CHAPTER SIX

“MY DEAR HART”: LISTER’S MARRIAGE TO HANNAH PARKINSON AND HIS MEDICAL PRACTICE IN YORK

1. Introduction

While Lister was negotiating the terms of his friendship with Ray, he was making another more permanent relationship with his own future wife, Hannah Parkinson, as well as establishing a medical practice in Yorkshire. Hannah Parkinson (1645–95) lived in Carleton-in-Craven near Skipton in West Yorkshire. Carleton-in-Craven was approximately five miles from Winterburne where Lister owned the estate of Friar’s Head Hall given to him by his great uncle, Dr Matthew Lister. In the summer of 1669, Lister had to travel there on his father’s behalf, and it was during his visit to this distinctive house standing alone in the Yorkshire Dales that he met his bride-to-be, whom he called “his dear Hart.” The time was a tragic one for his family: Lister’s mother Susanna was dying, and would pass away in November, and his father was poorly and clearly thinking about the hereafter, having a year previously given a magnificent solid-silver chalice and flagon weighing three-and-a half pounds to St Mary’s Parish Church in Thorpe Arnold (Sir Martin died in 1670). So Martin may have felt it was a matter of urgency to marry before his parents’ decease. Perhaps he realized that, without a wife, there would be no more venison pies and female companionship.

Although Martin may have encountered Hannah as a result of sheer physical proximity, it is more likely he came to her acquaintance through long-established family ties between the Parkinsons and the Listers. When Martin’s great-uncle Matthew served as a royal physician at the court of Charles I, he had been a close friend and neighbor of John Parkinson (1567–1650), a royal herbalist, apothecary, and gardener. Parkinson was best known for his works Paradisi in sole Paradisus terrestris (1629) and Theatrum Botanicum (1640). Matthew

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1 Banks, Thorpe Arnold, 14.
2 Parkinson, Nature’s Alchemist, 185.
Lister, along with Sir Theodore de Mayerne, championed Parkinson’s *Theatrum* at court, one of the most significant books on medicinal plants published in the seventeenth century, which encompassed “the birth of horticulture and systematic public medicine.” Mayerne said that Parkinson’s book: “Entered the very marrow of plants and the virtues of each for the good of the public. You reveal the ointment of mortals so skillfully so that your English compatriots...will forever after be intimate with the richest part of nature’s treasure chamber.” Sir Matthew Lister also provided John Parkinson with seeds of Chinese rhubarb he had obtained from Venice, as the finest medicinal rhubarb came from China, and it was considered one of the best purges, a cornerstone of seventeenth-century medicine. Parkinson was one of the first to describe its cultivation, as it was a goal for seventeenth-century European botanists to grow it successfully at home. Both Sir Matthew Lister and John Parkinson were ardent royalists during the English Civil War, so it is possible that the Lister and Parkinson families were well acquainted due to their past friendship and political allegiances. Hannah would have understood her fiancé’s interests in natural history as they ran in her own family, and it seems they were an especially compatible couple. Lister’s old friend Thomas Briggs congratulated him, commenting “I should not seem to think the ere ever been otherwise [happy] who have as I understand so suitable a Consorte.”

The Parkinsons were a large clan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries residing in all the parishes which extend from Kildwick-in-Craven to Kirkham in Lancashire, and they were, as a whole, well-off farmers and minor gentry. In Higher Fairsnape on the Bleasdale Moors, Lancashire, a farmhouse survives with the Parkinson crest carved above the door—three stars on a red chevron between three ostrich feathers. Hannah’s father, however, was from another branch of the family residing in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the location of Craven, a land that is generally high-lying, hilly, and with a climate not particularly suited for arable crops. But it is excellent land for growing

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3 Parkinson, “John Parkinson.”
7 Hannah’s father Thomas was John Parkinson’s nephew. See Woodley, “Anne Lister,” 228, note 3.
8 Bodleian MS Lister 3, f. 23r.