

BROTHERLY LOVE

An essay on the personal relations between
William Hunter and his brother John*

by

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THE personal relationships of William Hunter and his brother John are the personal relationships of two very great men, each of whom left his mark on the development of British medicine. John Hunter is regarded as the father of scientific surgery. William Hunter was certainly one of the greatest teachers of anatomy that the world has ever known. He also had a profound influence on obstetrical practice, though here his contribution appears in retrospect to have been more valuable in regard to the theory of the art than to its practical skills. However, the behaviour which we are to study will show us the strengths, the weaknesses, the envies and the foibles of genuine greatness.

Ten years separated the births of these brothers. Ten years separated their deaths. The period of their joint lives, from 1718 to 1793, covers an era of astounding incident in the economic, social and political development of the world. World leadership in these changes swung with bewildering rapidity from one country to another, and indeed from continent to continent. In this glittering pageant the Hunters were well fitted to take their place as representatives of British science.

William Hunter was of rather small stature, slimly built, elegant, cultured and eloquent. His original training for the Ministry may have been responsible for the somewhat austere formality which appears from time to time as one of his characteristics. He appears to have dressed well. He favoured the wearing of a rather full wig, much affected at that time by physicians. In his youth, he was considered of a most attractive countenance with a liveliness of manner which earned him plaudits in high society. It is clear that from an early age he had aspirations to make his mark in such society, and in this he succeeded. No higher award was open to him than that of the Physician Extraordinary to Queen Charlotte, 'charged with entire responsibility for the health of the Queen as a child-bearing lady'.

His brother John, on the other hand, had but little education beyond the elementary schooling obtained in his own village. He also was short of stature, but he lacked the elegance and grace of William. His shoulders were broad. His neck was extraordinarily short. His carriage was ungainly; he was capable of great feats of strength. His manners were rough and brusque. He was noted for profanity in an era noted for robust language. And yet, he had endearing qualities which inspired his pupils with a sense of loyalty which has persisted even to the present day. How much this is due to the adulation which he receives

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annually in the Royal College of Surgeons is debatable, but Edward Jenner, one of his first pupils and certainly one of his most distinguished, used to refer to him in his letters as 'the dear man', and everybody seemed to know who was meant.

The Hunters are an old Ayrshire family. In a latitude only a few miles to the north of the extremity of the Manchester Regional Hospital Area, the Mull of Galloway stretches its dentate coast towards the province of Ulster. It forms the southern pillar to the entrance of the lordly Firth of Clyde. The northern bastion is the Mull of Kintyre. Sailing up the Firth, passing the bracken covered slopes of the Isle of Arran, the traveller sees the great Bay of Ayr on his right or eastern side. A densely populated coastal plain is hemmed in by a sickle-shaped ridge of low hills which mark the boundary between Ayrshire and the neighbouring lands of Lanark and Renfrew. At the northern extremity of the Bay of Ayr, the point of the sickle curls towards the west, opposite the junction of the river and estuary at the Tail of the Bank.

A little south of the sickle's point, opposite the Island of Bute, is a low bluff overhanging an old harbour—Portincross, the port of the cross. It is here probably that the Saints of Ireland first set foot on the Scottish mainland. St. Bridget or Bride had a cell named after her quite near, and to this day the parish is called Kilbride—West Kilbride. The low headland dominating Portincross is on the estate of Hunterston, on which the construction of a large atomic power station appears quite inevitable, despite the opposition of all the local inhabitants, for whom the Laird of Hunterston is a challenging and most respected spokesman—or rather spokeswoman. Miss Hunter Weston lives in the family house. She is descended from the Norman-blooded Hunter ancestor to whom the lands were assigned by Robert II, the founder of the Stewart dynasty. It was from the ramparts of the old house that that happy warrior General Sir Aylmer Hunter Weston fell to his accidental death in 1940. Peace to his bones.

