

DOCTOR WILLIAM HUNTER OF NEWPORT

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WILLIAM HUNTER of Newport is "covered" by standard works on American medical history in a scant dozen lines to the effect that he was born in Scotland in 1729, a relative of the famous John and William Hunter, studied at Edinburgh under Munro and at Leyden, came to Rhode Island about 1752, gave early anatomical lectures at Newport, 1754-1756, possessed the largest medical library in New England and died in 1777. Most of this information comes from Thacher²¹ and several of the items are doubtful or incorrect. The unusual interest attaching to his career as well as his important position in the development of American medicine suggested to me, while studying the early history of anatomy in this country,⁷ that his life should be given fuller treatment. The same idea had already occurred to Dr. H. B. Jacobs of Baltimore; but though he never brought his studies to fruition, he has kindly furnished me with much pertinent material.

At the very outset of Hunter's life, we encounter difficulties. He was thought by his descendants to have been born in 1729 in Edinburgh; some authorities assign his birth to the year 1730 or 1731. This last, however, would have made him extremely young to have been, as appears later, at the battle of Culloden, 1746. As his tombstone states that he was in his forty-seventh year on January 30, 1777, this would indicate that he was probably born in 1730, and 16 is not too young for a surgeon's mate. It has always been a tradition in his family (and one held by his direct descendants living in Newport today) that he was a cousin of the famous brothers William and John Hunter of Long Calderwood, in Lanarkshire. Hunter himself is said to have said that he was their cousin. Tradition has it also that he was a descendant of the Hunterston* Hunters; but it must be accepted that definite evidence of his birthplace in Scotland, relationships there, and year of birth are lacking. On the other hand, a family resemblance has been noted, especially between John Hunter's portrait bust and William Hunter, the son of the subject of this sketch. John Hunter's descendants in London also have the tradition of the Hunterston descent but have not been able to prove it. Also there is said to be no evidence in the Hunterston records of a son having gone to America. When William Hunter's widow went to England in 1786, expect-

* In 1903, Hunterston Castle was still standing in the parish of West Kilbride, Ayrshire, one and one-half miles from Southannan, though then used as a farmhouse (see D. Y. Cameron's etching in "Two Great Scotsmen," G. R. Mather, Glasgow, 1903). This branch of the Hunter family seems to have been established there in the early thirteenth century. The famous brothers are said to have been descended from Patrick, a seventeenth-century Hunter of Hunterston, through his third son, Francis.

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ing to return the next year, she left her house in charge of Charles Feke, her husband's apothecary. Later deciding to remain in England and wishing to rent the house, she told him to burn a trunkful of letters. This source of vexation to the would-be genealogist, unfortunately so frequently repeated, doubtless accounts for many paucities of detail in William Hunter's life, and is accentuated by his death during the troublous times of the Revolution and the devastation of Newport shortly after.

We next hear of the young William Hunter at the fated field of Culloden, where as a mere boy he was a surgeon's mate, "Dr. Middleton of New York being his principal" (Thacher's²¹ and Mrs. William Hunter's diary⁵). This of course refers to Peter Middleton,* a graduate of St. Andrews, who must have come to this country shortly after "the '45," as it was in 1750 that he assisted Dr. John Bard in New York in making the well-known "dissection for anatomical purposes." Nothing further has been ascertained about William's relationship to William and John Hunter. The younger William apparently suffered no evil results from his Jacobite venture, as he shortly afterwards began the study of medicine at Edinburgh under the elder Monro (primus, 1697-1767). His great grandson found books at Edinburgh with his name inscribed in them, but more definite evidence of his sojourn there is not yet forthcoming.† It seems probable that he studied at Leyden, and while his name is not registered as a matriculant, he may well have pursued special studies there without registration. He is said to have studied with his cousin, the famous John; but this is unlikely as John arrived in London from Lanarkshire absolutely untrained scientifically in 1748 and there is no indication that our William studied in London. This statement more properly refers to the lawyer-son William (born 1774), who first studied medicine, and could have worked with John, as John did not die till 1793. The younger Hunter's daughter, Mrs. Birckhead, stated: "His mother (*i.e.*, the wife of the subject of this study), a widow at that time, was a stranger in London and must have turned to the latter to help in her son's advancement. As it happened, the boy did not like medicine and turned to the law, probably to the disgust of Dr. John Hunter."

William Hunter apparently came to this country in 1752, a young man of twenty-two or twenty-three, bringing "a valuable library" with him. This

* One of the founders of the King's College Faculty of Physic, the second oldest in this country, Middleton was their first Professor of the Theory of Physic (not of Pathology and Physiology, as frequently stated).

† Dr. John D. Comrie of Edinburgh has kindly searched the Scottish records and reports that Hunter's name is not mentioned in Monro's class list from 1746 to 1749. Unfortunately this record was not kept from 1750 to 1767. He further says: "It can be said definitely that he did not graduate at Edinburgh, and that he was not a member of the Royal Medical Society, but he may have taken a licence from the Royal College of surgeons. His name is not in the Bibliotheca Britannica." In regard to Culloden, Doctor Comrie states that Hunter's name is not in the list of Jacobite prisoners, as was perhaps to be expected, and naturally is not in Macnaughton's "Heroes of the Forty-five," or Johnston's "Roll of Officers in the Medical Service of the British Army."

