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THE AUTHOR OF "RAB AND HIS FRIENDS," DR. JOHN BROWN, OF EDINBURGH.*

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At the present time Dr. John Brown, of Edinburgh, is known by most readers as the author of "Rab and His Friends," and to some as the author of the beautiful little story of "Marjorie Fleming." In addition to these works there are, however, many other writings of Dr. Brown which still possess much of value and interest, especially to us as physicians, and my chief object in writing of him has been to recall some of these to attention. The man himself is likewise an interesting if somewhat pathetic study, his life commencing with every promise for prosperity and gladness, and closing in sorrow and distress.

John Brown was the offspring from a line of Presbyterian clergymen. His great grandfather, the Rev. John Brown, of Haddington, as he is usually known, began life as a shepherd boy and at the close of his career had achieved a reputation as one of the most learned biblical scholars in Scotland. His "Self-Interpreting Bible" was long a standard work. His son, the Rev. John Brown, of Whitburn, was likewise a man of eminence in the councils of the Church, but the ecclesiastical glory of the family culminated in the father of the subject of this sketch, and it is curious to see how closely his characteristics, as sketched in his "Memoir" by John Cairns, are reflected in the son. The father's life was a somewhat stormy one. He was an ordained minister of the "Burgher" branch of the "Secession" Church, which subsequently became the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

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His first charge was in Lanarkshire, but in 1852 he was transferred to Edinburgh, and some years afterwards the congregation over which he presided is said to have been one of the largest in that devout city. It was during this time that one of its periodic waves of theological dissension rent the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Rev. Dr. Brown was too eminent a theologian and too good a fighter not to be drawn into the vortex. He was tried by the synod of his Church for heresy in 1845, and was acquitted only after a bitter fight.

His son, the author of "Rab and His Friends" was born on September 22, 1810, at Biggar, in Lanarkshire. In his "Letter to John Cairns, D.D.," he gives us some insight into his childhood and youth. Until the family went to Edinburgh, his father gave the children all the education which they received, and a most excellent education it was. Biggar was nothing but a small country town, but there was nothing provincial about its spiritual guide and some of his parishioners. Brown tells us how his father studied the German theologians; he writes: "After my mother's death I slept with him; his bed was in his study, a small room, with a very small grate, and I remember very well his getting those fat, shapeless, spongy German books, as if one would sink in them, and be bogged in their bibulous, unsized paper; and watching him as he impatiently cut them up and dived into them in his rapid, eclectic way, tasting them and dropping for my play such a lot of soft, large, curled bits from the paper-cutter, leaving the edges all shaggy. He never came to bed when I was awake, which was not to be wondered at; but I can remember often awaking far on in the night or morning, and seeing that keen, beautiful, intense face bending over these Rosenmüllers, and Ernestis, and Storrs, and Kuinoels—the fire out and the gray dawn peering through the window; and when he heard me move, he would speak to me in the foolish words of endearment my mother was wont to use, and come to bed, and take me, warm as I was, into his cold bosom."

Another man of learning in the village, who exerted a powerful influence over the boy was a Mr. Robert Johnston, who had married his aunt. Of this remarkable man, Brown says: "A shopkeeper in that remote little town, he not only intermeddled fearlessly with all knowledge, but mastered more than many practised university men do in their own lines. Mathematics, astronomy, and especially what may be called selenology, or the science of the moon, and the higher geometry and physics; He-

brew, Sanscrit, Greek and Latin, to the veriest rigors of prosody and meter; Spanish and Italian, German, French, and any odd language that came in his way; all these he knew more or less thoroughly, and acquired them in the most leisurely, easy, cool sort of way, as if he grazed and browsed perpetually in the field of letters, rather than made formal meals, or gathered for any ulterior purpose, his fruits, his roots and his nuts—he especially liked mental nuts—much less bought them from anyone." What an example of the learning so often found in the most provincial neighborhoods of Scotland, partly a result, and partly a cause of that eager desire which exists in the bosoms of many of the very poorest Scots that their children should receive a university education, a desire so eager in many instances that it amounts to a passion! The preparatory education which the Rev. John Brown gave his son was of that solid, material kind, which subsequently enabled him to obtain the fullest value from his classical courses at the High School and University, and qualified him to take a scholarly pleasure in the perusal of the classics throughout his life.