Francis Hunter, a cadet of the house of Hunterston, left the family home in the closing years of the seventeenth century for reasons over which a veil is drawn. Some undefined trouble is hinted at in the family papers. His flight, if flight it was, did not extend very far. He crossed the sickle-shaped range of hills, and settled in Lanarkshire, where, so it is related, he made a good marriage, a form of career much sought after by the younger sons of landed gentry in these and later times.

His son, John Hunter the elder, was born about 1663, grew up in East Kilbride, and became a grain merchant. The portrait of John Hunter, senior, hangs in the Royal College of Surgeons. It was painted in oils by an unknown hand from a crayon original by James Hunter, an elder brother of John and William. William commissioned the oil copy.

John Hunter, senior, remained unmarried until the age of forty-four. He then espoused Agnes Paul, the daughter of a solid Glasgow citizen, a bailie, a magistrate, and the city treasurer for good measure. Some twenty-two years junior to her husband, she is said to have been handsome and talented. There is tangible

evidence of domestic felicity in the record of ten children which she bore to her husband, the last being wee Jockie, born when his mother was forty-three and his father approximately sixty-five.

The history of these children is distressing, however. The family appears to have been riddled with tuberculosis, and the only members to pass the age of thirty were James, William, John and their sister Dorothea. Dorothea, in fact, outlived them all, and, following her marriage to an elderly minister, founded the Hunter-Baillie family, of whom her son Matthew Baillie the pathologist was so distinguished a member.

I have no information about where the first six children were born. William was the first to be born on the famous property of Long Calderwood on the south-eastern outskirts of East Kilbride.

The house still stands. It is the dwelling house of a substantial steading. It faces south, a stone-built, stucco-faced structure, with a small storm porch to give additional shelter from the snell south-westerly winds which blow strongly over the rolling uplands of the Clyde basin. The view from its door is that of a landscape often wet and dripping, more suited for dairy farming than for the growing of grain, though the sheltered bottom lands produce soft fruits in abundance, and the tomatoes grown under glass are famous. In the time of John Hunter, senior, before the winter feeding of the beasts was understood, it must have been a hard country to farm, and the need for the sons to consider faring south in search of a fortune must have been obvious.

James went to Edinburgh to study law. William began his theological studies at fourteen in the College at Glasgow—only some eight miles distant. Only wee Jockie stayed at home—at first, that is.

There is no doubt John was a difficult child. He had little love of books. He was given to bawling tantrums when thwarted. But he tells us of his fascination from his earliest years in the wild life of the fields, woods and hills on his doorstep, a fascination which no doubt influenced him towards his subsequent studies in biology and comparative anatomy. It is interesting to probe into the possible reasons for which this child of nature forsook his boyhood playground to make his name in that great metropolis to which William Hunter referred as his 'darling London'. The transplanted Caledonian is often the most loyal of Londoners. It was William Dunbar who exclaimed:

Oh London, thou art of the flour of cities all.

The translation of John Hunter must be attributed to the combined influence of his older brothers. William was the main influence which moulded John, but the rather shadowy figure of James, the sensitive, artistic, short-lived James, must not be underestimated.

William was unable to pursue his intention 'to wag his pow in a pulpit'. At Glasgow University, he came under the influence of great liberal teachers, of whom Francis Hutcheson was the most remarkable. This was the age that bred the great philosopher of religious doubt, David Hume, with whom indeed the

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Hunters were acquainted. While William Hunter's Christian allegiance does not appear to have been shaken, at nineteen he no longer felt that sense of vocation necessary to enable him to fill a Scottish pulpit. It was at the age of nineteen that he came under the influence of William Cullen, one of the most inspiring of medical teachers, destined eventually to hold Chairs of Practice of Physic, at first in Glasgow, later in Edinburgh.