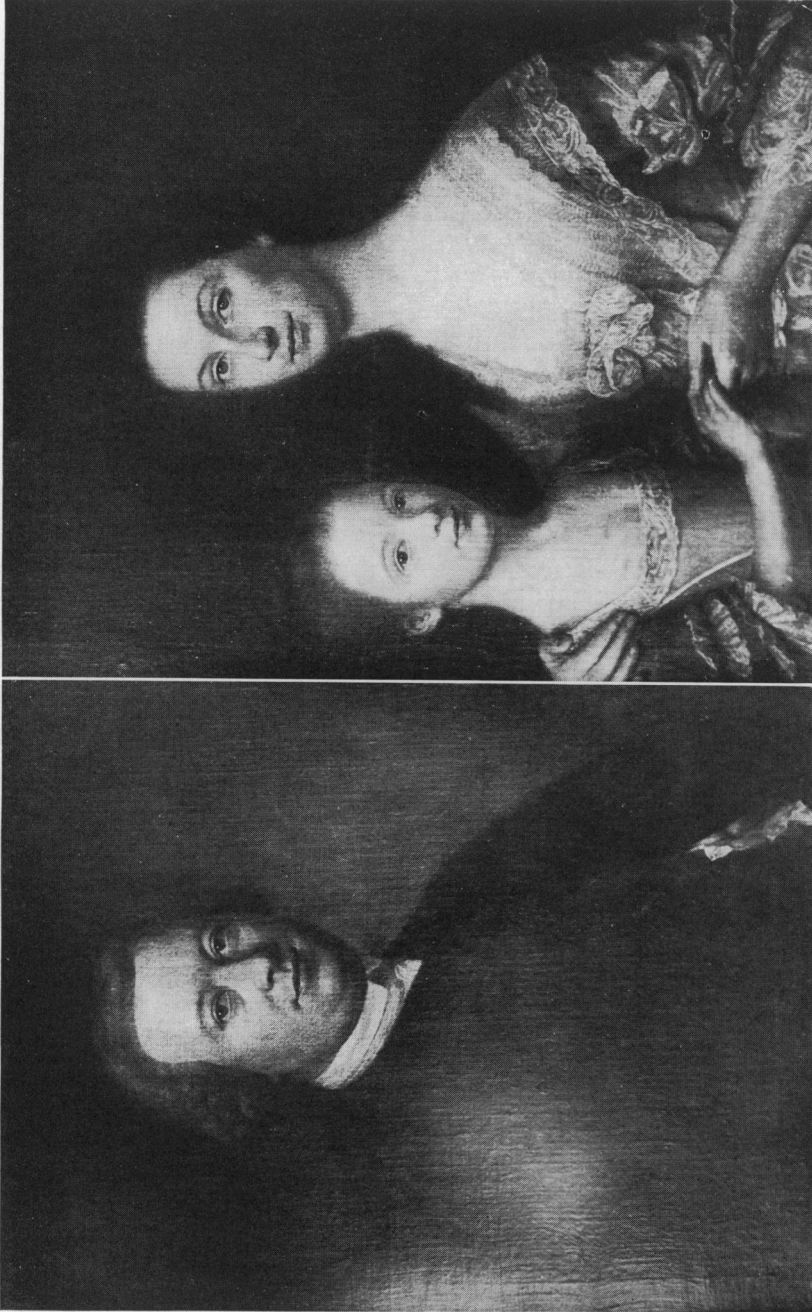


FIG. 1.—Portrait of William Hunter of Newport. Painted by Cosmo Alexander, 1769. This is the original from a copy of which the reproduction was made in *Ann. Med. Hist.*, vol. 4, p. 284, 1922.

FIG. 2.—Portrait of Mrs. Hunter (Deborah Malbone) and her daughter. This was probably the oldest daughter, Elizabeth, born 1762. It is stated that this was painted in 1767, but it is more probable that it, like the husband's, was done in 1769. The originals of this and the portrait of Dr. Hunter (Fig. 1) are now in the possession of a descendant—one of the children of Mrs. Wm. H. Birckhead.

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was the nucleus of a collection which is said to have been the largest in New England at the time of its dispersion after his death. Some of these books were given by his son to the library of Brown University, where they are still to be found, though not preserved as a collection. Among the titles were: J. Allen: "Synopsis Universæ Medicinæ" (1730); Alpinus, "De Medicina Methodica" (1719) and "Medicina Aegyptiorum" (1719); C. Benedictus, "Tabidorum Theatrum" (1656); Boerhaave, "Disputatio Medica" (1702); Fr. Hoffmann, "Opera" (6 vols., 1748); Mangetus, "Bibliotheca Pharmaceutica-Medica" (1703); Spigelius, "Opera quae Extant Omnia" (1645); J. J. Wepfer, "Observationes anatomicae ex Cadaveribus eorum quos Sustulit

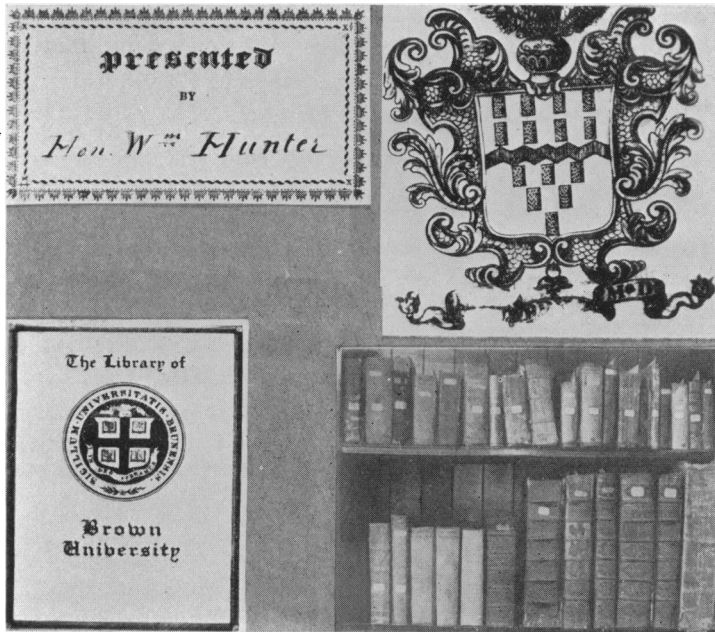


FIG. 2A.—Collection of William Hunter Books at Brown University and William Hunter's Bookplate.

Apoplexia" (1724); Th. Willis, "Cerebri Anatomie (1666) and 80 Leyden dissertations. In the Inventory of Hunter's effects are mentioned "Alston's Lectures in 2 Volumes (sic) 13/6, Macbride 15/9, Elaboratory laid open 5/6 Persivals Essays in 2 Volumes 9/ White, on pregnant women 4/6 London Practice on Physick 1/6 Mackburg on y^e Bile 3/6 Whites Cases 3/ A new dispensatory 6/9 2 old ditto 4/6 Eddenborough Letters 3/6 Quincy's Lexicon 2/6 Clarke's observations 2/3 Family Physician 4/6 Medical consulta^m 3/4 Eustachu (sic) Plates 9/. Smella's ditto 21/ Monros Anatomy 2/3 Johnson Dictionary folio in Two Volumes."

Arriving in this country he settled in Newport (founded by a physician, John Clarke), a thriving city that had already acquired considerable

wealth, situated in a prospering colony.¹⁷ This prosperity was largely due to the charter obtained from Charles II by Roger Williams and Clarke, which granted more civil and religious freedom than obtained in the other provinces. John Brett, Thomas Moffatt and John Haliburton were among the well-known medical men who came from the mother country to Newport about this time. Hunter quickly attained a position of prominence in Newport; graduates of European medical schools were none too common in the colonies at that time, and he was the first "male accoucheur in the colony."¹⁸

In 1755, only three years after his arrival, Hunter advertised in the *Boston Evening Post* of January 20, 27 and February 3, 1755 (as there was no newspaper in Newport at that time) his intention of giving a series of lectures on anatomy and surgery (Fig. 3).

The celebrated Benjamin Waterhouse said concerning these lectures:

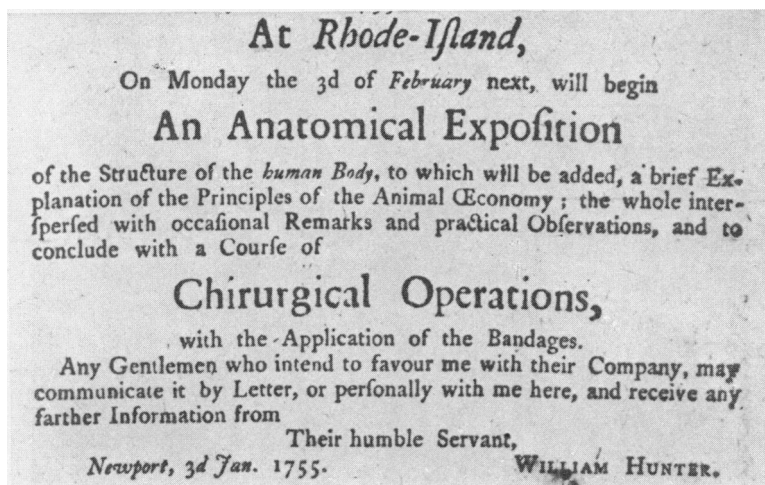


FIG. 3.—Advertisement of Hunter's lectures in the *Boston Evening Post*, January 20, 1755 (photostat Boston Public Library).

