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John Hunter, by JESSIE DOBSON, Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone, 1969, pp. xvii, 361, illus., 50s.

This book demonstrates that rare achievement, a historical work which blends narrative skill with meticulous factual accuracy.

John Hunter's life lends itself singularly happily to biography, but its attractive surface has led biographers of the past to become entangled all too frequently in thickets of false emphasis. In this book it is Miss Dobson's intention; 'To show how John Hunter came to be held in such esteem', and to do this she has presented us with the sequences of his life and thought as far as possible in John Hunter's own words. At the same time she has made easily available to the reader a very wide range of references, invaluable for expanding on any particular facet of her own account.

The construction of the book is reflected in the pages following the preface in which a complete chronological list of John Hunter's works is presented with full titles and references. This is followed by a general bibliography of some thirty-five items.

This generous hors d'oeuvres serves the purpose of whetting the appetite of the historically-minded reader, and it is so tastefully served up as to carry no impression of undue learning to the reader in search of a straight tale. This tale is then told in ten chapters.

At once, from the first chapter, one becomes fascinated by the complex emotional pattern which develops between the two brothers, William and John. Clearly each owed the other a great deal, particularly in those early years after 1748 when John came to London to assist his brother in his anatomical lectures. From the beginning it appears that John focused not only on normal anatomy but on morbid anatomy as well. In the winter of 1749 for example he records his observations on, 'a child brought into the room used for dissection in Covent Garden. On opening the thorax a large quantity of pus was found loose in the cavity with the surface of the lungs and the pleura furred over with a more solid substance similar to coagulable lymph. On removing this from those surfaces they were found entire.' Thus early was he making those observations through which he classified types of inflammation. The quotation actually comes from John Hunter's *Treatise on Venereal Disease*, published thirty-seven years later, in 1786. This interest in inflammation steadily matured through patient observation and experiment during the rest of his life, his *Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation and Gun-shot Wounds* not being published until a year after his death, in 1794.

Throughout her book Miss Dobson quietly presents many new facts about episodes in John Hunter's life. Perhaps the most striking example is represented by the third chapter which describes Hunter's army service during the Seven Years' War. We are first of all orientated by a short account of the military background of the expedition planned to capture the island of Belleisle in 1760. The state of military and medical organization revealed leaves little room for surprise at the failure of the initial attack. However within two months the island was taken and John Hunter was left on it accompanied by that band of colleagues whom he described so succinctly as, 'a damn'd disagreeable set'. In a series of letters between 1761 and 1763 we are treated to a vivid account of John Hunter's experiences and impressions of Belleisle, and

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later of the campaign in Portugal. These letters describe not only piquant human experiences but a number of medical and surgical case-histories. These include descriptions of those cases upon which Hunter based his own unorthodox management of gun-shot wounds, data which he kept by him until the last years of his life, when he wrote them up for publication.

Even the uninspiring company of his fellow-officers could not suppress John Hunter's urge to experiment whilst he was on Belleisle; 'In the beginning of the winter of 1761–2, he writes, 'I conveyed worms and pieces of meat down the throats of lizards when they were going into winter quarters. . . .' This was the beginning of his experiments on digestion from which he collected many specimens of the stomachs of different animals which may still be seen in the Hunterian Museum. He even contrived to bring back some of these lizards to England for his growing collection.

In Portugal his letters reveal a side of John Hunter which is little known—his powers of administration. These he exercised in organizing the 'Flying Hospitals' at the front line beyond Santarem and elsewhere. It is only when he fails to obtain the appointment of Deputy Director in Lisbon that one suddenly realizes the surprising fact that John Hunter possessed at this time no surgical qualification, a defect he remedied in 1768 at the age of forty. His experimental bent continued active during the Portuguese campaign as evidenced by the occasion when he fired off guns beside a fish-pond, and concluded; 'It is evident that fishes possess the organ of hearing . . . sounds effect [*sic*] them very much, and is one of their guards as it is in other animals.'

These examples of his multifarious activities during his military career in Belleisle and Portugal provide a good epitome of all phases of John Hunter's life.