There are few more beautiful tributes by any son to a father than the "Letter to John Cairns, D.D." and there are few literary remains which give us as clear an insight into the sources of the characteristics of their author. We see all the way through the description of his childhood at the little country manse, the development of the quiet, strong, lovable nature of the writer and also his tendency to meditative melancholy, which, as he writes of his father was "A condition under which he viewed all things and which quickened and intensified his sense of the suffering of the world and of the profound seriousness and mystery in the midst of which we live and die."

When he was twelve years old his father removed to Edinburgh. After graduating from the Edinburgh High School, the boy graduated from the Collegiate Department of Edinburgh University, and subsequently from the Medical School, receiving his degree of M.D. in 1833.

He was apprenticed, as was then the usual custom, during his medical studies to Mr. Syme, of whom he wrote afterwards that he was "the best blessing of my professional and one of the best of my personal life," and he elsewhere referred to him as "our greatest clinical teacher and wisest surgeon."

Syme was the surgeon who figures in "Rab and His Friends," and throughout Brown's writings there are constant references

to him and to his work, besides an obituary notice of him written shortly after his death. Syme was not only a cousin of Liston, the great Edinburgh surgeon, but also the father-in-law of Sir Joseph Lister, the discoverer of antisepsis. Until Syme's death, he and his former student were the closest of friends, and through this friendship with Syme, Brown was brought into close intimacy with the very best men in the profession in Edinburgh.

In passing, we might call attention to the fact mentioned by Brown that it was Dr. Syme who discovered the solubility of caoutchouc in coal tar, and described it in a letter to the *Annals of Philosophy* for August, 1818, and that it was after this date that MacIntosh took out his patent for the process which has since made his name known in all quarters of the globe.

Brown walked the wards in the City Hospital, and has left us in his most famous work a glimpse of his life as house surgeon. He subsequently served as assistant to a surgeon at Chatham, and during this period there was an outbreak of cholera in the town in which the young surgeon's courage and fidelity to his duty is said to have attracted the notice of Charles Dickens. He did not remain long away from Edinburgh, however, as the prospects of the son of his father were too bright in that city to be idly cast away, and soon after his return he succeeded in acquiring a very large practice.

His earnest work and lovable nature won him hosts of friends, and his medical skill soon procured for him a high reputation as a diagnostician. His bent lay entirely in a clinical direction, and we have no record of any strictly scientific work which he performed; in fact, as we will shortly notice, he did not appreciate the vast importance of the new era then dawning for scientific medicine. He was of a social disposition, and as years went on, his house in Rutland street was the scene of many social gatherings. He is said, by the author of a little memoir of his life, to have known "everyone in Edinburgh except a few newcomers, and to walk on Princes street with him was to realize that this was a literal fact. He generally drove, but when he walked it was in a leisurely fashion, as if not unwilling to be arrested. To some he spoke for a moment, and, though only for a moment, he seemed to send them on their way rejoicing; to others he nodded, to some he merely gave a smile in passing, but in each case it was a distinctive recognition, and felt to be such." A gentleman who frequently saw him in Edinburgh tells me that he was a very big, bluff man, with a frank, open manner. The

first time he met him was at a musicale in Edinburgh, where a young lady, a relative of Brown's, played upon the piano. Brown listened attentively until the performance was at an end, then turning abruptly to a lady who was sitting with my friend, he said, "Miss —— should study Roman history." It was evident that the meaning of his remark was not plain to his hearers. Instead of immediately explaining what he meant, he said to my friend, "What studies do you pursue at the High School?" When told "chemistry, Latin, Greek, etc.," he said, "Do you expect to be a chemist?" "No," was the reply. "Yet your knowledge of chemistry and other extraneous subjects will be of great value to you in anything you may undertake from the breadth of mind, and the training they bring into your life; so also would Miss ——'s rendering of music be improved by a broader preliminary training." Again and again we find Brown recurring to this thought in his writings.