Cullen was at this time in medical practice in Hamilton, under the patronage of the Duke of Hamilton, to whom Cullen's father had been factor. He was a citizen of renown, a bailie, and a prominent figure in every way. Some ten miles away, in the neighbouring county town of Lanark, still practised a somewhat older man, shortly destined to migrate to London, there to become one of the world's greatest teachers in the art of practical obstetrics. This was William Smellie, with whom Cullen was on terms of friendship which appeared to withstand the trauma associated with the borrowing of books and their tardy return.

In 1737, William Hunter joined Cullen in a loose partnership in Hamilton. The partnership not only permitted but actually encouraged each member to undertake travel and study, and the intention was that William Hunter would equip himself to take over the surgical side of the practice in which Cullen had little interest.

In 1740, William Hunter went to Edinburgh to study anatomy under Alexander Monro, *primus*, and from there went on by sea to London. Escaping the rigours of a storm at sea, making special endeavour to ingratiate himself with the more aristocratic of his fellow passengers, he eventually arrived safe and sound in the metropolis, where he stayed at first with his senior compatriot, William Smellie.

His residence with Smellie was comparatively short. Smellie himself had only just commenced the teaching of midwifery, and it is possible that Smellie's contribution to Hunter's obstetrical education was not extensive. Hunter probably owes much more to another Scottish expatriate, James Douglas, who combined midwifery with anatomical research of the very highest order, precisely the type of career in which William Hunter was later to make his mark. It seems that James Douglas was anxious to obtain the assistance of a young colleague who would lend him dexterous aid in the peritoneal dissections in connection with which James Douglas's name is perpetuated. The 'pouch of Douglas' remains one of the sturdy indefensibles of British anatomical nomenclature. Additionally, Douglas was looking for a young man with a wide general education to act as resident tutor for his son, a youth destined by his father for medicine but inclined to be frivolous and even dissipated. William Hunter seemed ideally suited for this post, and probably required little persuasion to take up his residence with the Douglas family, where he remained for some years. He courted Miss Douglas, with her father's approval, but unhappily the lady died, apparently before there was a formal betrothal. James Douglas died in 1742, but after his death Hunter continued to reside with Mrs. Douglas. Furthermore, in accordance with the dying wish of James

Douglas, Hunter took James, junior, to the Continent in 1744. It seems doubtful that this visit did much good to James Douglas, junior, and it may indeed be the case that William Hunter ignored his duties as a bear-leader in order to prosecute his own studies. Certainly he did not neglect the opportunities to enlarge his acquaintance with anatomy, and particularly with the technical details of anatomical dissection, including the injection of arteries and veins with differentially coloured waxes prior to the initiation of the dissections. As a result, he returned from the Continent prepared with confidence to set himself up in the autumn of 1746 as a teacher of anatomy in his beloved London. The advertisement for his course undertook that the instruction would be after 'the Paris method' implying that each student would have the opportunity personally to dissect the body, an undertaking which would have been considered rash in most British cities other than London. There the resurrection men appear to have been beginning to function with that degree of efficiency for which they later became extremely famous. There is no evidence that William Hunter was ever short of human subjects for dissection either at his first course or at any of the other courses which he continued successfully to run up to the time of his death.

It is right now to look for a moment at the short career of James Hunter. John Hunter, senior, died in 1742. The property descended to James Hunter who very shortly after paid a visit to his brother in London. He appears to have been discontented for some time with his prospects as a Writer to the Signet, and had indeed been corresponding with Cullen as to the possibility of his changing to Medicine. This proposal William Hunter enthusiastically supported, and indeed his fertile brain very early hatched out a plan whereby he and his brother James would take over the practice of the deceased John Douglas, the lithotomist, the brother of William's patron, James Douglas. William was so convinced of the intellectual and social potentialities of his brother James that he felt quite sure a golden future lay before them. But James Hunter's health broke down in 1744. He sustained a haemoptysis, returned to Scotland, pursued a few desultory medical studies during the ensuing months, only to die of the family scourge early in 1745. It is probable in fact that the short period during which James remained alive in Scotland was of the very greatest importance for the development of medicine in the United Kingdom. It is very likely that the fallow ambitions of John Hunter were now critically fertilized by the reports by James Hunter of the activities of their London brother, for John wrote to his brother either in 1747 or 1748, asking if he might come to London to assist him. This letter, together with the reply from William Hunter, I have been unable to trace. It is stated, however, that William Hunter replied with great cordiality, and in September 1748 John rode south from Scotland to join his brother. It is very probable that he passed through Preston. He was accompanied by a young friend named Hamilton. The pair were welcomed by William Hunter, John as an assistant in his dissecting room, Hamilton as a pupil. It is probable that this Hamilton is he who subsequently became a teacher of anatomy in Glasgow. At all events, we find the brothers in September