"About the year 1756, Dr. William Hunter gave at Newport, R. I., the first anatomical and surgical lectures ever delivered in the twelve Colonies. They were delivered in the Court House, two seasons in succession, by cards of invitation, and to great satisfaction. His collection of instruments was much larger than any professor exhibits at this day. Doctor Hunter was a man of talents, well-educated at Edinburgh, and a gentleman of taste in the fine arts." (Peterson.¹⁵) The manuscript of these lectures was said by Thacher in 1828 still to be in existence according to the *N. Y. Medical Repository*, but I have not been able to locate either the manuscript or the reference. That these lectures were actually given, and well attended, is proven by the existence of at least two tickets of admission on the familiar playing card backs (No. 61, Mr. William Vernon and No. 101, Mr. Brindley) (Figs. 4 and 4A). How many more took advantage of this systematic instruction, the apprentice system being the only other available method of acquiring medical knowledge, is of

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course not known. Neither is it known how long the lectures continued. The usual statement is that they were given 1754-1756 (Thacher), but from the

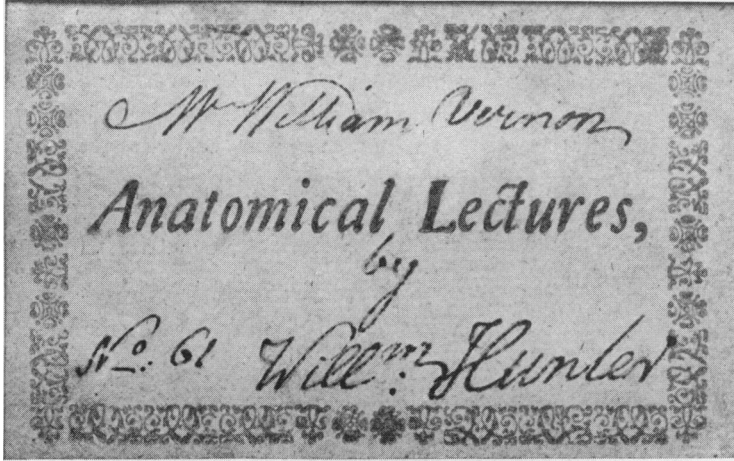


FIG. 4.—Mr. William Vernon's ticket to Hunter's lectures, printed on the back of a playing card.

above advertisement it would seem that they were not begun until 1755, Waterhouse's second season presumably being 1756. The lectures were given in the Old Colony (State) House (Fig. 5) and apparently attended by many

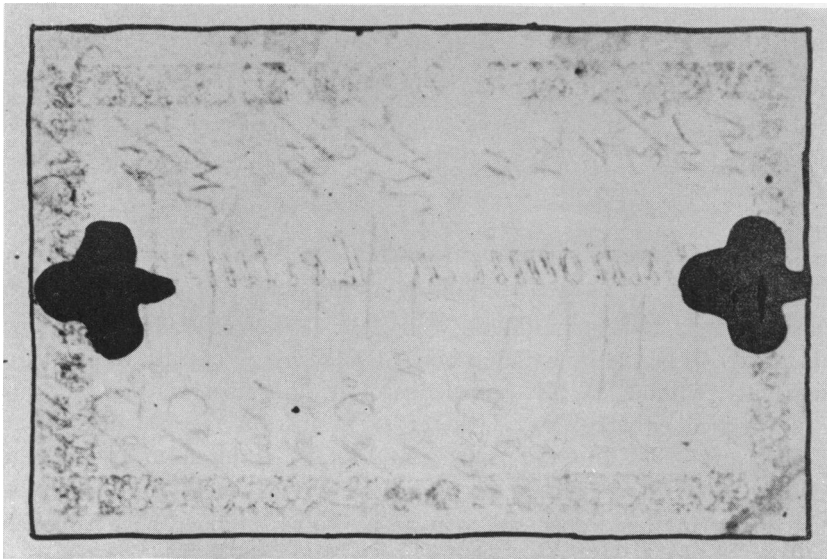


FIG. 4A.—Playing card back of Mr. Brindley's ticket to Hunter's lectures.

who were interested in natural philosophy as well as by those desiring instruction for more practical purposes. As regards their priority in the history of anatomy in this country, there seems to be very reason to accept the belief that

they were the first systematic, advertised, public lectures on the subject known to have been delivered in this country. Thomas Cadwalader, to be sure, had given lectures and demonstrations of dissections in Philadelphia in 1730 (not 1750, as frequently stated) on his return from studying in Europe "for the instruction of the elder Dr. Shippen and some others, who had not been abroad. . . . This probably was the first business of the kind ever done in Pennsylvania." (Wistar.²²) But how much these lectures and demonstrations approached systematic instruction is a matter still to be determined; certainly there is no known record of their having been publicly advertised.

In the year in which Hunter is supposed to have arrived in this country, the following advertisement was placed in the New York *Weekly Postboy* of

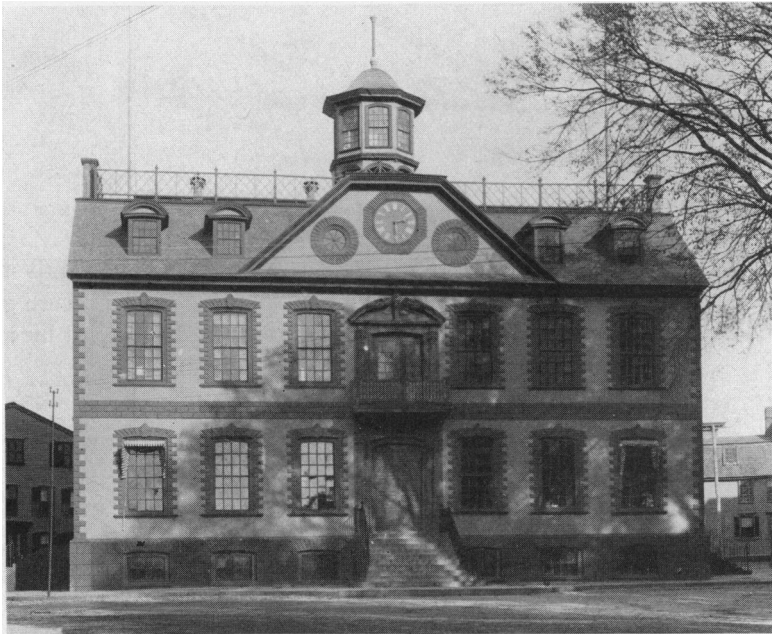


FIG. 5.—The Old Colony House, Newport, in which Hunter gave his lectures.

January 27, 1752, by Thomas Wood, Surgeon: "Whereas Anatomy is allowed on all Hands, to be the Foundation both of PHYSICK and SURGERY, and consequently, without SOME knowledge of it, no person can be duly qualified to practice either: This is therefore to inform the Publick, That a COURSE of OSTEOLGY and MYOLOGY, is intended to be begun, some Time in February next, in the City of New Brunswick (for which Notice will be given in this Paper, as soon as a proper number have subscribed towards it). In which Course, all the human BONES will be separately examined, and their Connections and Dependencies on each other demonstrated; and all the MUSCLES of a human BODY dissected; the Origin, Insertion, and Use of each plainly shown. This Course is proposed to be finished in the Space of a Month.