He was a good classical scholar and took a delight in keeping up his acquaintanceship with the old authors of Greece and Rome. His writings are full almost to pedantry of quotations from them. His interest in literature and art was such that whenever a rare engraving, an ancient book, or anything of that nature was unearthed in Edinburgh, it was pretty sure to be brought by the finder to his house "just that Dr. Brown might see it." But the pre-eminent trait of his character was affection, and that is the keynote to all his life; he not only loved others, but inspired a corresponding affection in them. It is beautiful to read the notices which were written at the time of his death. The tone prevailing in all of them is one of personal loss, and many anecdotes are brought forward to instance the sweetness of his disposition.

One who loved him very much wrote, shortly after his death, "In trying to describe anyone, it is usual to speak of his manner; but that word applied to Dr. Brown seems almost unnatural, for manner is considered a thing more or less consciously acquired. In going to see him friends never knew what style of greeting was in store for them, for he had no formal method; each thing he said or did was an exact reflection of the moment's mood, and so was a true expression of his character."

In this same little sketch of his characteristics from which I have drawn very freely, there is an amusing story of his first meeting with the lady who wrote it. She was a school girl friend of his sister's at the time, and he had offered to drive her home

from his sister's house to Edinburgh in his doctor's carriage. "We soon reached said carriage, and my foot was on the step, when again my arm was seized, and this time, 'Are you a homeopathist?' was demanded. I stoutly answered 'Yes,' for I thought I must not sail or drive under false colors. 'Indeed! *they* go outside,' was his reply. This was too much for me; so, shaking myself free I said, 'No, they don't, they can walk.' He smiled, looked me rapidly all over from head to foot, and then said in the same quiet voice, 'For that I'll take you in'—and in I went."

Brown's devotion to this sister of his was most beautiful. For the last sixteen years of his life she kept house for him at his home in Rutland street, and their home was the point around which much that was best in the social and intellectual life in Edinburgh centered. She took the deepest interest in all of his affairs, and during the last few melancholy years did her best to buoy him up and prevent his yielding to the despondency of which he became the prey. It was to her encouragement that we are indebted for much of his literary activity.

It was not until he was 48 years of age that he published "Rab and His Friends." The little sketch achieved immediate popularity and resulted in further literary activity on the part of its author. In 1858 he gathered together a number of essays which he had written, and published them under the title of "Horæ Subsecivæ," which has been happily translated "Brown Studies." A second series was published in 1861, and was soon followed by an American edition under the title of "Spare Hours."

In 1874, his Alma Mater conferred upon him the degree of LL.D. in recognition of his literary attainments.

He had begun to show symptoms of mental failure some years previously, suffering from repeated attacks of melancholia, which, as years went on, increased in frequency and duration. Towards the latter years of his life he received a pension from the Civil List, and his friends raised a large subscription for his support. In 1881 he seemed to recover his cheerful disposition and a large portion of his mental activity, and so much did his condition improve that in 1882 he published a third collection of his writings under the title of "John Leech and Other Papers." The improvement was but temporary, however, and he soon relapsed. He died from pleurisy on May 11, 1882.

In considering the literary works of Dr. Brown, let us first notice those upon which his fame now chiefly rests. Of these

"Rab and His Friends" easily holds first place. It is a trite saying that in English literature there are but few short stories to compare with those to be found in the French language, but we would defy any literature to produce a more complete little classic than "Rab and His Friends." For simplicity, sincerity and obvious truthfulness; for deep pathos and human sympathy; for pure humor and insight into human nature, this simple little story is almost unexcelled.

Rab is a dog, and the story concerns the carter to whom he belongs, and his wife. From the fight between Rab and the Bull-Terrier on the first page to the last page describing the faithful sheep dog's funeral, every paragraph is pregnant with interest. Take the description of Ailie sitting on a sack filled with straw, with her husband's plaid around her, with his big coat with its large white metal buttons over her feet, waiting to see the doctor at the hospital: "I never saw a more unforgetable face—pale, serious, *lonely*, delicate, sweet, without being at all what we would call fine. She looked sixty, and had on a mutch, white as snow, with its black ribbon; her silvery, smooth hair setting off her dark gray eyes—eyes such as one only sees twice or thrice in a lifetime, full of suffering, full also of the overcoming of it: her eyebrows black and delicate, and her mouth firm, patient and contented, which few mouths ever are." Her husband James, with his tender interest and loving care is splendid, and as for Rab, the mastiff, with his "large, heavy, menacing, combative, somber, honest countenance," there is not a dog like him in all literature. Ailie has a cancer of the breast; a surgeon examines it and tells her of the absolute necessity for its removal. Then follows the description of the operation which, aside from the beauty of its language, is interesting because of its contrast with our modern ideas of such occasions.

