

John Brown of Haddington

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AT the end of last year there was issued from the Press a Life of the Rev. John Brown, Haddington, which will, in all probability, be reckoned in the years to come the standard biography of this noted minister and faithful servant of Jesus Christ. Among the great and good men who have occupied pulpits in Scotland, the name of John Brown will be held in everlasting memory as one of the righteous. His struggle with the hindering circumstances of poverty, his indomitable spirit in acquiring knowledge, his piety as a humble follower of the Lord Jesus, and his faithfulness and zeal as one of His ministers, all tend to give John Brown a place among the noted men of a land which has had its own goodly band. In a life so full of the evidence of God's work of grace there are many lessons that may be gleaned for the edification of the Church of the living God.

John Brown was born in the year 1722, in the hamlet of Carpow, near Abernethy, by the River Tay, in Perthshire. His father was one of the weavers of the place, and was a self-taught man. He set an example of godliness in his home, and his precocious son was privileged from his earliest years to feed upon sound, though strong (for a boy of his years), religious meat in the shape of the books that his pious father had gathered together.

In a brief sketch of his life, John Brown makes a reference to his early years: "The more I consider the dealings between God and my soul, I am the more amazed at His marvellous loving-kindness to me and my ingratitude and rebellion against Him. It was a mercy that I was born in a family which took care of my Christian instruction, and in which I had the example of God's worship both evening and morning; - which was the case of few families in that corner at, that time. This was the more remarkable that my father, as I have heard, being born under Prelacy, got no instruction in reading; or next to none, but what he got from masters after he began to herd."

In the same sketch he makes reference to an incident in his life which throws some light on a custom evidently prevailing at that time on Communion occasions. At the dispensation of the supper only communicants were permitted to be present within the church, while the non-communicants who had been present at the preaching outside did not enter the building during

the dispensing of the bread and wine. This is how he refers to the incident: - "About the eighth year of my age I happened in the crowd to get into the church on the Sacrament Sabbath, where it was common for all but intended communicants to be excluded. The table or tables which I heard served before I was put out were chiefly served upon Christ, and in a sweet and delightful manner. This captivated my young affections, and has made me since think that little ones should never be excluded from the church on such occasions. Though what they hear may not convert them, it may be of use to begin the allurements of their heart."

It was only a few months he was privileged to attend school, but he made the most of his opportunities. "My parents' circumstances," he writes, "did not allow them to afford me anymore but a very few quarters at school for reading, writing, and arithmetic, one month of which, without their allowance, I bestowed upon the Latin." At this early age (between 8 and 10) he not only read but learned by heart the *Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism*, *Vincent's Catechism*, and *Flavel's Catechism*. So that he was well equipped in early youth as far as catechetical knowledge was concerned. The death of his father and mother cut short the eager scholar's career at school, as the following pathetic sentence from the sketch of his life shows: - "My father dying about the eleventh year of my age and my mother soon after, I was left a poor orphan, who had almost nothing to depend on but the providence of God."

From this date began his struggle in life's hard school, and right nobly did he conduct himself in the uphill path. He was attacked by fever no less than four times in succession, and his otherwise healthy constitution was seriously undermined by weakness. These afflictions and his reading of religious books turned his thoughts to higher things, and his own account of what he passed through is of considerable interest. "Meanwhile," he writes, "in 1734 and especially in 1735, the Lord, by His word, read and preached, did not a little strive with and allure my soul."

The reading of Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, contributed not a little to awaken my conscience and move my affections. Some of his hints, made worse by my mind, however, occasioned my legal covenanting with God. I made much the same use of Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ*. Indeed, such was the bias of my heart under these convulsions that I was willing to do anything but flee to Christ and His free grace alone for my salvation. In these

times I had no small delight in reading religious books, the Bible, *Rutherford's Letters*, and the like; and by means of these, particularly by means of Gouge's *Directions how to walk with God*, was led into considerable circumspection in my practice.

The sweet impressions made by sermons and books sometimes lasted days on end, and were sometimes carried to a remarkable degree. Under these I was much given to prayer, but concealed all my religious appearances to the uttermost of my power. Four fevers on end brought me so low within a few months after my mother's death as made almost every onlooker lose all hopes of my recovery; only I remember a sister, the most simple and the most serious of all us children of the family, told me that, when she was praying for me, that word I will satisfy him with long life, and show him my salvation was impressed on her mind, which, she said, made her mind perfectly easy with respect to my recovery.