Thomas Wood, Surgeon.

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“Such Gentlemen who are willing to attend this Course, are desired to subscribe their Names as soon as possible, with Mr. Richard Ayscough, Surgeon, at New York or said Thomas Wood, at New Brunswick, paying at the same Time, THREE POUNDS, Proc. and engaging to pay the said Sum of Three Pounds more, when the Course is half finished.

“N. B. If proper Encouragement is given in this Course, he proposes soon after, to go thro’ a Course of ANGIOLOGY and NEUROLOGY; and conclude, with performing all the OPERATIONS of SURGERY, on a dead body: The Use of which will appear to every Person, who considers the Necessity of having (at least) SEEN them performed, before he presumes to perform them himself on any living Fellow Creature.”

Although this advertisement was subsequently repeated on several occasions in the same journal, I have been unable to find the “notice” that was to follow a sufficient number of subscriptions, so we do not know whether one or both courses were given, or if begun, how long they were continued. Sporadic post-mortem examinations, of course, had been made from the earliest times, usually to ascertain the cause of a suspicious death, but sometimes for purposes of instruction. Thus Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians, as early as 1647, expresses in a letter to Mr. Thomas Shepard, the Cambridge minister, his desire that “our young Students in Physick may bee trained up in making experiments, for we never had but one Anatomy in the Country, which Mr. Giles Firman (Firmin) (now in England) did make and read upon very well.” The Apostle’s desire seems to have carried weight, as we find the following resolution passed within a month by the General Court of Massachusetts: “We conceive it very necessary y^t such as studies physick or chirurgery may have liberty to reade anotomy (sic) and to anotomize once in foure yeares some malefactor in case there be such as the Courte shall allow of.” In the same letter to Shepard, Eliot says, “I have shown them (*i.e.* the Indians) the anatomy of man’s body.” . . . Packard¹⁴ gives the record of a dozen autopsies reported in New England before 1678, and Hartwell quotes from a Maryland Order of Council¹⁵ one of the earliest autopsies performed in this country by legal direction (1670). In 1691, the celebrated autopsy on Governor Slaughter of New York was made, which for a long time was erroneously regarded as the first recorded autopsy in this country. None of these, however, should detract from the distinction of Hunter’s achievement.

His opportunities to teach anatomy and surgery must have been sadly interrupted by his military activities. In 1755 he was surgeon in Colonel Harris’ regiment in the unsuccessful expedition against Crown Point under the command of Sir William Johnston³ (see his later letters to Johnston quoted p. 516). “It was in Dr. Hunter’s tent the brave Baron Dieskau died”⁹ (the French Commander). Hunter also served in the Campaigns of 1756 and 1757³ and in March, 1758, was elected by the General Assembly physician and surgeon general to the Rhode Island troops. We happen to have the exact date of his departure from Newport (June 29) and can come close to

the date of his arrival at Lake George (July 4).^{*} Although the British under Abercrombie were defeated by the French at Ticonderoga in one of the bloodiest battles on this continent before our Civil War, they were successful in Canada, as elsewhere throughout the world, this campaign leading to the conquest of Canada. Hunter is thought to have served in both Abercrombie's and Amherst's expeditions into Canada.¹ His status as medical officer to the Rhode Island troops appears from the appended vote of the General Assembly.[†] With the return of the troops after the capture of Quebec and Montreal, Hunter returned to his practice in Newport with marked success.

Ezra Stiles,¹⁹ who bitterly hated Hunter and his Toryism, gives this interesting light on the obstetrics of Newport in 1774: "In Conversation with Mrs. Dennis a principal Midwife of this Town, she told me, that the number of Births in this Town last year was four hundred & thirty, that there would be 440 this year, that the number of actually bearing Women was near nine hundred, and that their usual Term of bearing was from fourteen Months to two years, that is each had a Child once in 14 m^o or two years, that of the 900 Women Dr. Hunter had about fifty and might deliver 30 a year; Dr. Haliburton about a dozen Women; all the other Doctors together not so many as a dozen. There are three women Midwives more all which deliver but a few, suppose 20 or 30, I should suppose Mrs. D. delivers 350 or more per annum. I suppose these comprehend Whites & Blacks; of all which there are in Town Nine Thousand Two Hundred souls. . . . Total Souls in Newport last May 7917 Whites, 1292 Blacks and Indians 9209."

Some fragmentary information as to Hunter's methods of practice remains;

^{*} In a letter from the Committee of War of Rhode Island, to Governor Hopkins, dated Newport, June 29, 1758, a letter was enclosed to Colonel Babcock which said, "store ship is arrived, with the arms and tents for the American troops . . . and Dr. Hunter set out this morning for Providence, in his way to Albany. . . ." A letter from Colonel Babcock to Governor Hopkins, Camp Lake George, July 4, 1758, states "Your letter, per Hunter, I received."¹⁸

[†] "The General Assembly do vote and resolve, and it is voted & resolved that William Hunter who went & officiated as Physician and surgeon to the troops of this Colony during the last Campaign, shall be paid his wages at and after the rate of ten pounds lawful money, per month, in bills of credit of this Colony, pursuant to agreement: that for the ensuing Campaign his pay shall be one hundred & eighty pounds old tenor, shall be procured for him according to his own directions, that in case the said W. H. shd loose, or by any accident be deprived of the medicine chest he shall have liberty & credit with some proper persons, to be pitched upon to that purpose, to supply himself with what shall be found necessary for the remaining part of the Campaign; that Mr. Hunter shall have the same allowance made for him by the Colony for Chirurgical instruments, in this Campaign as he had in the last; that the Colony shall furnish all stores necessary for the accommodation of the sick, who shall be tended and taken care of by a sufficient number of men suitable for nurses, to be selected out of the companies; this assembly not approving that women should be employed for that service; that if any contingent charges should accrue to the Doctor by travelling, transporting or otherwise, it shall be paid him by the Colonies commissary, and lastly, he shall have a marquis or tent provided for him." Bills of the old tenor were sealed at £5.10.0 to the dollar (Rhode Island Republican²).