"The operating theater is crowded; much talk and fun, and all the cordiality and stir of youth. The surgeon with his staff of assistants is there. In comes Ailie; one look at her quiets and abates the eager students. That beautiful old woman is too much for them; they sit down, and are dumb, and gaze at her. These rough boys feel the power of her presence. She walks in quickly, but without haste; dressed in her mutch, her neckerchief, her white dimity short-gown, her black bombazeen petticoat, showing her white worsted stockings and her carpet shoes. Behind her was James with Rab. James sat down in the distance, and took that huge and noble head between his knees. Rab looked per-

plexed and dangerous; forever cocking his ear and dropping it as fast.

"Ailie stepped up on a seat, and laid herself on the table, as her friend, the surgeon, told her; arranged herself, gave a rapid look at James, shut her eyes, rested herself on me, and took my hand. The operation was at once begun; it was necessarily slow; and chloroform—one of God's best gifts to his suffering children—was then unknown. The surgeon did his work. The pale face showed its pain, but was still and silent. Rab's soul was working within him; he saw that something strange was going on, blood flowing from his mistress, and she suffering; his ragged ear was up, and importunate; he growled and gave now and then a sharp, impatient yelp; he would have liked to have done something to that man. But James had him firm, and gave him a *glower* from time to time, and an intimation of a possible kick.

"It is over; she is dressed, steps gently and decently down from the table, looks for James; then turning to the surgeon and students, she curtsies—and in a low, clear voice, begs their pardon if she has behaved ill. The students—all of us—wept like children; the surgeon happed her up carefully—and resting on James and me, Ailie went to her room, Rab following."

For some days Ailie does well. On the fourth she is worse, and the description of her last hours is too pathetic for quotation. The book has gone through many editions and been translated into many tongues, and I have recently been told by a publisher that it is one of the best selling reprints of small books which is published. Brown wrote other canine memoirs, but none of them ever approached "Rab" in interest or beauty.

With the exception of "Rab and His Friends," Brown never wrote anything more beautiful than "Marjorie Fleming." The heroine was a little girl who died of meningitis when not quite eight years old, but who will live forever in Brown's pages as the child-friend of Sir Walter Scott. Brown's sketch is written with such thorough delight in his subject, such appreciation of the humor and pathos of the quaint little girl who died so many years ago, that it fairly carries one away. It is chiefly a running commentary on her diary and letters. Scott said of her: "She's the most extraordinary creature I ever met with, and her repeating of Shakespeare overpowers me as nothing else does." This poor little girl could repeat Shakespeare by the hour, and her innocent little letters are full of references to the most incongruous literary productions. Thus she writes: " 'Tom Jones' and Gray's 'Elegy

in a Country Churchyard' are both excellent, and much spoken of by both sexes, particularly by the men." "Thomson is a beautiful author and poet, but nothing to Shakespeare, of which I have a little knowledge. 'Macbeth' is a very pretty composition, but an awful one. 'The Newgate Calender' is very instructive."

The poor little thing's religiosity is a strongly marked characteristic. Imagine a child of seven writing "I am very sorry to say that I forgot God—that is to say I forgot to pray to-day, and Isabella told me that I should be thankful that God did not forget me—if he did, O what would become of me—I must go to unquenchable fire, and if I was tempted to sin—how could I resist it—O, I will never do it again—no, no—if I can help it." Again, "My religion is greatly falling off because I don't pray with so much attention when I am saying my prayers, and my character is lost among the Braehead people. I hope I will be religious again, as for regaining my character, I despair of it."

