Jorgensen by name, who was now for the second time about to break his parole and accompany the ship in the interests of the firm. The *Margaret and Anne* sailed June 2, and on arriving June 21 at Reikevik Jorgensen, finding that commerce with England was prohibited, effected a revolution in the island, proclaimed its independence of the Danish crown and himself its 'Protector,' imprisoned the governor, Count Tramp, erected a fort armed with six guns, equipped troops, remodelled the laws, established representative government and trial by jury, reduced the taxes, and raised the salaries of the clergy; all without shedding a drop of blood, or an attempt at resistance on the part of the people<sup>1</sup>!

On his arrival at Reikevik my father received a hearty welcome from the Stiftsamptman (Icelandic governor of the island), to whom he had brought from Sir Joseph Banks a letter of introduction, together with a handsome present of books, engravings, &c. The delight of the old man on receiving these was affecting; he spoke of Sir Joseph with veneration, describing his philanthropic efforts to avert the

<sup>1</sup> An account of the career of this extraordinary man is given in his Autobiography, published anonymously in Ross's Hobart Town Almanack for 1835; and is retold in a little work entitled 'The Convict King, being the Life and Adventures of Jorgen Jorgensen, Monarch of Iceland, Naval Captain, Revolutionist, British Diplomatic Agent, Author, Dramatist, Preacher, Political Prisoner, Gambler, Hospital Dispenser, Continental Traveller, Explorer, Editor, Expatriated Exile, and Colonial Constable, retold by James Francis Hogan': 12mo, London, Ward and Downey, 1891. What most concerns botany in Jorgensen's career are the facts that he served as a seaman under Capt. Flinders, R.N., in his voyage to Terra Australis (1802-5), with Robert Brown as botanist, and J. Franklin (afterwards Sir John, the Arctic traveller) as midshipman; and that it was through the exertions of Mrs. Fry, Sir Joseph Banks, and my father, that the sentence of death passed on Jorgensen in 1825 was commuted into penal servitude for life in Tasmania, where I saw him in 1840. He died there in that or the following year, his fellow voyager, Sir John Franklin, being governor of the colony at the time! See 'Tour in Iceland,' by W. J. H., for details of Jorgensen's acts, &c.

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famine that threatened the Icelanders at the beginning of the war, when the activity of our cruisers intercepted their supplies of food from Denmark and Norway<sup>1</sup>, adding that Sir Joseph had obtained the release of Danish prisoners in England, and at his own expense furnished them with the means of living and returning to their homes.

As may be taken for granted, under such circumstances every facility was given to the visitor for travelling to the most interesting places in the island, Thingewalla, the Geysers, Skalholt, Reykholt, &c., and for making collections and observations on natural history.

On August 6, H.M.S. *Talbot* anchored in Reikevik harbour, when her commander, the Hon. Captain Jones, promptly deposing and making a prisoner of Jorgensen, replaced Count Tramp in the governorship.

On August 25, after bidding adieu to his kind friend the Stiftsamptman, who gave him a valuable collection of Icelandic books, my father embarked on his return voyage in the *Margaret and Anne*. On this occasion the vessel carried besides the passengers and crew some Danish prisoners of war, and she was ordered by Captain Jones to sail in company with the *Orion*<sup>2</sup>, now a prize of the *Talbot*, carrying Mr. Jorgensen and another party of Danish prisoners. The two ships left in the afternoon, but the *Orion* becoming suddenly becalmed could not proceed till the following day. The *Margaret and Anne*, on the other hand, being favoured by the wind, pursued her voyage till the morning of the 27th, when being twenty leagues from the land, in a dead calm, she was discovered to be on fire. Being loaded with oil and tallow, the progress of the flames was rapid; smoke burst out at once from all the hatches, and to add to the horror of the situation, she did not

<sup>1</sup> Sir Joseph Banks being himself a Privy Councillor obtained an Order in Council, dated Feb. 10, 1810, strictly forbidding acts of hostility against the poor and defenceless colonies of the Danish dominion, and permitting them to trade with the parent-country, unmolested by British cruisers.