as for instance, a prescription "For Mrs. Arnold R̄ Tincture: perm: Elix^r—Vitriol: Sign the Tincture half a tablespoonfull of which to be taken in a cup of Balm Tea morning, noon, and night every day Ap^l 24, 1771." The following items from his ledger give a glimpse at his daily methods, drugs and prices. Errors of spelling and punctuation, though they somewhat confuse the meaning, have been left as in the original. "Dos Ex. Ipecac No.; Bol. No. Ex. Vitre Antim; a child—Dos. ex Rhei.; Dos. Ex. Sal. Glaub.; Mist. Anod.; Bol. ex. Rhei.; Pills; Plasters; a. operation hard open abscess in her throat 3/; b. to directing a proper complex bandage and tapping you 2/8/0; Ph. Tinct.; Bol. Capini; The Strong Mixture Empl. Epis.; Jallay's Solut.; Mix^r. Hydragog.; Bol. Ex. Opium No. VI 4/; Mix^r. purg. u. a.; Decoc. ex. F. Senna; Pil. Ex. G. Gambage—case of dropsy; Child—emetic; Ph. Tinct. c. Peru. & Rhei. 3/6; Ph. of Balsam; Box of Pectoral pills; A blister inter scapula 2/0/0; Child. Dos. ex. Calom. No.; Nov. 6, 1763—To delivering your wife of a Dhgt—8 dollars or 2/8/0, The above made a present of; Nov. 29, 1765—To delivering ditto in dangerous labour of a son—6/0/0 (N. B. No further charges follow so that in each case the charge is apparently until the wife is well); Dec. 20, 1767—Delivered of a daughter dangerous labour 6/0/0; Mr. Nichols—Comptroler—yr. negro boy salivated 90/0 = 4/10/0, yr. negro woman visited /3—3; Us. cured of the venereal disease /60 = 3/0/0; Sept. 1768 To curing you and yr. wife of the venereal disease /120—6/0/0; Aug. 12, 1769 Cured a second time of ditto /120—6/0/0; May 21st, 1764 Cabel Arnold Carpenter near Parson Browns—Daughter a box pills 2/6d—, a pt. of Tinct^r. 1/3d—, V. twice 6/—0/9/9; 23rd, Visited 3/, 25th visited 3/, 27th visited 3/, 29th visited 3/—0/12/0; 30th R. pil & Tinct. 3/9d, 31st visited 3/, July 9th a pt. of Tinct. 4/6d—0/11/3; July 9 Visited 3/, 12th R Tinct. 4/6d, and visited 3/, 17th R̄. Tinct. 4/6d—0/15/0—total £2/8/0; Jany. 21, 1771, Visited in the night 9/, Bol. purg. 1/6, visited 3/, 22nd visited 3/, 0/16/6; 23d. Al: Decoct purg 7/6 visited 3/—; Dec. 21, 1773 Given in—£7-4-0; February 1768 Given in; April 11th Then received the above in full Wm. Hunter; 1768 Mr. Allborough, a fisherman oposite (sic) Capt. Carrs on the point in Kindal Nichols house; July 2d. To delivering your Wife in dangerous Labour 120/—£6.; Lawf. money; July 30, 1771 Fanny Demmerson an Indian at . . . Cured of L.V. 60/ Hot Chases; Aug. 29, 1771, Hannah Church, a mulatto at Finsons Cured of L. Vencr. 60/. Jan. 1772 paid in part one guinea."

In 1765 and 1768, we find that Mr. George Wright incurred the following charges, amounting to £4.6.3 "Lawful money." Was he not in need of medical attention in the intervening years or was a colleague having his innings?

| | Sh. | D. |
|---|-----|----|
| June 5th Mrs. Wright a box Ointment 2/6. & a Box pills 6/3d..... | 8" | 9" |
| - and Visited 3/- 6th Visited 3/- 7th Visited 3/- | 9" | |
| 10 Visited 3/- 11th the Ointment Repeated 2/6 | 5" | 6" |
| 14 the pills Repeated 6/3- and twenty powders 5/- | 11" | 9" |
| and Visited 3/- 22d the pills as before 6/3 | 9" | 3" |
| 22 ^d and powders; again 5/- and Visited 3/- July 4th visited 3/..... | 11" | - |

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| | Sh. D. |
|--|--------|
| Septem ^r 15. a Box pills 9/6 and more Ointment 2/6..... | 12" - |
| 1768 and Visited twice 6/..... | 6" |
| August 2 ^d Visited Mr. Wright 3/- 3 ^d Dressed his hand 3/..... | 6" |
| 3 ^d and spread plaister /6 & Ointment 1/ 4th Drugs Dit. 3/..... | 4" 6" |
| 6 th Drugs dit 3/..... | 3" |

The illustrations on the next page will give further light on the kind of practice that he pursued (Fig. 6).

Captain Edward Wanton continued as his patient, at least into 1770, as is proved by Hunter's letter to him about his Gout (Fig. 7). This does little more than reflect the views on gout current at this period. The two following letters (in the possession of the Pennsylvania Historical Society) may be taken as characteristic of Hunter's courtesy, urbanity and good common sense in his attitude toward health and disease :

"The Hon^{ble}. Sir William Johnston (sic) Baronet at New London. Newport May 10, 1768. Sir: Nothing but Mrs. Hunter's being in the Straw and not well enough to be left shou'd have prevented me at this time from the pleasure of waiting upon you at New London. As you are come this way for the benefit of the Sea-Air let me persuade you to pass a few days with us on this pleasant Island surrounded by the Ocean. Here you will enjoy more of the Sea-Air than is to be found on any other spot on the Continent. The Vapours or fogs that infest us at this season of the year and that may be deemed unhealthy to the Inhabitants I will venture to say will prove salutary to you that have lived so many years at so great a distance from the Ocean. Dr. Moffatt who is capable of giving you the best advice I dare say will confirm this. I shall do every thing in my power to make the place agreeable to you and altho there are many here that can and will entertain you with more elegance and Splendour than I can yet I am sure there are none that will give you a more hearty welcome or be more pleased to see you than Sir Your Most Obedient Humble Servant Wm. Hunter."

"To the Hon. Sir W^m. Johnson. Newport, March 15, 1773. Sir: The account our worthy friend Mr. Chew gives of the state of your health affords me great pleasure. I hope you will make it your study to preserve it, by varying your scenes of life, and not confine yourself to the Inland part of the country, which cannot long agree with a constitution, that has been used to the more salutary sea-air. You will find it necessary, and I hope you will not neglect visiting, the Sea-Coast once in three or four years. You are sensible how much easier it is to prevent sickness, than it is to restore health, therefore while you are able, come down and spend the two hot summer months on this Island, and in the Fall you shall return with a sufficient store of Health for years to come. There can be no doubt that, in general, temperance is the foundation of health, yet to indulge now and then has always been allowed; but if you will honour me so much as to become my guest, depend upon it, you shall be allowed to do as you please, and it shall be our study to make everything agreeable to you. Mrs. Hunter who is the daughter of Wm. (?)

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Malbone, your former acquaintance and particular friend of your Uncle Sir Peter Warren, wou'd be happy in paying attention to you, and I am sure, the Jaunt, wou'd contribute to the Establishing of your health, which all your

for
September 19th 1772

In the Gout, Nature's endeavours to throw the load of excessive matter out of the body upon the joints; & therefore the pain ought by all means to be mitigated by external remedies, for by attempting this the Gouty humor is thrown back upon the vital organs. you are the best Judge whether your Stomach and Solids bear don't stand suffer from such injudicious treatment.

As to the medical treatment, different methods are to be pursued in the fit and out of it. quiet is not only judicious but enforced by the very incapacity to motion. In case of a Fever, the diet should be the same as in a cold & cold; otherwise, common food of easy digestion may be allowed. For great care must be taken of the stomach and strength.