This all sounds very priggish, but with the other child-like extracts from her dairy and letters, and accompanied by the loving commentary of Dr. Brown, the pathos is fairly overwhelming. She was a jolly little thing, and wrote evidently from the fullness of her little heart. We can only feel that of all precocious children, little "Marjorie Fleming" was the most loving and lovable, and that in her precocity there was nothing of offense.

To the medical man the most interesting volume of the "Horæ Subsecivæ" is that containing the essay on Locke and Sydenham, and a number of other articles on medical men and topics. In his introduction, Brown gives vent to some of his pet views and opinions upon which he enlarges at length in the essays which follow. Among these ideas are several of great interest. One topic upon which he is particularly strong in his expressions is what he terms "Man-midwifery." He was bitterly opposed to the practice of obstetrics by men, believing that such cases should be attended by women who could be especially trained for the purpose, and should receive good compensation for their services. He writes: "Some of my best and most valued friends are honored members of this branch; but I believe all the real good they can do, and the real evils they can prevent in these cases, would be attained, if—instead of attending to their own ludicrous loss of time, health, sleep and temper, some 200 cases of delivery every year, the immense majority of which are natural, and require no interference, but have nevertheless wasted not a little of their life, their patience and their understanding—

they had, as I would always have them to do, and as any well educated resolute doctor of medicine ought to be able to do, confined themselves to giving their advice and assistance to the midwife when she needed it."

In the case of the country doctor, he was especially anxious that routine midwifery cases should not be considered as an essential part of his duty. His idea was that in every hamlet there was at least one woman who could be trained in such a way as to be perfectly competent to handle ordinary cases, and enough educated to know when she should call on the services of the physician.

He was very much opposed to specialism in medicine, vehemently urging that such methods of practice broke up the old customary relation between the family physician and his patients. Women doctors were anathema marantha to him, and homeopathy fell in the same category.

A topic upon which he loved to discourse was what he termed the hurtfulness of many of the advances in scientific medicine which he had witnessed during his own professional career. He believed that many of the instruments which came into vogue, especially after Laennec's studies in auscultation, had been really injurious to the education of the physician rather than of service to it. He quotes with approval a remarkable saying of Dr. Syme "that during the last 36 years the practice of medicine has upon the whole gone backwards, and that year after year it is still going backwards." Brown makes a strong distinction between the practice of medicine and the study of medicine, conceding that diagnosis had been greatly advanced by the external methods of auscultation, by the advancement in microscopy, chemical analysis, etc., yet he felt that the *tactus eruditus* and the sagacity of the physician had suffered greatly by his too frequent reliance upon these external aids. Dr. Sellar had published, in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal,* a paper entitled "On the Signification of Fact in Medicine, and on the Hurtful Effects of the Incautious Use of such Modern Sources of Fact as the Microscope, the Stethoscope, Chemical Analysis, Statistics, etc." At the present time it would seem as though the publication of an article of this nature would require considerable courage on the part of its author, yet we find Dr. Brown recommending its perusal, and quoting from it. It is curious to note the bitterness with which Syme, Sellar and Brown wrote on this topic.

We are all nowadays more or less familiar with the life of

the Scotch country doctor through the biography of our friend MacLure, by Ian Maclaren, but he has not been the first to receive justice at the hands of a fellow countryman. Walter Scott in his little read novel "The Surgeon's Daughter," depicts in the character of Gideon Gray a beautiful example of this over-worked, under-paid, and most beloved class of men, who, as he says, was worse fed and harder wrought than anyone else in the parish, unless it were his horse. Dr. Brown was greatly stirred by a correspondence in the columns of the *Scotsman* in which the country doctors were held up to abuse and ridicule on one side, and on the other, were warmly defended by their partisans. Brown contributed a short paper to the controversy under the title of "Our Gideon Grays," in which he wrote stoutly in defense of the country practitioner. In it he presents some remarkable facts concerning country doctors which were elicited in 1846 by an association of medical men in Edinburgh, organized in order to express their sympathy with their country brethren, in the remote districts of Scotland, and to gather as much information as possible regarding their attendance upon the poor of the districts in which they practiced. The information which they collected was buried in the appendix of the first report to the Board of Supervision, but the astounding revelations which it made, should be promulgated to the world. The questions were directed particularly to the matter of medical attendance upon the parochial poor; out of 325 returns 94 had received some remuneration for attendance and outlay. In one instance this consisted of three shillings for twelve years' attendance on seventy constant and thirteen occasional paupers. In another instance the doctor attended 400 paupers for eight years and never received any recompense for his skill, his time and his drugs.