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1748, embarked upon their long period of practice in the metropolis, at first in all friendship, later, perhaps, with growing coolness, and eventually in open disagreement.

It should be noted that they did not remain permanently in London for the rest of their lives. William Hunter paid a brief visit to Scotland in 1750, being at that time awarded the Doctorate in Physic of the University of Glasgow. At this time the Long Calderwood household was reduced to Mrs. Agnes Paul Hunter and Dorothea Hunter. Mrs. Hunter died early in the winter of 1750, concerning which more will be said shortly. In 1751 John Hunter was sent north to bring Dorothea to London, where she made her home with William until the time of her marriage some years later to the worthy Mr. Baillie, minister of Shotts. From that country parish he was later translated to the Chair of Divinity in the University of Glasgow.

So far as is known, the brothers did not thereafter visit Scotland. John Hunter served as a surgeon in the army from 1760 to 1763. Both John and William Hunter spent occasional periods in Bath recuperating from various illnesses, but apart from that their main activities were in or in the vicinity of London, and it is in that city that we have to trace their changing relations.

It must be remembered that William was not very closely acquainted with John at this time. While his contacts with Long Calderwood were probably close during his five years at Glasgow University and even during the years of practice in Hamilton, William had finally left home for Edinburgh *en route* for London about the age of twenty-three. At that time John was but thirteen. Now, in 1748, he was a young man of twenty, short, probably ungainly, and almost certainly unable to converse in any speech but broad Lowland Scots. In that tongue he was somewhat sparing of the spoken word. He must have appeared rather uncouth to the fastidious William, that 'stickit minister', that ambitious accoucheur, that mixture more than three parts snob. It is much to William's credit that he made himself responsible for his brother's further education, but it is quite permissible to doubt whether his initially affectionate welcome may not have been replaced by a sense of irritation with the gaucherie of his brother, of which irritation he may have been, paradoxically, somewhat ashamed.

John's conduct may not have done much to allay William's irritation. We are told that John was Jack Hunter to the resurrection men. He was also said to play a considerable part as an amateur dramatic critic, accompanying kindred spirits to the theatre where they indulged in organized activity of the type later to be referred to as 'barracking'. When William arranged for him to be entered as a commoner at St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, the ungrateful John absconded after a scant two months, and spoke of his experiences in after life in a manner unnecessarily coarse. Describing how 'they' endeavoured to indoctrinate him in Greek and Latin, he pressed his thumbnail on the table saying, 'These schemes I cracked like so many vermin!'

Though William must have been disappointed at his lack of academic progress, yet John was an admirable demonstrator to the students in practical

dissection. He also proved indefatigable in undertaking research dissections to elucidate the special problems at that time exciting William's interest. These particularly included the successful attempt to inject the seminiferous tubules of the testis and the demonstration of the embryological anatomy of congenital hernia. On both these subjects John found for William admirable ammunition for his hostile exchanges with the Monros, *primus* and *secundus*, and with Percival Pott. In these slanging matches, William showed an almost savage jealousy in his claims for priority of publication.

It is indeed quite probable that William began quite early to be jealous of his brother John. This must not be urged over strongly. But it is not at all an uncommon situation between brothers, when the elder one comes to recognize qualities of brilliance in his junior. Where the gap in age is of the order of ten years, this situation may well be exaggerated by the attitude of the younger brother. He admires and may even revere the brother so much older than himself, and may strive more and more to please that brother by exhibitions of industry and flights of intelligent imagination, each one of which infuriates the older still more.