A few Glases of generous wine after dinner will keep the Gouty humor in the joints. People who have been accustomed to the Gout for many years, if the fits don't come on regularly, their bowels or Solids are attached instead of their joints; and besides they are seized with such weakness in their legs and feet, that the remainder of their life is often miserable: And this is often brought on by living too low and confining themselves to a milk & Vegetable diet. Therefore let your food be of a more solid form but of easy digestion, one meal a day of flesh of the tender sort, and mix and them on fresh fish. When you have out the fit your common drink ought to be Claret and water and when you are to bed with

a Lee you ought to drink nothing but good Claret after dinner and in the Evening — Quinch and all acid Liquors are bad for you — As for medicine I would not have you use much but now that your stomach and bowels are disordered it is necessary to do something for them. Therefore I have ordered you a Box of pills & a vial of Tincture.

You are to take two of the pills every Night at bed time and as many early in the morning every day. Take the Tincture two Spoonfulls of which is to be in a Glass of Claret or good wine at Bedtime & to be as much at part in the latter room every day — I hope by the use of these medicines a few Weeks you will recover to be as young and healthy as your friends and I think I need not wish to see you. I am
Yours &c. Wm. Hunter

FIG. 7.—Hunter's letter to Captain Edward Wanton on the care of his gout.

friends are so desirous to see confirmed.—I am Sir Your very Humble Servant Wm. Hunter.”

Hunter imported his own drugs, mostly from a Mr. Witherly and Messrs. Corbyn and Co., Druggists, Holborn, and had an apothecary to put them up

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and sell them. The successors of this apothecary remained in the Hunter house until comparatively recent times. When the house was sold a few decades ago, a number of old glass jars and delft gallipots were found in the attic, of which photographs are reproduced (Figs. 9 and 10). Thacher says that "he was a most eminently successful practitioner, as well as an operator in surgery; he appeared at that day to be bold and rash, but the truth was, he brought with him from Europe a more exact knowledge of anatomy, and greater chiralurgical skill grounded on that knowledge, than existed in the colonies at that period."

For the first ten years of his life at Newport, Hunter lived in the "old



FIG. 8.—Hunter's Apothecary Shop, Thames and Mary Streets, Newport.

Rodman House," originally on the corner of Ann (now Touro) and Thames Streets (Newport's principal thoroughfare), but now—like so many of the old Newport houses—standing on Bridge Street, second house from Washington Street (Fig. 11). Its fine proportions, numerous windows, hip roof and clapboarded sides tell their own story in spite of the bad times that it now seems to be experiencing. This house was occupied by Thomas Rodman (1647-1727) who came from the Barbadoes in 1680. After his death his son Thomas lived there, then Hunter, then Dr. John Haliburton (Dr. H. B. Jacobs' note). Hunter later lived on the Corner of Mary and Thames Streets, in a house that has also been moved to Bridge Street to make way for a candy

store and is said to be still in existence (Fig. 12). We show another "Hunter House" of the same style on Washington Street (reproduced from a newspaper clipping) (Fig. 13).

On September 13, 1761,⁹ in old Trinity Church, Hunter married Deborah (born November 23, 1744, died abroad), the youngest daughter of Godfrey Malbone (1724-1785), who was educated at Oxford and was "one of the most

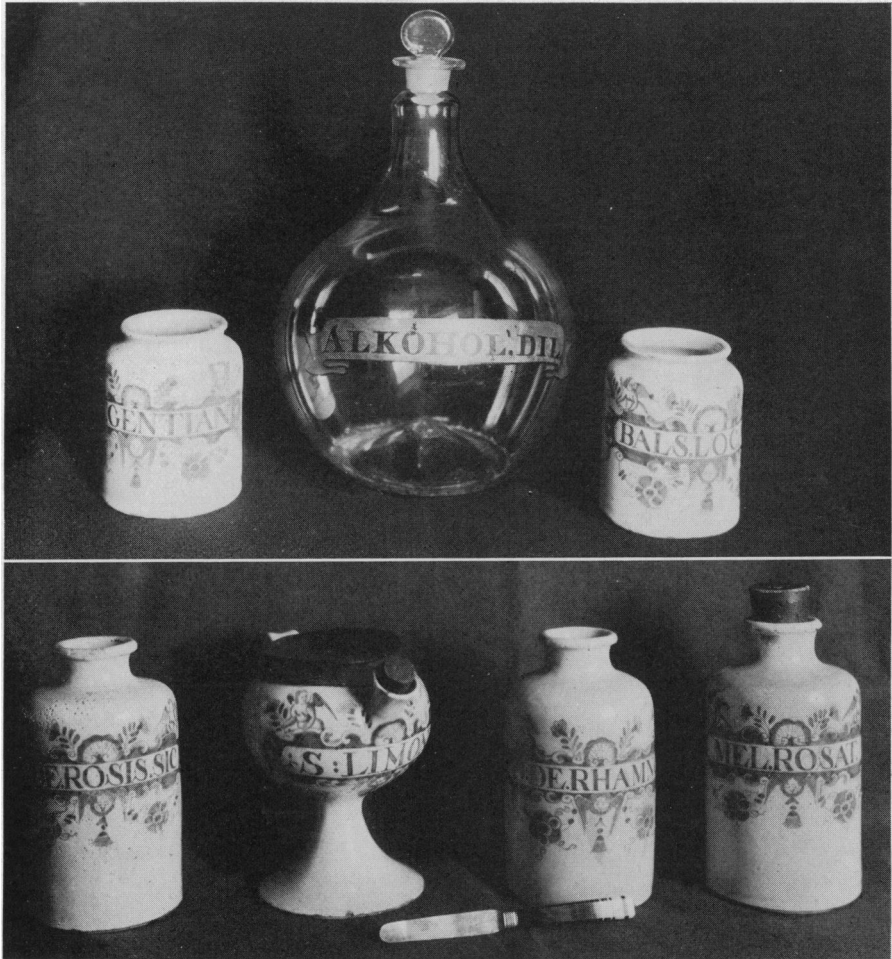


FIG. 9.—A glass flask from Hunter's pharmacy (belonging to Anna M. Hunter) and two "Gallipots" (called Galley Pots in the inventory) (heirs of Kate Hunter Dunn).

FIG. 10.—More of Hunter's Gallipots and a Spatula with agate handle (Newport Historical Society).

opulent merchants and land proprietors of the country" (Thacher). A few months later Hunter became one of the "undertakers" to pay for an enlargement to the church, of which his father-in-law was a vestryman, "for which they are to have the pews, subject to a tax for defraying the expenses of the church."⁹ Hunter's pew was No. 13 (Fig. 14). The original Malbone house was destroyed by fire. While it was burning Colonel Malbone, the owner, is

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said to have remarked: "Though we lose our home, there is no reason to lose our dinner." The Hunters had seven children, of whom three, William, Katharine and Godfrey Malbone, died in infancy. Three daughters died abroad, Elizabeth (1762-1859), Anne (1766-1859), wife of John Falcounet (Falconer), and another Katharine (1773-1860) wife of the Count de Cardigan. Another William, the youngest child (1774-1849), was "a lawyer of very great classical and scholastic attainments."¹ After studying law at the Inner Temple, he gained a prominent position at the Rhode Island bar, was



FIG. 11.—The Rodman House, Newport.

Senator from Rhode Island, 1811 to 1821, and long Minister to Brazil. He has numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren living today.

