John Irwin Hutchinson

Professor of Mathematics

— December 1, 1935

Cornell University and the City of Ithaca were shocked by the sudden death, on December 1, 1935, of John Irwin Hutchinson.

He had given more than forty-one years of service to Cornell, as instructor (1894), assistant professor (1903), and professor (1910) of mathematics. He came to Cornell University as Instructor in Mathematics in 1894, at the time when it had been decided to choose as instructors mature men who should participate both in giving advanced instruction and in directing the investigations of mature students. He had recently received his doctorate at the new University of Chicago, and was indeed its first recipient of that degree in mathematics. He began actively to discharge the duties and responsibilities of his position here. He was one of the founders and most active members of the Oliver Mathematical Club, organized for the purpose of hearing and subjecting to searching criticism addresses on the reading and research of its members. He took part in all grades of instruction. Several elementary textbooks, written in conjunction with colleagues, had long popularity, not only in the University, but throughout the United States. His advanced courses and his research were chiefly in analysis, but usually in fields closely allied to topics in geometry, the theory of groups, and the theory of numbers. Among his original productions, two achievements deserve particular mention for their permanent value and the attention they attracted here and abroad: the introduction of the isometric circle in connection with automorphic functions, and the discovery of the infinite group of birational transformations of the general Kummer surface.

Hutchinson played an active role almost from the start in the new American Mathematical Society. He was a frequent contributor to its Bulletin and was one of the first assistant editors of its Transactions, launched in 1900,—an office which he held until failing health led him to relinquish it fifteen years later. In 1904 he was one of the major speakers at the international meeting of mathematicians held in connection with the World's Fair at St. Louis.

A nervous breakdown in 1911 interrupted his work for some time. On his recovery he devoted his energies, with his former skill and penetration, to the generalized zeta-function in the analytic theory of numbers. These contributions also received recognition and praise from other specialists.

In addition to the logical intellect of the mathematician, Hutchinson had a great love of all beauty whether in nature or in art. His knowledge of astronomy gave him keen interest in the starry heavens, and his love of nature was evinced in his appreciation of, and delight in the cultivation of flowers; in the songs of birds, and in the play of light and shade on the distant hillside. Early training as a pianist and lifelong cultivation of a discriminating taste for fine music, were sources of deep satisfaction to him. In literature his mind was stored with a knowledge of both ancient and modern classics from which he derived much of his intellectual recreation. To those few of his colleagues and friends who knew him intimately, was revealed something of the rare strength and beauty of his gifted personality.

> His life was gentle; and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, *This was a man!*

To Mrs. Hutchinson we extend our heartfelt condolences; we rejoice that we could share with her in the beneficent influence of a sincere, rich, and useful life.

Source: Fac. Rec. p. 1913 Resolutions of the Trustees and Faculty of Cornell University, February, Nineteen Hundred And Thirty-Six