Whether or not the emotion of jealousy had begun to operate early in the association, the year 1750 saw a peculiar development which seems to show William in an unfavourable light, and might have planted in John's mind the seeds of disillusion in regard to his older brother's character.

In the summer of 1750 Mrs. Hunter took ill. Cullen attended her, and as early as 12 July we find him writing to William of his persuasion 'that some scirrhoty is forming in the stomach, which gives me a very disagreeable prospect with regard to her'. She has evidently been asking that John should come to visit her, and, with exquisite tact, Cullen goes on: 'She says nothing now about Johnnie's coming down: but I know, in her present temper, it would have pleased her much if he had.'

On 1 August William writes to Cullen:

I cannot consent this season to her request, for my brother's sake, for my own sake, and even for my mother's sake. It would be a very bad scheme. I have wrote of it to her, and I hope she will consider better of it, and find that it is really a whim begot by sickness and low spirits.

If this was indeed a reply to the letter informing him of Cullen's suspicion of a gastric cancer, it seems a very brusque refusal.

By October, very delicately again, Cullen is apologizing lest his own tardiness as a correspondent may 'have put off your writing to your mother, which she complains of'. By November, Mrs. Hunter is dead.

It is not clear whether John was fully in his brother's confidence during this correspondence. But if he did know of it, one may readily imagine the resentment which he might have felt. He stood to his mother in all probability in that peculiarly close relationship which links a multipara to her Benjamin.

In 1751, John had his Scottish holiday. In the autumn of that year he was back in the dissecting room, however, and no doubt took part in the famous

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dissections of the pregnant patient who died suddenly at full term and became the 'first subject' described in William Hunter's *chef d'œuvre*, the magnificent elephant folio entitled *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*. Twenty-three years were to pass by before this appeared in print, but the dissections commenced in 1751.

Suitable subjects were not frequently obtained. The second subject arrived rather inopportunistically in the next hot weather in 1752, but the time of arrival of the third subject is unknown.

A weakness of the early plates is an obvious uncertainty in regard to the distribution of the uterine arteries and veins in relation to the placenta. Indeed, Jesse Foot, a scurrilous critic of both the brothers, observes with some justice that the plate which professes to show placental anatomy might just as well be used to illustrate the telescopic appearances of the surface of the moon. Indeed it is not until the illustrations made from the third body that more convincing detail begins to appear, and not until the eighth body that the principle of the separate maternal and foetal circulations is clearly understood.

William Hunter controlled his illustrator with severity. Indeed, Van Rymdyk's resentment expressed in print has been entertainingly reported in recent years by Mrs. Betsy Copping Corner.¹ We may be sure William Hunter would have allowed no vagueness in a matter where his knowledge was complete.

It is therefore safe to assume that William Hunter did not know the detailed anatomy of the placental circulation before the summer of 1752, and may not have known it in full till much later.

The critical year is in fact 1754. At that time John Hunter was intimate with Dr. William Smellie's assistant—a Dr. Colin Mackenzie. Twenty-six years later, in 1780 John Hunter reported on the circumstances in which he was called by Colin Mackenzie to examine a dissection which Mackenzie had started, and which he was unable to interpret. As a result John Hunter claimed that the anatomy of the placental circulation at once became clear to him. William Hunter at first treated him and his report with 'gentle raillery', but was later convinced. It was John's contention in later years that William had never sufficiently acknowledged the claims of his brother with Colin Mackenzie to be the original discoverer of this mystery. There is no evidence, however, that John's resentment in 1754 was as high as it appeared in 1780.