Apprehensions of eternity, though I scarce looked for immediate death in these troubles, also affected me. But the death of my parents, and my leaving a small religious family to go into a larger, in the station of a herd-boy, for two or three years, was attended with not a little practical apostasy from all my former attainments. Even secret prayer was not always regularly performed. But I foolishly pleased myself by making up the number one day which had been deficient in another. It was my mercy, too, that in all my services, I was cast into families, except perhaps one, where there were some appearances of the grace of God, besides useful neighbours."

One of these families, to which he makes reference, was that of John Ogilvie, a pious farmer, between whom and his youthful herd boy there sprung up a beautiful intimacy and spiritual friendship. A contemporary of John Brown's has left a fine description of the aged farmer and the youthful shepherd that is well worthy of reproduction. "Mr. Brown," says this writer, "was born in poor circumstances. His infant life, through the death of near relatives, may be styled friendless, but as soon as he could do anything, Providence provided a friend for him in the neighbouring mountains to Abernethy in John Ogilvie, a shepherd, venerable for age, and eminent for piety.

This worthy man, though intelligent and pious, was so destitute of education, as not to be able to read English. Knowing the narrow circumstances of your father's [i.e., John Brown's] family, his serious disposition, his love of learning, his wonderful capacity, he was induced to engage him in his service, to help

him with his sheep, particularly to tend his lambs, but chiefly to read to him. They were not long companions till they became dear friends, and both of them found their connection mutually beneficial. To accommodate themselves they built a lodge on Colzie Hill, to which they repaired not only to screen themselves from the storm, but to read the Word of God, to pray, and to sing the praises of the Chief Shepherd. Thus, the wilderness and the solitary place was glad for them, and the desert rejoiced with joy and singing. The ruins of this lodge are well known, and from its sacred use obtained, and yet bears, the name of the Tabernacle. But, however, the pleasant period comes to an end; the farmer dispersed his flock, and the godly shepherds separated."

There is something particularly arresting in the picture of the aged pilgrim and his youthful companion exercised in the momentous concerns of eternity as they withdraw from their occupation of herding sheep betimes to have communion with Him who is the Good Shepherd, and who leads His flock to green pastures and by still waters. John Brown, young in years, was travelling a rough road, and was in deadly concern about his soul's salvation, though in after years, looking back on his efforts and his experiences, he concluded that there was not wanting an element of legality in his endeavours.

He made a vow to pray six times a day, while he was herding, and three when he was not. "All movings of the affections," he says, "I took for special enjoyings of God, and now thought myself sure of heaven, if I was not a hypocrite; to avoid which deceit I kept the whole of my religion as hid as I could, especially prayer. In this way of doing I continued from that time till June, 1740, or else 1741, at least, if not till now; still putting my fashion of religion in Christ's room, setting up formal prayers, etc., for my Saviour, yea, for my God." His own account at his experiences during this eventful period cannot be better told than in his own words. "At length," he writes, "after a multitude of ups and downs, glowings of affections, and sad coolings, I, after a sore fever in 1741, which somewhat awakened my concern about eternal salvation, was providentially determined, during the noontide, while the sheep which I herded rested themselves in the fold, to go and hear a sermon, at the distance of two miles, running both to it and from it.

The second or third sermon which I heard in this manner, and I had no other opportunity of hearing the greater part of the year, being preached on John vi. 64, There are some of you that believe not, by one I both before and afterwards reckoned a most general preacher, pierced my conscience as if

almost every sentence had been directed to none but me, and made me conclude myself one of the greatest unbelievers in the world. This sermon threw my soul into no small agony and concern, and made me look on all my former experiences as nothing but common operations of the Holy Spirit, and in this manner, I viewed them for many years afterwards, and often in my sermons, after I was a preacher, described the lengths which common operations might go on this footing.

But at last, I began to doubt that I had been too rash in throwing aside all my former experiences as having nothing of the really gracious in them. And I saw that it was improper for a preacher to make his own experiences, either of one kind or another, anything like a discriminating standard of his conceptions or declarations on these delicate subjects. On the morrow after, I heard a sermon on Isaiah liii. 4, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,' which enlightened and melted my soul in a manner I had not formerly experienced; and I was made as a poor lost sinner, the chief of sinners, to essay appropriating the Lord Jesus as having done all for me, and as wholly made over to me in the Gospel as the free gift of God and my all-sufficient Saviour, answerable to all my folly, ignorance, guilt, filthiness, wants, slavery, and misery. This sermon had the most powerful, pleasant influence on my soul of any that I ever heard.

