The Man I Knew

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Much can be written about James Henderson Scott. The problem is to separate out a few anecdotes from one's personal exposure to this intellectual giant of a man. A flood of memories surface but a few isolated moments will have to suffice to give the flavor of this most unusual individual.

Like others before and after me, my first encounter with James Scott was as an impressionable student in his dental anatomy classes. Just a handful of us clustered to one side of the main anatomy lecture theatre, with James leaning on the end of the front bench that ran the full width of the room. This was Professor Thomas Walmsley's territory for the rest of each week and, because of that, it was a place most of us held in awe. More often than not, the blackboard displayed one or more of Walmsley's intricate chalk drawings of neural connections in the central nervous system. But James had us put that aside with his brief, clear conversations about some aspect of tooth development, structure or the place of teeth and skull in the comparative scheme of things. Not overtly humorous even though he had his moments, but unique, even eccentric, certainly different and a teacher from whom we learned with ease. At the time, he was completing a detailed comparative anatomy display in the gallery of the old medical museum to illustrate dental and skull features of different classes of living vertebrates. This was our practical guide through the intricacies of the subject. Inevitably, he was accessible and impressed us by his willingness to take time to answer questions, no matter how simple. His whole approach to teaching appeared quite casual but was calculated to bring out the best qualities in all of us. Who does not remember seeing him in an old sports jacket and open-necked shirt shuffling back and forth to the University library, either with a fresh armful of journals or reading as he walked? The epitome of a widely-read man who we soon recognized could talk both authoritatively and amusingly about most any topic under the sun.

After several years in dental practice I went to see him on a morning-off. I had reached a point when I wanted to go beyond the daily routines of patient care. James stood out for me as a stimulating, intellectual teacher and I was confident he would have ideas to share. Happily, he was in his office and, after some minutes of friendly conversation about family and my reason for being there, he pulled out a somewhat dog-eared notebook from a desk drawer and grunted, "I keep this for people like you." In it was a list of research questions and topics. "Take it home and read it. Bring it back next week and tell me the one you would like to do." So began my career-long interest in jaw development, skull growth and the trigeminal system. He afforded me full access to his laboratory, the skills of his technician and an extensive collection of embryonic and fetal

material. Discussion of my progress and results was frequent but not forced and always productive. There is no doubt he was my mentor.

One morning a few years later, during the throes of the B.Sc. program in Anatomy and Physiology, for one thing had led to another, he appeared and literally threw down a copy of the British Dental Journal on the bench in front of me, pointed to an advertisement and said, "Apply for that." I expressed my reservations, for it was out of the blue. He persisted and after discussions at home I did apply. This led to my first academic position, at the University of Manchester. The rest is history! Later, we were to write an anatomy text together. It was a challenge to keep up with him for he wrote voluminously in pen or pencil, always on legal size pads or leftover examination books.

I have fond memories of exchanging external examining responsibilities with James and I believe the students found some enjoyment too, for he was kind and considerate to them, giving the benefit of the doubt when possible. During my visits to Queens it was a treat to pick up his latest reprints. He was a prolific scientific writer and there was always something new to be had. Between times he continued his barrage of letters to the editors of city newspapers or wrote poetry. On one occasion he suggested that I should seek reprints from the United States and send whatever I had in exchange. "That's what I'm doing," he said. "I'm hoping someone will invite me over there before long. I want to straighten them out a bit!" As life would have it, as the result of a completely different set of circumstances, I later had the pleasure of inviting James to stay with us in Iowa City while I was there on a two-year leave-of-absence from Manchester and he was making his first visit to the USA!

James always had pithy advice for research and teaching neophytes. I was about to leave for England to give my first research paper and was going over my notes. "What are you going to do with those," he asked, looking over my shoulder. I explained, to which he retorted, "I'll tell you what to do. Read them on the train and throw them out the window." Great advice but not followed on that particular occasion. But I never forgot and many of my students over the years received the same guidance from me. Thus the art of extemporaneous speech or talking from slides! He was a great believer in short lectures. "Don't talk for more than half-an-hour," he would say. "They have short attention spans and the best you can do is to get a couple of points across before you lose them."

James often was the life and soul of the party at dental research meetings. He could be counted on to ask the critical question, usually after others had had their turn. Some regarded him with amusement, not completely recognizing the depth of his knowledge and his vision. Some may recall the occasion when a London colleague who was well known for his aggressive questioning asked James after a short paper on the superior dental nerves, "Dr. Scott, do you mean to tell us your results prove that all these canals in your radiographs contained nerve branches?" "Not at all," James chuckled, "All it proves was that there was fuse wire in them!" The room exploded with uproarious laughter.

Behind the serious faade James Scott was a kindly man, always asking about family and showing genuine empathy with any problem. He was beset with the

side effects of medications to relieve the pain and suffering of advancing arthritis. He became progressively more crippled as the years went by until he was mostly confined to his desk and chair. But I never knew him to complain about his lot in life and his productivity continued until the end. It was a tremendous privilege to have known and worked alongside him and this will be shared by all who knew him well. Sadly, there are not too many of us left. But the importance of his visionary contributions to skull growth has stood the test of time and will be a lasting memorial to this great man.