Somewhat later than 1754, a new factor appeared in the relationship, however. This was the growing realization by John Hunter of his incompetence as a lecturer. As a fashionable accoucheur, William undoubtedly had need of a deputy lecturer. He had much night work, and to appear as fresh as paint before his ever increasing audiences must have been quite a strain. Sometimes he must have been taxed to make his appearance at all. John was a superb practical anatomist, but as a lecturer he was diffident, confused, unready, and got terribly tongue-tied. Even when he was much older, and when he had transferred his lectures to the wider subjects which interested him much more than detailed human anatomy, he was so afflicted. As deputy for his brother,

he could have emptied in a few weeks a lecture theatre which his brother filled with eager and enthralled listeners. Indeed, Dr. Hunter's lectures were often attended by distinguished scholars who had no intention of practising medicine, surgery, or midwifery, but who came merely to listen to the silver tongued William Hunter, lecturing with all the skill and bravura to which the Scottish pedant at his very best may attain.

It must have been gall and wormwood to John Hunter, listening to his brother's glib expounding of facts which had been ascertained by the skilled craftsman's hands which belonged to John. John had complete insight into the situation, if we may believe a contemporary statement to the effect that 'his brother wished to take him into partnership with him, and in 1758 declared him fully competent but that he declined on account of his aversion to public speaking and extreme diffidence'.

In 1759 John's health first gave trouble. He had an inflammation of the lungs of unspecified type, which his attendants no doubt thought quite likely to be phthisical. This appears to have been taken as an indication for him to seek a military career, rather strange therapy by modern standards.

In 1760 his service began. He saw active service in Belle-Isle and garrison duty in Portugal. He returned to London in 1763, having in the interval accumulated the data on gunshot wounds which he used in his treatise on that subject published some thirty years later. This slow publication of recorded observations is quite characteristic of John Hunter's methods.

From his overseas stations John Hunter proceeded to bombard William with a series of letters, short, brusque, but affectionately termed, in which letters he solicited William to use his influence to secure his (John's) promotion, or his posting to another station, or the prevention of his posting to another station, or the payment of specialist pay, all in the best tradition of the soldier doctor serving overseas. John had the makings of a wangler, if not of a scrounger.

But the letters are affectionate and comment warmly on the news which William has sent him of the progress of his battles with the Monros. John is even prepared to endeavour to secure some sort of affidavit from a fellow-officer whose testimony he thinks will favour William's case. The fellow-officer is somewhat unwilling, but John thinks he can persuade him.

We may therefore assume that John returned to London with a heart made fonder by absence, and prepared for a reconciliation in respect of any old quarrels which had marred his relationship with his brother. But the former close relationship was not re-established.

It was true that John's place in the anatomy school was filled by a new partner, William Hewson, a much better lecturer than John, and at least his equal as a scientist. But had both brothers wished it, a place for John might certainly have been found. One or perhaps both brothers evidently did not wish it. John set up as an independent teacher of anatomy and surgery, entered into a loose partnership with a fashionable Scottish dentist named Spence, and set about getting himself on to the staff of St. George's Hospital. He was most ably abetted by William, and while their efforts were defeated on the occasion of the first

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post-war vacancy (it went to a stay-at-home colleague) in 1767 John was elected.

It was in this year 1767 that a most curious incident arose which can have done nothing to allay any jealousy which William felt for his brother. In February, John, wee John, was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society. William, who had nursed that Society for years with neat and able little papers was still outside its sacred pale. He was elected later in the year, but it must have been a snub to him. Incidentally he was a man to some extent fated to be snubbed—by government, and, above all, by the College of Physicians.

But 1767 was the year of fate for John Hunter in two other respects. In that year he became engaged to be married to Anne Home, the daughter of an army surgeon with whom John had soldiered; and in that year, in an act of extraordinary bravado, he inoculated himself with syphilis. His marriage was delayed until 1771, during which time John states he 'knocked down' his secondary syphilis with singularly ill-administered mercurial therapy.