Subsequent to his return from Portugal in 1763 John Hunter's ebullient energy burst out in many directions. He set up a menagerie; he obtained an appointment as Surgeon to St. George's Hospital; he married. From the point of view of posterity his museum collection takes pride of place. Designed to illustrate all the basic physiological functions such as digestion, growth, etc., this grew apace, specimens coming to him from all over the world. His experiments multiplied, extending far into the realms of zoology, physiology and pathology. It is in this regard that his warm friendship with Edward Jenner developed, a friendship which is unfolded by a series of letters brought forward by Miss Dobson with explanatory context in such a way as to emphasize the emotional and intellectual kinship which existed between these two remarkable men. This continued right up to John Hunter's death. Through these and other letters the author carries the narrative thread of Hunters' life over many years, bringing out clearly the development of the expression of his ideas in that magnificent collection of specimens which so well deserves the title of Hunter's Masterpiece.

Curiously enough this book of 353 pages slides so smoothly, even elusively, through the reader's mind that it seems too short. The great labour of detailed work that has gone into it is skilfully and modestly concealed in the fluency of the narrative. It becomes abundantly clear that the author has deliberately refrained from expressing her own opinions on John Hunter's position in relation to contemporary medical science and biology. This she has done because she considers that, 'the task is too great; Hunter's achievements were so many and so varied that each facet of his

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work needs separate and special study.' Though in sympathy with this decision one cannot help regretting it, for few are in so good a position to make comment on Hunter's work than the present Curator of the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons.

In the result we are given an account of Hunter's life made vivid, unbiassed and authentic by so frequently using his own words to describe its events and feelings. The account is embellished by a set of sixteen unusually revealing illustrations, the whole being enclosed within a volume attractively distinctive to the eye and easy to the hand. We have here, indeed, a very elegant presentation of the data of John Hunter's life; and if we ask the author, what of its interpretation?, she will no doubt reply that the answer to that question begins in a visit to Hunter's Masterpiece.

KENNETH D. KEELE

Union Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Medical Manuscripts in the Libraries of Hyderabad, by M. AZEEZ PASHA, Hyderabad, Upgraded Department of History of Medicine, Osmania Medical College, 1966, pp. iv, 46, no price stated.

In his introduction to this catalogue, Dr. D. V. Subba Reddy stresses the importance of making lists of all libraries and owners of private collections of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu manuscripts on medicine. Responsible bodies, he adds, such as public libraries and universities should acquire these manuscripts, prepare descriptive catalogues, and initiate microfilm services for scholars in India and abroad, and he considers this as a matter of national importance. This publication reveals a great wealth of manuscripts and supports the urgency of Dr. Subba Reddy's suggestions. Not only in Hyderabad, but also throughout the Middle and Far East an intensive search for scientific and other MSS should be carried out.

Mr. Azeez Pasha's publication is in fact a check-list (not a catalogue) of Arabic and Persian medical MSS existing in six libraries in Hyderabad: State Central Library, Salar Jung Oriental Library, Osmania University Library, Unani Medical College Library, Sayeedia Library, and Idare-a-Adbiat-a-Urdu Library. None of these libraries has previously published any catalogues of its Arabic and Persian medical MSS. This check-list is divided into two sections: one for Arabic medical MSS (pp. 1-15) covering 188 items, and another for Persian medical MSS (pp. 17-46) comprising 416 items. The author gives his data in five columns: serial numbers, titles (in Arabic or in Persian, with transliterations), English translations of titles, authors' names, and names of libraries and shelf-marks.

There are many spelling mistakes and printing errors in the Arabic titles, as for example: *al-Nafīs* and *al-raʿīs* (p. 1, n. 12), *al-firāsa* (p. 2, n. 14, 3), *bur* (p. 3, n. 26, 2), *al-jirahā* (p. 3, n. 27), *Aqsarāʿī* (p. 5, n. 53), *al-ṣināʿa* (p. 6, n. 64), etc. The method of transliteration is archaic and inconsistent, and there are misprints in names of physicians. For example, Ḥunain b. Iṣḥāq (809-874) appears once as Hunain bin Ishaque (p. 10, n. 125), and again as Hussain bin Ishaq (p. 7, n. 88; and p. 13, n. 168). It would have been appropriate to have given references to standard works and to published catalogues. No descriptions of MSS are given, such as notes on foliation, sizes, dates of MSS, names of scribes, marks of ownership, etc., all of which are essential data for scholars who would wish to study these works. Had *incipits* and