Hutchison's
Clinical Methods
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SIR ROBERT HUTCHISON MD FRCP
(1871–1960)

*Clinical Methods* began in 1897, three years after Robert Hutchison was appointed Assistant Physician to The London Hospital. He was appointed full physician to The London and to the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, in 1900. He steered *Clinical Methods* through no less than 13 editions, at first with the assistance of Dr H. Rainy and then, from the 9th edition, published in 1929 with the help of Dr Donald Hunter. Although Hutchison retired from hospital practice in 1934 he continued to direct new editions of the book with Hunter, and from 1949 with the assistance also of Dr Richard Bomford. The 13th edition, the first produced without Hutchison’s guiding hand, was published in 1956 under the direction of Hunter and Bomford. Dr A. Stuart Mason and the present author joined Bomford on Hunter’s retirement to produce the 16th edition, published in 1975, and following Bomford’s retirement prepared the 17th and 18th editions.

During the many years of its continuous publication *Clinical Methods* has been translated into many languages. Indeed it is one of the great pleasures of association with the book to receive letters from far parts of the world, offering friendly advice, criticism and correction. Students have sometimes noted errors that have escaped the eye of the editors during several editions.
Hutchison died in 1960 and there are now few who remember him in the years of his active and productive life. It is evident from the memoirs of his contemporaries that he had a remarkable personality and many of his clinical sayings became, in their day, aphorisms to be remembered and passed on to future generations of students. Of these the best known is his petition, written in his 82nd year:

"From inability to let well alone; from too much zeal for the new and contempt for what is old; from putting knowledge before wisdom, science before art, and cleverness before common sense; from treating patients as cases, and from making the cure of the disease more grievous than the endurance of the same, Good Lord, deliver us."

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Preface

*Clinical Methods* is a book for students of all ages and all degrees of experience. We all have gaps in our knowledge and this book should help fill them. It is intended to provide insight and instruction on the acquisition of clinically useful information whether obtained by the traditional clinical skills of history-taking and physical examination, or by the increasingly complex and accurate methods available to the modern clinician with help from the biochemist, physicist, physiologist or computer engineer. Clearly, it is not possible to include all this information within the covers of a single book. Yet if modern investigative methods are to be applied to patient care, intelligently, with economy and with compassion, they must be integrated with traditional methods. The latter remain invaluable and irreplaceable clinical skills. Extended investigations and more complex managements must be both useful and humane. The art of the clinician, mentioned by Robert Hutchison in his petition, is essentially the art of communication and explanation.

In his own day Hutchison was concerned to explain those tests that were important in his clinical practice, particularly bacteriology, urine testing, radiology, and the beginnings of electrical tests of muscular function. Brief accounts of modern methods of investigation are therefore given throughout the nineteenth edition of the book; these are not intended to be complete but, rather, to give some idea both of the principles underlying them, and of the indications for their use.

Earlier editions of this book excluded surgical, gynaecological and obstetric problems but this now seems inappropriate. Indeed, other aspects of medical practice, especially the assessment of the sexually-transmitted diseases, have hitherto suffered unnecessary neglect, yet fall naturally into place in the context of the clinical methods used in their diagnosis, investigation and management. These matters now receive proper attention. Despite these changes it is hoped that faithful, older readers will continue to recognise in *Clinical Methods* an old friend; a friend offering some new information, together with much that is well-tried, and that ought to be as well-known to new generations of students as it was to their teachers when they were students. Good clinical method, Robert Hutchison said, is still the root of the matter.

Dr A. Stuart Mason has now retired from The London Hospital and from his long association with *Clinical Methods*. His influence on the book has been profound, particularly in ensuring its relevance to clinical practice, to the acquisition of clinical skills, and to the fundamental importance of planning appropriate investigation and management. With this nineteenth edition of
Clinical Methods several new contributors have joined the book. Some have contributed entirely new chapters and others have modified the work of their predecessors. Thus Hutchison's Clinical Methods is not the work of any individual but is the result of close collaboration between clinical colleagues in their practice at The London Hospital. The editor both contributes to the book and carefully moulds and modifies the individual contributions so as to integrate them into a single text. Throughout the book an attempt has been made to indicate particularly important matters, and to suggest the diagnostic relevance of certain findings. The book may therefore be used not only as a text of clinical methods but as a supplement to textbooks of medicine, surgery and the specialties. It may be read from cover to cover or approached piecemeal, as seems appropriate. Constructive criticisms are, as always, welcomed.

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