John's marriage was a success, but it is clear that William did not approve. He may have objected to Miss Home's lack of dowry. Or it may have been that in his pernicky middle age William disapproved of marriage in general—always excepting its value in putting fees into the pockets of the practitioners of midwifery.

John wrote to him jocularly on the eve of his wedding:

Dear Brother,

Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock and at St. James's Church I enter into the Holy State of Matrimony. As that is a ceremony which you are not particularly fond of, I will not make a point of having your company there. I propose going out of town for a few days: when I come to Town I shall call upon you. Married or not married, ever yours,

JOHN HUNTER.

Jermyn Street, Saturday Evening.

There is incidentally an echo of a possible objection to marriage in William Hunter's treatment of Hewson. In 1770, Hewson married Miss Mary Stevenson, the daughter of Benjamin Franklin's landlady, and William Hunter shortly after dissolved their partnership.³ Indeed Benjamin Franklin was called upon to arbitrate as to the terms under which the dissolution was implemented.

In 1773-4 there is a record of an unusual event which brought the brothers and their students together on an unusual task. Sir George Barker, the able commander of Robert Clive's artillery, had presented Queen Charlotte with an elephant. When this unhappy creature died, its carcass was presented to William Hunter. William invited his brother to share in the dissection, and this task was evidently accepted as a joint venture, apparently in perfect amity.

In 1774 the long awaited *Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* appeared. It is almost certain that John received a presentation copy. In the preface there is a handsome tribute to John for his very able assistance with many of the dissections, and to Robert Strange, who engraved two of the plates—and magnificent they are. There is, curiously enough, no acknowledgment to the

artist who produced the red chalk drawings from which the engravers worked. He was Van Rymdyk, who had previously drawn for Smellie. And, there is no mention of Dr. Smellie's assistant, Dr. Colin Mackenzie, who in John Hunter's belief had played an important part in the elucidation of the anatomy of the placental circulation.

It is questionable when John began to notice the omission of Mackenzie's name, and when resentment against his brother began to rise. The reason why it took until 1780 to burst forth is hard to explain. It is in fact quite possible that their real quarrel was about something quite different. Indeed, Jesse Foot remarks that the brothers were thought to have disagreed on another matter altogether.

. . . it arose from John Hunter having invited William to the sight of a diseased part of a soldier, who had died in consequence of it—and William, having found that this diseased anatomical property would prove a valuable preparation for his museum, caused it to be taken to his house and refused to give it up to the claim made by John. This was resented by John, and this proved to be so serious a foundation for the separation of friendship and affection between the two brothers as never afterwards found any abatement.

It is quite possible that in this case the gossip collected by Foot may have been quite accurate. Both the Hunters were indefatigable collectors. Their museums were their chief pride—and remain sources of pride to the respective institutions which now house them. William's is at the University of Glasgow. John's is the glory of the Royal College of Surgeons. I visited both a few weeks ago, and found them still reverently maintained and as glorious as in the years of their foundation. It was with the greatest satisfaction that I found how much of the collection in the Royal College of Surgeons had escaped what is referred to in the catalogue with great dignity as 'the disaster of 1940'.

Whether or not there was some preliminary quarrel, there was no doubt about it at all after January 1780. In the most public manner possible, at a meeting of the Royal Society, John Hunter accused his brother of failure to award credit to others for the discovery of the nature of the circulation through the maternal vessels of the placenta. That credit said he, should rightly belong to himself and to Dr. Colin Mackenzie, Dr. Smellie's erstwhile assistant, now dead.

The connection between the mother and foetus in the human subject has in every age, in which science has been cultivated, called forth the attention of the anatomist, the physiologist, and even the philosopher: but both that connexion, and the structure of the parts that form the connection, were unknown till about the year 1754. . . .

The late indefatigable Dr. Mackenzie, about the month of May, 1754, when assistant to Dr. Smellie, having procured the body of a pregnant woman, who died undelivered at the full term, had injected both the veins and arteries with particular success, the veins being filled with yellow, the arteries with red.