<sup>2</sup> The *Orion* was a Danish ship of war, that had brought Count Tramp to Iceland a few weeks before the arrival of the *Margaret and Anne*, which, in virtue of her letter of marque, had, under Jorgensen's orders, seized her as a prize.

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carry boats enough to hold the number of souls on board. All attempts to subdue the fire were vain, when providentially a rescuer appeared on the horizon. This was the *Orion* with the irrepressible Jorgensen<sup>1</sup> on board, who, to enable that vessel to rejoin her consort, had insisted on being allowed to run her through a dangerous passage between the reefs and the mainland of Reikevik harbour, and who by thus saving a day saved the lives of all hands on the burning ship, whom he carried back to Reikevik.

My father's description<sup>2</sup> of the progress of the conflagration, as seen from the *Orion*, is graphic—of the flames seizing the sails and rigging, of the falling of the masts, of the discharge of the guns, and of the reduction of a ship of 500 tons burthen, worth £25,000, to a hull with cataracts of blazing oil and tallow pouring over its sides.

Unfortunately the fire broke out in a part of the ship where his collections were stowed, and he lost everything but a few weeks of his journal, the clothes he stood in, and an Icelandic lady's wedding dress<sup>3</sup>, which the ship's steward flung into the boat as she shoved off from the burning wreck.

The fire was proved to have been planned before leaving Reikevik by some of the Danish prisoners, two of whom had lit it in the previous night. A search in the bedding of the prisoners in the *Orion* resulted in finding combustible materials, no doubt secreted for the same object.

On her return to Reikevik Captain Jones offered my father a passage home on board the *Talbot*, which he gladly accepted. The voyage was a tempestuous one of sixteen days' duration, during which the *Talbot* lost her foremast. She arrived in Leith roads on September 20.

<sup>1</sup> Jorgensen had proved himself to be a first-rate seaman, with all the qualities of a commander, when serving under Captain Flinders; and subsequently in 1807, as a captain in the Danish navy, when in a ship with eighty-three hands and twenty-eight guns, he engaged for three-quarters of an hour the British sloop *Sappho*, with 120 men. On this occasion he was taken prisoner and put on parole, which he twice broke as stated above, in making this and a former visit to Iceland in the interests of Messrs. Phelps & Co.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tour in Iceland*, vol. i, pp. 362–4.

<sup>3</sup> Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.

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Soon after his return, and yielding to the wishes of his friends, he commenced writing his 'Journal of a Tour in Iceland.' On hearing of this Sir Joseph Banks most liberally offered him the use of his own manuscript journal, and various other papers relating to the island, together with the magnificent drawings of the scenery, dresses of the inhabitants, &c., which were made by the artist who accompanied him in his voyage thither in 1772. With these materials, his own journal of four weeks out of the twelve which he passed in the island, and a retentive memory, refreshed by a reference to all available works and all documents relating to the revolution, he compiled and printed, for *private distribution only*, in 1811, an 8vo volume of upwards of 400 pages and four plates. Sir Joseph Banks was so pleased with it that he induced my father to reproduce it for publication. The second edition with additions, in two volumes, with two maps and four plates, dedicated to Sir Joseph, appeared in 1813, and is to this day a standard work. A *résumé* of its contents may be welcome to those interested in the author's career. Volume i contains the history and present condition of Iceland, its productions, institutions, commerce, &c., followed by his 'Recollections of Iceland' in journal form. Volume ii consists of six appendices: (1) details of the Icelandic Revolution, drawn up with singular impartiality; (2) proclamations relating to it; (3) Hecla and the volcanic mountains of Iceland; (4) Odes and Letters presented by the literati of Iceland to the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Banks and the Honourable Captain Jones; (5) a list of Icelandic plants; (6) Danish ordinances concerning the trade of Iceland.

Reverting to the destruction of his collections, my impression is that the loss to science of the cryptogamic plants was the most serious, for he was a keen student of mosses, Hepaticae, lichens, and both marine and fresh-water Algae<sup>1</sup>, and had gained invaluable knowledge on them during his excursions

<sup>1</sup> When only twenty-one years old he was in correspondence, on the subject of fresh-water Algae, with Mr. Dillwyn for whose British Confervae he made drawings of species discovered by himself in Norfolk.