Dr. Brown was fond of emphasizing what he called the "Distinction between the science, and the art or craft, or as it was often called, the cunning of medicine," and he loved to expatiate upon the value of the "middle propositions," a term which he borrowed from Plato's statement that "Particulars are infinite, and the higher generalities give no sufficient direction in medicine; but the pith of all sciences, that which makes the artisan differ from the expert, is in the middle propositions." He considered that Plato meant by this the gift of uniting a knowledge of the science of medicine with a capacity to utilize the fruits of that science. He held that the natural consequence of the predominance in his time of what he termed the merely scientific element,

was that the elder members of the profession were too much pushed aside by the younger men. He quotes with great approval Louis' preface to the first edition of his "Researches on Phthisis." "Few persons are free from delusive mental tendencies, especially in youth, interfering with true observation; and I am of the opinion that generally speaking we ought to place less reliance on cases collected by very young men; and above all not to trust the task of accumulating facts to them exclusively."

He strongly advocated the apprenticeship system in the study of medicine, holding that it did away with much of the evils of class teaching and learning from books. Particularly was he inflamed against examinations in the course of medical studies, holding that such methods gave no true insight into the amount of skill in medical science possessed by the pupil, and were generally merely tests of his memory. He has a happy quotation from Epictetus upon this point which is so apt that I am sure you will pardon its repetition. Epictetus says that the system of examination is "As if sheep, after they have been feeding, should present their shepherds with the very grass itself which they had cropped and swallowed, to show how much they had eaten, instead of concocting it into wool and milk."

Two of his short papers are of especial interest to teachers of medicine, one entitled "Education through the Senses," and the other "With Brains, Sir." In "Education through the Senses" he dilates with great approval upon the suggestion of Dr. Adams of Banchory, that ornithology should be taught as a branch of medical education. He believed that the addition of a branch of natural science, in the stricter sense, to the medical curriculum, would cultivate the habit of observation, and would be of inestimable value to the student in pursuing his more strictly professional studies. The paper entitled "With Brains, Sir," is written in his most characteristic and happiest vein. In it he expatiates upon his objections to the cramming system of medical education, striking the keynote of his subject most happily by the statement that he "did not think it was necessary that everybody should know everything, but he did think it was essential for every man, when his turn came to be able to do something."

As I have stated my main reason for writing of Dr. Brown has been to recall some of his less known writings to the attention of the profession. In his time they were widely read, and although his views met with great opposition, they nevertheless were given the respect that is ever due to the frankly spoken

thoughts of an honest man of ability. They seem to us in reading them over, to reproduce with photographic exactness the nature of the man. He was profoundly emotional, almost hysterical. He allowed his personal prejudices to color his views upon all topics, and he was fond of using strong expressions to clothe his sentiments when he voiced them. Although, as can be seen, many of his views were erratic or even absurd, nevertheless, his essays abound in practical suggestions and thoughts which are most helpful.

I am fully aware I have trespassed very greatly upon your patience in the matter of quotations, but I cannot refrain from giving you, in closing, the paragraph in which Dr. Brown sums up the qualifications of a physician. "The prime qualifications of a physician may be summed up in the words Capax, Perspicax, Sagax, Efficax; Capax—there must be room to receive, and arrange and keep knowledge; Perspicax—senses and perceptions, keen, accurate, and immediate, to bring in materials from all sensible things; Sagax—a central power of knowing what is what, and what it is worth, of choosing and rejecting, of judging; and finally, Efficax—the will and the way—the power to turn all the other three—capacity, perspicacity, sagacity, to account, in the performance of the thing in hand, and thus rendering back to the outer world, in a new and useful form, what you have received from it."