Having opened the abdomen, and exposed the uterus he made an incision into the forepart, quite through its substance, and came to what seemed to be an irregular mass of injected matter. The appearance being new he proceeded no further, and greatly obliged me, by desiring my attendance to examine parts, in which the appearances were so uncommon. . . .

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He goes on to describe very vividly how he was able to trace arteries and veins in the uterus up to the points where they communicated with a mass of sinuses which filled uniformly with the injected material to constitute a great lake of blood vessels in which venous and arterial injections blended freely.

Those present, he says, were reluctant to accept this interpretation of the findings, but he at length persuaded them.

I returned home in the evening [he adds] and communicating what I had discovered to my brother, Dr. Hunter, who at first treated it and me with good humoured raillery, but on going with me to Dr. Mackenzie's was soon convinced of the find.

He then speaks of:

leaving the reader to examine what has been said upon this subject by others, especially by Dr. Hunter, in that very accurate and elaborate work which he has published on the Gravid Uterus in which he has minutely described and accordingly delineated the parts, without mentioning the mode of discovery.

He goes on to complain that even as late as 1755–6, his brother was lecturing in a way which revealed incomplete knowledge of the subject. He adds that:

Dr. Mackenzie being an assistant to the late Dr. Smellie, the procuring and dissecting this woman without Dr. Smellie's knowledge was the cause of a separation between them, for the leading steps to such a discovery could not be kept secret.

[and also]

I was indeed so tenacious of my claim to the discovery, that I wrote the account in Dr. Mackenzie's lifetime, with a design to publish it.

This is typical of much of John Hunter's work, the noting down of information, and its publication many years later. It is so much in character as to add verisimilitude to the whole tale.

William Hunter reacted in a sharp letter of refutation to the Secretary of the Royal Society. John replied in similar vein, after which the Society closed the debate without publishing any of the papers, though they remain in the Society's archives, and have since been published piecemeal.

And substantially this ends the tale. The brothers were completely estranged. So far as is known they neither spoke nor corresponded again, except when John Hunter attended his brother professionally on his deathbed. William Hunter required to be catheterized in the few days which his life lingered after a paralytic stroke in 1783, and this service John rendered him. Miss Garet Rogers exercises artistic licence in her recent novel, *Brother Surgeons*, when she makes William Hunter say to John his famous last words: 'If I had strength enough left to hold a pen, I would write how pleasant and easy a thing it is to die.' They were in fact spoken to Dr. Charles Combe, one of his executors.

The other executors were George Fordyce, and David Pitcairn. The will was executed in 1781 in the year after the quarrel. The name of John Hunter was not mentioned in the Will. The property of Long Calderwood was willed to

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Matthew Baillie, the son of Dorothea and her minister husband. John Hunter did not attend the funeral in St. James's Church, Piccadilly.

There seems no doubt John Hunter was stricken with grief if not remorse. His life flickered slowly to extinction in the next ten years. Miserably ill, his life 'at the mercy of any rascal who might cause him to lose his temper', he enjoyed little ease. It must have been some comfort to him when young Matthew Baillie refused to accept the Long Calderwood property and made it over to his uncle with bold generosity.

Both brothers now lie in peace in the London where they did their great work. The memorial to William Hunter in St. James's Church is undamaged by bombing, though those which flanked it, dedicated respectively to Sydenham and to Richard Bright, were destroyed. John Hunter reposes on the north side of the nave of Westminster Abbey. The handsome brass placed over his grave by the Royal College of Surgeons is partly illuminated by light from one of the adjacent windows in the glass of which are representations of St. Edward the King and St. Edwin the Abbot. As a soldier-surgeon John Hunter would be pleased, I feel sure, to note that this window has been dedicated to the Glory of God in memory of the officers and other ranks of the Royal Army Medical Corps who fell in two world wars.

These two pilgrims are at rest. Of them, I believe it might have been said: 'Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in at the gate; and, lo! as they entered they were transfigured: and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. . . . Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy. . . .'

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