By a sermon on Isaiah liv. 24, 'Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength,' my soul was also remarkably affected and drawn to the Lord. By means of these and other ordinances, the sweetness which I felt about 1735 was not only remarkably returned to me, but I had far clearer views of the freedom of God's grace "and of the exercise of taking hold of and pleading the gracious promises of the Gospel." John Brown was nineteen years at this time, and the spiritual struggles through which he was passing were the preparation by an all-wise God to make him a polished shaft.

It was in virtue of passing through such an experience that he says in his *Reflections of a Christian upon his Spiritual Elevations and Defections*: - "Sometimes He hath lifted me up, in allowing me sweet, distinct views of divine truth, and of Jesus and His Father therein. Anon, He casts me down into deep and darksome caves. I groped as a blind man at noon-day. Sometimes God, by His Word and Spirit, afforded me the most convincing assurance that He was my Saviour, my Husband, my Father, my Friend, my Physician, my God - my all and in all. Anon, He permitted me to fall into such darkness and doubts

that I could be persuaded of scarce anything inspired. Sometimes God hath lifted me up to sweet serenity of soul. Anon, He cast me into deep waters, where there was no standing. Sometimes He hath so feasted me in His ordinances that the frequent return of Sabbaths, sacramental occasions, opportunities of family, social, or secret worship, were my delight. Anon, ordinances became to me as dry breasts, and their approach a trifle, a burden; and neither before, nor in, nor after, did I enjoy the visits of Christ. Sometimes God hath carried me up to Mount Pisgah and shown me the celestial Canaan, and my irrevocable title thereto. Anon, He held back the face of His throne, and spread His cloud over it. Are thy frames, my soul, so changeable? Let me charge thee to have no confidence in thyself; but to live by faith on the Son of God and His everlasting covenant, which are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. "These words will be as a mirror to God's people, in which they can see what a truthful representation he has given of their ups and downs, of their wavering doubts and certain hopes; and above all things will they put their" Amen" to the advice: "Live by faith on the Son of God, who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

IN the last article an account of John Brown's early life: and spiritual struggles was presented to the reader, and we now proceed to give an account of the uphill course he had to tread before becoming a minister of the Gospel. For one who was to be so useful in Christ's vineyard, it is not surprising that he should have early experienced the cruel buffetings of Satan. The attack was well planned and pressed home with a persistency that embittered the life of the ardent student, whose heart was set on entering the ministry.

During this period of trial, he manifested much of that fine spirit of forbearance which characterised him earlier in life when he was made the victim of the boyish pranks of his fellow-herd, Henry Ferney. According to the story, Henry Ferney one Sabbath evening managing to get his flock into the fold before his companion, strewed the entrance with whins, and fastened a bunch where the gate was fastened. As John Brown came up with his flock, Ferney watched his opportunity and pushed him headlong into the pricking whins, and burst into a fit of boyish laughter as he saw John Brown's sorry plight.

The victim of Ferney's boyish prank rose from the ground with bleeding hands and face, and, instead of chastising him thoroughly, as might have been expected, he merely looked at him, and, in a kindly but injured tone, said, "O

Henry, what for do ye that on the Lord's night? I would have been loth to do that to you." The gentleness of the rebuke stung Henry to the quick, and he became the steadfast friend of John Brown. It was much of the same spirit he showed when called upon to endure the particularly bitter trial to which incidental reference has already been made. Brown had made extraordinary progress in the acquirement of languages, and his zeal in this direction, though it was to cost him dear, may be gathered from the following extract from a letter written in his own defence, in which he explains his method of learning Greek without the aid of grammar or teacher: -

"I learned the letters from *Orth. Tab. Gram.* marginal words in *Ovid*, and names in the New Testament; for reason told me that at least our unaccustomed tongue could not much change names from what they were in the Greek, as, *e.g.*: (1) Words authoritatively interpreted, as Eloi lama sabachtani, Talitha cumi, Siloam, Corban, Golgotha, Gabbatha, Emmanuel, Cephas, Aceldama ; for if these be changed in any language - as, for example, if Aceldama be made Acerdama, it would be false; for it would say - 1st, that the Jews called that place, Acerdama; 2nd, that Acerdama, *Hebraice*, signifies a field of blood. And so, in the matter of all words of this kind. (2) Words authoritatively called alien, as Abaddon, Armageddon. (3) Proper, obsolete, in equivalent names, as, *Hebraice*, Cainan, Arphaxad, etc., Luke iii. *Graece*, Olympas, Priscilla, etc. (4) Names changed in one place from what they were in another - Noah, Genesis x. i; Noe, Luke iii.

