

pupils that entered under him—not under them; the rush to go round the wards with him, and his name in everybody's mouth; his rough jokes at their expense, his out-spoken contempt of their pathological doctrines."

As an example of the misrepresentation to which Hunter was subjected, the following instance may be quoted: Bromfield was opposed to Hunter's operation for aneurysm, and wrote of his first operation: "I once saw an attempt of this kind, in which I shall only remark that the patient died; and I do believe that the embarrassments which occurred, as well as the event of the operation, will deter the gentleman who performed it from making a second attempt in a similar case." But, as a matter of fact, the patient died fifteen months after the operation, neither of it nor of the aneurysm. Finally, Hunter "so exasperated his surgical colleagues by insisting that they ought to do more for the pupils, that in September they addressed a memorial to the governors, in which they said:—

"On the subject of lectures—to take leave of this point which has been so much insisted on—we must declare our joint opinions, and they are incontrovertible." Then followed their "opinions."

Following closely upon this difference between Hunter and his colleagues came the election of a candidate for the vacant office of surgeon to the hospital. Hunter, and Dr. Matthew Baillie his nephew, supported Everard Home; the rest of the staff, Mr. Keate. In the light of recent events in the nursing world it is of interest to read: "The contest was perhaps the warmest in the annals of hospital electioneering, and several of the Royal dukes attended in person to vote for Mr. Keate, who was chosen by a majority of 134 against 102." After this it was war to the knife.

The quarrels of the surgical staff were, we are told, all over London, for they were all of them men of high position in the profession. At length, when Hunter declared that the entrance fees of the pupils should no longer be divided equally among the surgeons—he would keep for himself the fees of those who entered under him—matters reached a crisis, and the three surgeons said they would appeal to the governors. A special court was summoned. Before the meeting Hunter sent to every subscriber a long printed letter, which was answered by a "counterblast" from the three surgeons. These letters are worthy of the closest study; nurses especially, in whose profession the same war is now raging, will read with interest the same arguments for and against a higher curriculum as are advanced at the present day. "The special court decided against Hunter. The entrance fees were to be equally divided. They further appointed a committee to draw up rules for the admission and teaching of the pupils." The three surgeons submitted certain proposals to the committee without consulting Hunter. One of the conditions, viz., that the pupils "shall bring certificates of their having been bred up to the profession, and of their good behaviour," it is important, in its connection with subsequent events, to remember. These proposals were accepted, but in the autumn of the same year two young men came to be admitted under Hunter without certificates that they had been "bred up to the profession." He promised, if they drew up a statement of their case, to lay it before the Board, and to plead their cause; but on the day of the meeting, though apparently in excellent spirits, he

told a friend that "he was afraid there would be a dispute and was sure it would be the death of him." When he arrived at the hospital the meeting had already begun. Hunter "presented the memorial from the young men and spoke on their behalf. One of his colleagues flatly contradicted something he had said. Then came the end. Angina seized him; he turned towards another room to fight out his pain by himself, and Dr. Matthew Baillie followed him. He went a few steps, groaned, and fell into Dr. Robertson's arms and died." So died John Hunter, the most brilliant ornament to his profession in his day, done to death by the jealousy, spite, and rudeness of his colleagues. He was buried at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and no monument was erected to mark the place of his grave. In 1859, after viewing three thousand and sixty coffins, Frank Buckland found his body. He was buried on March 28th, 1859, just sixty-six years after his death, with great honour, in the north aisle of Westminster Abbey.

Little remains to be told, and that is discreditable to another member of the medical profession, Sir Everard Home, who was Hunter's brother-in-law, who had been Master and President of the College of Surgeons, and twice Hunterian orator. Hunter's priceless manuscripts had been, as executor, committed to his care. He would allow no one else to have access to them, but after drawing largely upon these papers for his own work upon comparative anatomy, and for the numerous papers which he read before the Royal Society, he destroyed them—or, as we are told, "He stole from the Hunterian manuscripts, and then burnt them, after publishing many of Hunter's observations as his own." Again: "He said he destroyed every one of the manuscripts, yet when the trustees brought pressure to bear upon him he returned several. He faced the matter out, and kept his seat on the Council."

Full proof of the dastardly treachery and unfaithful stewardship of this contemptible trustee, brother-in-law, and friend of John Hunter, was given in the evidence of Mr. Clift—who was secretary to Hunter, and custodian of the museum during the last year and eight months of his life—before the Parliamentary Committee on Medical Education. Clift, after Hunter's death, faithfully cared for the museum; and when receiving a salary of seven shillings a week for this duty—at a time when, owing to the war with France, bread cost two shillings a quarter loaf—he, for his own pleasure, transcribed most of the manuscripts, and it is owing to this fact that the greater part of Hunter's unique work has been preserved.

Although the public inquiry did not take place until eleven years after the destruction of the manuscripts, Mr. Clift broke down and cried when he gave his evidence.

As the reader lays aside this most interesting book he will feel that it is but the latest record of the almost invariable lack of appreciation of men and women of genius by their contemporaries. Later generations value them at their true worth, but, during their own lives, they are most frequently surrounded by an atmosphere of heat and controversy evoked by their own courageous exposure of public abuses. The battle rages too fiercely for a just appreciation of their talents to be possible; those less worthy of distinction, but keenly desirous of it, are jealous of, and often entirely fail to comprehend, a genius and success which are not theirs; and the lot of those whom succeeding generations delight to honour, is usually abuse, misrepresentation, and persecution.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)