

## John Hutchinson, O.B.E., F.R.S., LL.D., V.M.H., F.L.S.

M. D. GUNN\*

Dr. John Hutchinson, Nestor of British systematic botanists, botanical author, explorer, collector and authority on the floras of India and Africa, died at his home at Kent Road, Kew, England, on 2nd September 1972. Born at Blindburn, Wark-on-Tyne, Northumberland, England, on 7th April 1884, he received his schooling at Wark and Newcastle and his practical training in horticulture in his native Northumberland and the adjacent county of Durham. To gain further experience he journeyed south to Kew and entered the Royal Botanic Gardens as a student gardener in 1904. His interest in the scientific side of horticulture and his

natural talent for drawing gained him early recognition when he was selected to fill a temporary assistant post in the Herbarium in 1905. In 1907 he was promoted assistant in the Indian section and in 1909 was transferred as assistant for Tropical Africa. He returned a second time to Indian botany from 1915–1919 and from then onwards was in charge of the African section until 1936 when he was appointed Keeper of the Museums of Botany. He retired officially from Kew in 1948, but continued working there in the Herbarium and in the writing of books. His 68 years association with the Royal Botanic Gardens terminated with his death.



FIG. 1.—Drs. R. A. Dyer, I. B. Pole Evans and J. Hutchinson. Photograph taken in 1953

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Although Hutchinson had gained a wide knowledge of African plant material at Kew and in the great herbaria of Berlin-Dahlem and Paris and other continental botanical institutions, it was not until 1928 that he was able to visit the southern part of the African Continent and study the veld and its flora. His visit was made possible through a grant made by the then Empire Marketing Board. He arrived in Table Bay on 13th August 1928 and was met by a small group of prominent local botanists. He began botanizing in the vicinity of Cape Town on the day he arrived and continued collecting and recording his observations across the length and breadth of the country until he set sail for England on April 12th 1929, having travelled some 11 000 kilometres and collected over 3 000 plant species.

During his 1928–29 tour Hutchinson had botanized with and been the guest of General Smuts at his home "Doornkloof" at Irene near Pretoria. Hutchinson received an invitation from the statesman to be his guest on a botanical expedition he was planning to Lake Tanganyika. As a result he returned for the second time to South Africa travelling in the company of Mrs. Arthur Gillett and her two sons Jan and Anthony (Mrs. Gillett and Jan Gillett were both keen collectors and botanists) who had also been invited to join the Smuts Expedition, arriving at Irene on 29th June 1930.

Mrs. Smuts and some members of her family accompanied the party as far as the Victoria Falls. Dr. I. B. Pole Evans then Chief of the Division of Botany joined the expedition at Beit Bridge, he and two assistants travelling in a well equipped motor caravan. The expedition journeyed through Southern and Northern Rhodesia (now Rhodesia and Zambia) on to Abercorn on the shores of the Lake Tanganyika. On the return journey Hutchinson left the party at Broken Hill and went on into the Belgian Congo. He returned to England in August 1930.

An account of his travels is given in his book *A Botanist in Southern Africa* published in London in 1946. The book, now an item of Africana, is profusely illustrated and the numerous black and white line drawings of plants bear testimony to his talent as a botanical artist.

On his departure from South Africa he sent a printed message of farewell (Fig. 2) to the many old and new friends who had given him assistance during his travels. This gesture on the part of Hutchinson was typical of the man. His friendship towards South Africans continued throughout his life. Any South African visiting the Kew Herbarium was soon taken under his wing, including a long line of liaison officers from the National Herbarium in Pretoria.