Now, both being alike to our English, the reason of their change is the Greek, and therefore must be in the Greek as in ours. Now, all the Greek letters may be found by comparing - Eloi lama sabachtani, Arphaxad, Capernaum, Sem, Aceldama, Booz, Ragan, Salmon. Now, to prove the powers to be what you conceive or not, look other words, as, for example: I would be sure of *Beta* that it is equal to *b*-I look Abraam, Abioud, Abia; Obed, in all which, if I have hit right on the power of *Beta* by calling it *b*, then the second form in all these four words must be like it; but this is not true, therefore the former.

Now, the way I took to learn the sense was much the same, by comparing the Greek words with the words in our Testament, beginning at the shortest verses, as I Thess. v. 16, etc.; and as I had observed many terminations with some of their oblique cases in Latin and Greek rudiments] so as I went along I made it my study to notice verbal terminations, right and oblique, still allotting them to that person, time, mood, voice, etc., their English agreed to. All this

while, I never thought of its dual number, middle voice, etc., which the Latin has not."

We have been at pains to give this long extract which to the general reader may probably appear a meaningless jumble of words, but we make bold to say that no student can read these words without a feeling of profound admiration for the resolute endeavour, crowned with marvellous success, of the laborious scholar, whose very success was to be attributed to Satanic help. When Brown had obtained a knowledge of the Greek alphabet, he was anxious to possess a copy of the Greek New Testament for himself. St. Andrews was the nearest place at which such a volume could be obtained, and the university city was twenty-four miles distant.

One evening, in 1738, he made an arrangement with his friend, Henry Ferney, to look after his flock during his absence, and then set out on his journey, reaching St. Andrews early in the morning, footsore and weary. Entering MacCulloch's bookshop in South Street, he asked for a Greek New Testament. The bookseller was quite taken aback, for Brown was fresh from the hillside, clothed in rough homespun and barefooted, and only sixteen years of age. "What will you do wi' that book? You'll no can read it," said the bookseller. "I'll try to read it," was the respectful answer of the shepherd-boy.

One of the Professors, who was in the shop, overhearing the conversation, drew near, and asked the bookseller to bring a Greek New Testament; and then, turning to John Brown, he said, "Boy, if you can read that book, you shall have it for nothing." He eagerly grasped the book, opened it, and read a passage, to the amazement of the Professor, who acknowledged that the prize was worthily won. John Brown, with his longed-for book (which is still in possession of one of his descendants), set out on his return journey, and by the afternoon he was back again on the hills of Abernethy, and while herding his sheep on the hillside he eagerly read, in the original tongue, the precious words uttered, and of the wonderful works wrought, by God's anointed One and His disciples.

It was this wonderful knowledge of Greek that was to awaken in the minds of some who ought to have known better, the dark suspicion that John Brown was in league with Satan. In conversation with Wm. Moncrieff, son of the minister of Abernethy, the former challenged Brown in these words: "I'm sure the deil has taught you some words." Brown laughed at the jest, but it was anything but a jest, as after events proved. The Rev. Alexander Moncrieff, his

minister, believed the cruel slander; - and through the years to come Brown had to reckon on his determined opposition. In a lengthy letter in his own defence, written to Moncrieff, who refused him a demission certificate, he says: -

“Here appears a right cruel procedure, for - First, your promise of a Testificate was that moved me to seek one. Second, this; in my view, was equal to the greater excommunication materially, for it implies a total casting me out of your care, and so you would have nothing to do with my Testificate. Thus, you have punished me these two years, on suspicion, with a material excommunication, the evils of which I showed in my letters, March, 1744, and January, I think, 1744, or December, 1743. I add, thirdly, thereby I am exposed to the fury of men and devils; as (1) to soldiers taking me, as being under mala fama; (2) to adherents tempting to apostasy, of which tempting they make this, your unjust treatment, their occasion; (3) to devils and mine own lusts tempting me to vent anger at you, etc., to desert the cause, because of the bad usage I met with in it. Under which trouble, as I have acted most sinfully by trespassing more and more against the Lord, so I have been guilty of hatred at you, which I have especially discovered in not using due pains to restrain you in this course of injustice and also in telling this, your treating of me, unwarily, where I should not; for which, as I wish for forgiveness of God, so I wish you'll forgive me it, humbly intimating that, through the grace that is in Jesus, I desire to forgive you and all men whatever they have done or said against me, as I would desire to be forgiven of God. So, I earnestly beg and entreat you would from this time forth do me justice by bringing my character to trial, and if you find me then guilty of scandal, punish me with some formal censure, which thing I resolve to seek from the Session as soon as possible. All this letter I write in presence of Almighty God, who punishes liars (Rev. xxi. 8; xxii. 16), and leave it to the management of Providence, desiring you to use it as the Lord shall direct you.”