As seen by his portrait, the elder Hunter was a handsome, well-dressed gentleman. This painting (Fig. 1)—by Cosmo Alexander in 1769, owned by W. R. Hunter, of Middletown, R. I.—shows the white bag wig and stock of the period with the ruff of the waistcoat appearing from under the black coat. It is marked on the back "Dr. William Hunter, born in Edinburgh, Scotland, died at Newport Jan. 30, 1777." Thacher says of him: "He is reported to have been somewhat too handsome for a man; his manners were

courtly and amiable, his opinions liberal and his literary relaxations were the classics.”

Ezra Stiles, the Congregationalist minister, President of Yale, who could not forgive Hunter’s antagonism to the cause of liberty, gives us the following brilliant, if one-sided, bit of portraiture (journal of February 9, 1777).¹⁹ “Heard of Dr. Hunter’s death in Newport. He was Scotch Physician—spent about two years in attending the medical Lecture in University of Edinburg—then came over to America 1754 circa, with nothing. Settled at Newport, where he got an Estate, turned Chhman (Churchman, i.e. Church of England), became as haughty as a Scotch Laird, high in ministerial and parliam^y



FIG. 12.—Hunter’s House on Thames and Mary Streets, Newport.

Measures, an inveterate Enemy to American Liberty—dressed well, was much of the Gentleman, lived high & luxuriously—could approve nothing but what was European, despised American Literature & Colleges—of polite Morals. Of natural good Sense & a taste for the belles Lettres—but not a man of any great Reading in any Branch of Learning, even that of his own Profession. He tho’t he bro’t knowledge eno’ with him out of Scotland, at aet. 21, for a physician in America. He determined his Mode of Religion upon secular & political Motives, such as would have joyned him to a Mosque in Turkey, the House of Rimon at Damascus, or St. Peter’s at Rome. Had he taken time for inquiry into his own real principles, he would probably have found them the same as David Humes or some other Scotch Deist—but he was not disposed for such a self-examination; and had he known himself a

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Deist, he would yet have been a Scotch Chhman in New Engl, from his Hatred of New Engl Presbyterians."

Hunter is said to have been ^{1, 4, 17} the first patron of Gilbert Stuart, the celebrated painter. While visiting the mainland to see patients, Hunter was struck by the drawings in chalk on a certain barn door. Seeing other meritorious drawings upon later visits, he investigated the matter and found that the boy, Gilbert Stuart, had made them. Hunter then gave him money to take drawing lessons. After a time the boy visited him in Newport and Dr. Hunter asked if he was ready to begin painting. The boy replied that he thought he was; whereupon the Doctor said: "Well, paint my dog." The original of this picture is now to be seen in Newport in the house of Mrs. William E.

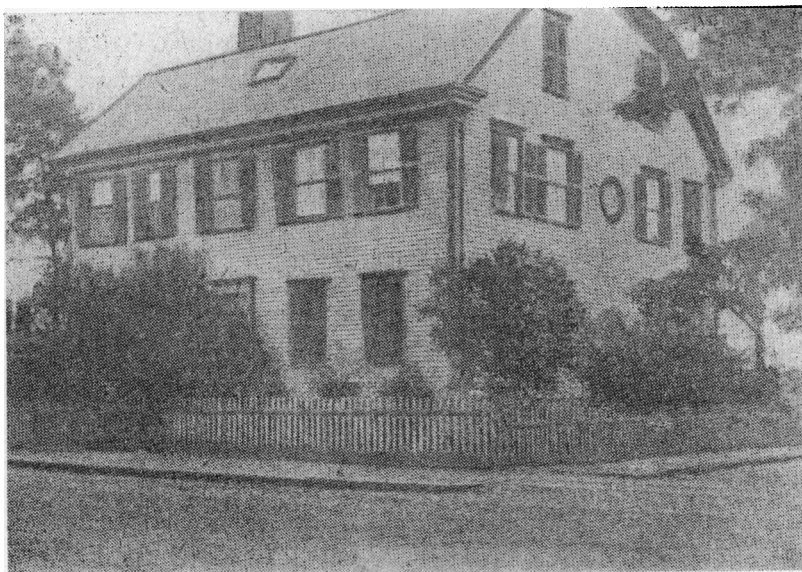


FIG. 13.—Hunter's House on Washington Street, Newport.

Glyn, a great-great-granddaughter of Doctor Hunter. Stuart, who was born at Middletown, R. I., in 1755, even at thirteen had begun to show his talent, and two of his portraits (of himself and Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse) painted before 1770, the year in which he first had instruction in art, hang in the well-known Redwood Library in Newport. (Dr. H. B. Jacobs.)

Like many of the Scottish emigrants to the colonies, Hunter remained a loyalist and was from the start a frank supporter of the home country's authority. He is known¹¹ to have been a subscriber in 1767 to the anti-colonial *Boston Chronicle*, and as the clouds gathered preceding the Revolution, he did not hesitate to denounce "the dom'd Rebels."^{1, 19} On Christmas Day, 1775,^{10, 19} Hunter was among eight Tories brought before General Lee to swear renunciation of Tory principles, fidelity to the American cause and readiness to take arms in its defence when called upon by the Continental Congress. The three who did not take the oath are listed and Hunter's name is not among

them; nevertheless, he as a physician, and Mr. Bisset, as a clergyman, were exempted from the statement about taking arms.^{10, 17} On July 18, 1776, however, the General Assembly resolved that Hunter, who with several others had refused to subscribe to the declaration it had prescribed, be removed by the Sheriff to Smithfield, R. I.¹⁶ The declaration to which Doctor Hunter refused to subscribe read as follows: "Declaration or Test, to be made by suspected persons in the Colony, relative to the War with Great Britain: 'I, the subscriber, do solemnly and sincerely declare, that I believe the war, resistance, and opposition, in which the United American Colonies are now engaged, against the fleets and armies of Great Britain, is on the part of the said colonies



FIG. 14.—Interior of Trinity Church, Newport, with Hunter's Pew.

just and necessary; and that I will not, directly nor indirectly, afford assistance of any sort or kind, whatever, to the said fleets and armies, during the continuance of the present war; but that I will heartily assist in the defence of the United Colonies.'” In August, however, he was permitted to return to Newport on account of the dangerous illness of one of his children, and three of the state magistrates were “appointed to direct when the said Doctor Hunter shall be sent back to Smithfield.”

When the British took Newport, December 8, 1776, Hunter's ease was assured. His name occurs in Stiles' list of those in the city at that time¹⁹—one of about a dozen to be marked with four stars, *i.e.*, the most extreme of Tories. He took great pleasure and satisfaction in the local predominance of his side, but his triumph was short-lived. He contracted a “putrid fever,”

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while in attendance at the Army Hospital (according to one account),⁶ or while attending sailors—prisoner of war on a man of war in the harbor (according to another).⁵ After a short illness, he died on January 30, 1777. In the February 7th number of the *Newport Gazette*, a paper sponsored by the British while in occupation, the following obituary was published: “Last Friday night departed this life D^r. W^m. Hunter in whom concentrated all those virtues wh. adorn the patriot, form the husband and compose the parent. The town has sustained a loss which can not be repaired. His worthy consort is deprived of the most engaging of husbands and his children the best, the fondest of parents. The patience with which he bore the many & un-