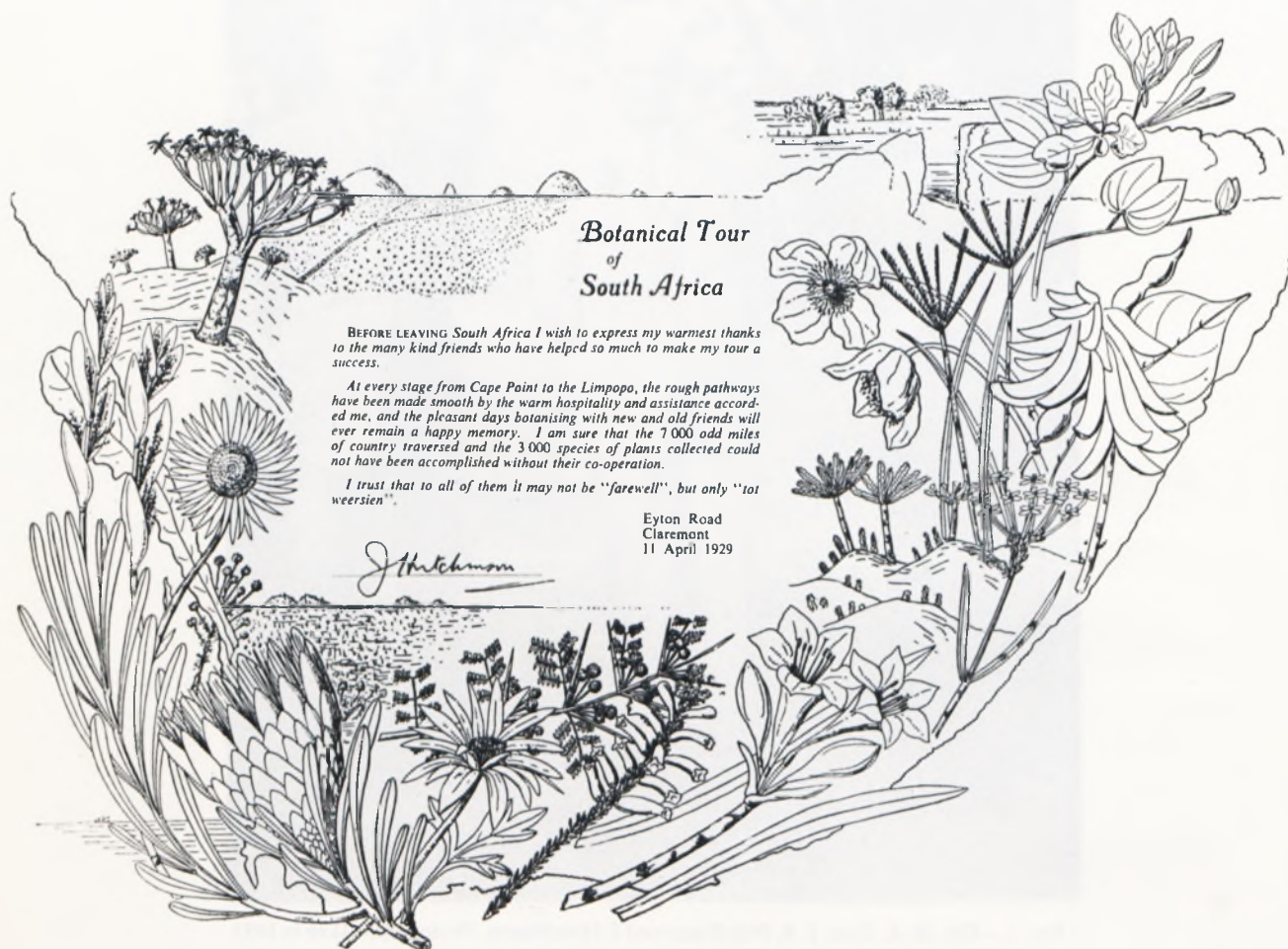


FIG. 2.—Farewell message sent by Dr. Hutchinson to his friends on leaving South Africa.

Apart from his monumental *A Botanist in Southern Africa*, Hutchinson contributed to South African botany in numerous papers to the *Kew Bulletin* and in revisions of families for the *Flora Capensis*, namely Myricaceae and Moraceae and contributions to Cyadaceae, Euphorbiaceae and Proteaceae. In a wider context he was known to botanists in South Africa for his classic works *Families of Flowering Plants* (1926, 1934 and 1958), *Flora of West Tropical Africa* (with Dalziel, 1927–1936), the *Genera of Flowering Plants* (1963, 1967) and *Evolution and Phylogeny of Flowering Plants* (1969).

Hutchinson received many honours. In 1934 the University of St. Andrews awarded him an honorary LL.D. degree; in 1947 he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society; he received the Victoria Medal of Honour from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1944, the Darwin Wallace Centenary Medal in 1958 and the Linnean Gold Medal in 1968. In 1972, shortly before his death, he was awarded the O.B.E. A fitting tribute was paid to Hutchinson by Dr. R. A. Dyer, his old and valued friend, formerly Chief of the Division of

Botany and Editor of *Flowering Plants of Africa*, when he dedicated Vol. 31 (1956) to him. The dedication reads:—

TO

JOHN HUTCHINSON

LL.D., F.R.S., V.M.H., F.L.S

Botanist, artist, for many years in charge of the African collection in the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, later Keeper of the Museums, retired in 1948, author of numerous botanical works during his official career including "The Flora of West Tropical Africa" in joint authorship with J. M. Dalziel, "The Families of Flowering Plants", "A Botanist in Southern Africa", and since retirement a series of popular books on the British Flora illustrated by his facile pen and for many years employed on the mammoth task of a new genera of flowering plants of the world, this volume is dedicated as a mark of appreciation for seeing through the press in England most of the first 26 volumes of "Flowering Plants of Africa" and for his invaluable guidance of and friendship towards many South African botanists including the present grateful editor of this work.

On learning of his death, Dr. Dyer wrote: "From a humble beginning in the Gardens, he reached the pinnacle of botanical fame".