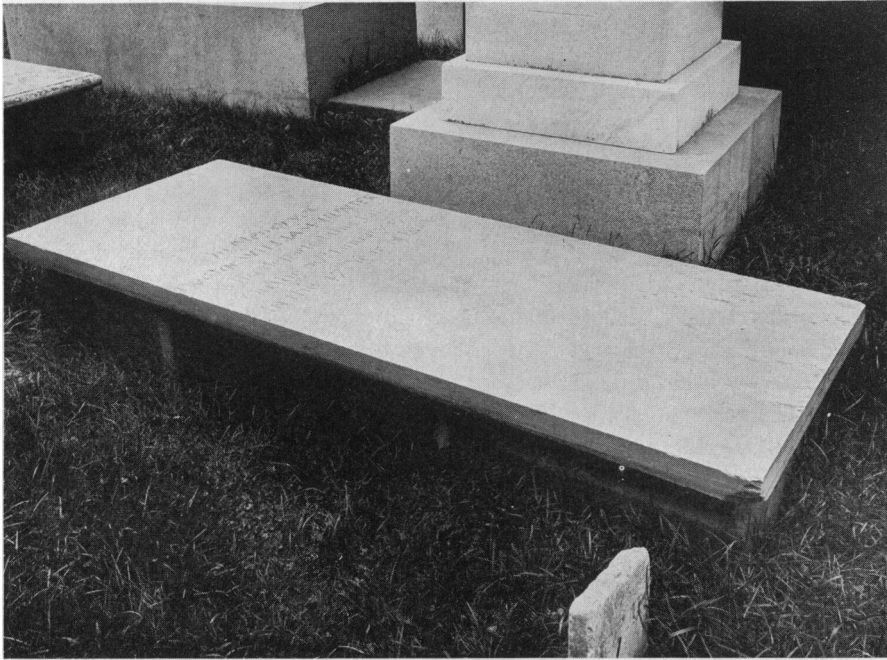


FIG. 15.—Hunter's Tombstone in Trinity Churchyard.

provoked insults of his countrymen in full confidence that relief would soon arrive deserves every encomium and perhaps the goodness of his disposition is not in any instance more conspicuous than in forbearing to retaliate the injuries of many whom the restoration of the authority of his sovereign had placed in his power.” He was buried in Trinity churchyard (Fig. 15) near those of his children who had gone before. His tombstone reads: “In memory of Doctor William Hunter who departed this life on the 30th of January 1777 in the 47th year of his age.” His widow and three beautiful daughters were highly regarded. “Among the maidens of Newport who were adored by the French officers were the Misses Hunter. The gay followers of Rochambeau sang their praises and traced their names upon the windows of their quarters.” (Mason.⁹) When the eldest daughter, Eliza, was threatened with

blindness, Mrs. Hunter sought help for her in Europe, taking the others with her and none ever returned. Contemporary accounts, as well as two miniatures still in the family possession, proclaim their charms. A Mr. Chipman writes in his journal: "We have heard much of Miss Hunter of R. I. who was at Dr. Lloyd's; we were prepared to expect something supernatural. We called to see her; our expectations were exceeded by the interview. She is, without exception, the most beautiful, accomplished, and elegant person (with a mind, if possible, as we were informed by her friends, superior) that I ever beheld."

His will was not probated for almost three years (Newport Town Council, December 30, 1779).¹² It reads: "In The Name of God, Amen, I William Hunter, of Newp^t in y^e County of Newp^t in y^e Colony of Rhode Island, Physician, being sick & Weak, but of a disposing mind & memory, do hereby make this my last Will & Testament, & dispose of such Estate, as I am Blefsed withal in the following manner to Wit, Imprimis, I Give, Bequeath, & devise, to my Dear Wife, the Income & Profits of One Third part of my Real Estate, during her Life, as also one third part of my Personal Estate, Item, all the Remainder of my Estate both Real & Personal I order to be Divided by my Ex^{rs} into five Equal parts, Two parts of which I Give, devise, & Bequeath to my Son William, His Heirs & Assigns forever, & the other Three parts, I Give, devise, & Bequeath to my three Daughters, Elizabeth, Anne, & Catharine, Share & Share alike to them, their Heirs, & Assigns forever, Item, my mind & Will is, & I order that my Wife shall have & receive y^e Issue & Profits of my Real Estate, till my Youngest Child Comes of Age, & that my Daughters receive their shares of my Personal Estate when they Respectively arrive at y^e age of Twenty one Years, And, Lastly I appoint my s^d wife & my Two Friends, Francis Brindley & Simon Pease Ex^{rs} of this my Last Will, dated at Newport this thirtieth day of January A D 1777 Wm. Hunter—Seal Sealed & Acknowledged as his last Will in presence of us Francis Brindley Jun^r Penelope Bisset A Johnston Newpo^t The aforegoing is a true Coppy of y^e Original Will of William Hunter Recorded & Compared, by Me this 15th day of decb^r A D 1780 Peleg Barker Jun^r Council."

The inventory of his personal estate, made a week later, throws an interesting light on the *materia medica* of the day, but is too long to be included here. The huge number—according to present viewpoints—of 273 drugs is listed, in amounts varying from one drachm of cinnamon, valued at 15s., to thirty-one pounds of ammonia. Not a few old friends are encountered, such as aloes, arsenic, paregoric, hyocyamus, sulphur, cinnamon, ether, opium, santonin, jalap, lunar caustic, tartar emetic, castor, antimony, cantharides, James' powders. But most have long since departed from our pharmacies, many are unrecognizable; some are as startling as "Sang. Draconis," of which six ounces were valued at one shilling three halfpennies. Among the furniture is listed "One Neagro (*sic*) Man Named Mark" £22.10 (exactly the same valuation as for a roan horse two lines later). Another Negro, named Quarts, was worth considerably less (£13.10) than the chaise (£18). In the

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Notes of Hand, we find 129 individuals listed for amounts varying from six shillings to 2,500 pounds and totalling £7,860, 6s. and 6 pence.

Why should this man be given a distinguished position in early American medicine? Certainly not on account of his famous namesake, whether or not the relationship could be proved. The manuscript of his lectures, if it could be found, would of course afford a much more valid basis for judging his medical attainments than the scanty statements given here. According to Thacher, he corresponded with Cullen and "his own illustrious kinsmen," but it has not been possible to uncover this evidence. At least, no letters from the Hunter brothers to their ancestor are known of by his descendants today. It might fairly be said that, possessed of unusual charm of personality and culture and of more than the average natural intelligence, fortunate in being trained in one of the best medical schools in the world, Hunter came to a new country where such a combination was rare. Seized with the happy idea of offering instruction to his fellows and doubtless the best qualified to give it at a time when need for such systematic study was beginning to be realized through the colonies, he unquestionably deserves the fame for having been the first known in this country to have given a publicly announced, successful course of lectures on anatomy and surgery. The importance of such an achievement need hardly be further emphasized. His military activities and successful professional career bear further witness to his worth and ability. Nor should his political attitude during the Revolution be regarded as other than the natural response of one of his position—an attitude similar to that of many of the leading citizens of New York, Pennsylvania and New England, well understood by most of their class and easily forgotten in favor of those who threw in their lot with the new country after the war was over. What the country lost by his early, untimely death can only be conjectured. From what we know of him, he doubtless would have agreed with Alfred Stillé: "Only two things are essential, to live uprightly and to be wisely industrious."²⁰

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