The transparent candour and the spirit of sincerity which breathe throughout this letter are fine evidences of the Christian bearing of Brown under a cruel charge. In reviewing in after years the experiences of this trying time, he writes: -

“Meanwhile, I was led out to ponder my own heart and way, and made to see myself as bad before God as a devil, and much worse. This I took God to be calling me by the reproach. These things made me not a little content with my

lot, and kept me from labouring to expose my reproaches, or even to defend myself, unless when I thought I had a plain call. And I then and ever since have found that the Lord most clearly delivered me and vindicated me, when I made least carnal struggling, but laboured to bear His indignation as quietly as I could. The sting I had found in my learning, which I had so eagerly hunted after, tended to keep me humble under what I attained, or afterwards attained. The reproach which I myself had met with, tended to render me less credulous of what I heard charged on others. On these and other accounts, I have since looked on that sharp affliction as one of God's most kind providences to my soul." He also says that advantage was taken of his trials to make him desert his Church, but with no effect. "During these trials," he writes, "I had my own share of solicitation to desert the Secession, in which I was so ill-used by some of the chief managers. But, as I had not taken that side from regard to men, the Lord enabled me to take no offence at His cause, because of their maltreatment of me."

The result of these trying experiences made him leave Abernethy, never to visit it again. Meantime, he took up the work of a peg-jar, and tramped the country with a pack on his back. But John Brown was ill-fitted for such work. When he came to a house in which there were books, the scholar-pedlar forgot all about his pack, and leisurely gleaned the literary treasures that were more to him than the few shillings he might have gained by selling his merchandise. During his pedlar days the Rebellion of 1745 broke out, and John Brown joined the Volunteers. On the Volunteers being disbanded in 1746, Brown returned to his pack, which had been carefully deposited in a peat stack during his soldier days.

Shortly after his return he received the glad news that the office-bearers of Abernethy Kirk-Session had granted him a full certificate of church membership. The Rev. Alexander Moncrieff refused to sign it, and, even as late as 1752, when John Brown preached at Auchtermuchty (five miles distant from Abernethy), a member of Mr. Moncrieff's congregation who crossed the hill to hear Brown was summoned before the Session, and rebuked for listening to a "pretended minister."¹ The granting of the certificate enabled Brown to take up teaching as a step towards the desire of his heart - the entrance to the Christian ministry. He was a much greater success as a teacher than a pedlar,

¹ No doubt, the fact that Brown was a Burgher and Moncrieff an Anti-Burgher, would have influenced Moncrieff to look upon Brown as a "pretended minister."

and drew scholars from a wide radius to Gairney Bridge, where he had set up school. He was especially anxious to give his scholars religious instruction, which was imparted in no half-hearted way, as the following testimony bears record: "He was accustomed on Saturdays seriously to address his scholars. His discourses on these occasions were very warm and pathetic. The late Mr. Adam Low of Barclay informed me that, for his part, he was often, by Mr. Brown's rousing lectures, terrified from sin, and so strongly convinced of evil that it cost him many nights want of sleep, until he got clearer views than he had of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ."

When the Burgess Oath controversy rent the Secession Church in twain, Brown sided with the Burghers, and, on offering himself as a student, one of the members of the Presbytery said that, while he did not doubt the learning of Brown, yet he understood he was indebted to Satan for it. But Ralph Erskine, who knew him well, silenced all opposition by gently remarking, "I think the lad has a sweet savour of Christ about him." After spending a few sessions under the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine and the Rev. James Fisher, he was licensed to preach the Gospel in 1750. He reckoned it as one of the mysterious providences of God that, "about the same time, if not the very same night," his primary calumniator, whose part had been so earnestly maintained in opposition to him, was, after he had been several years a preacher, and a zealous preacher in appearance, necessarily excommunicated by his supporters through falling into grievous sins.

John Brown never attended a University, but he was better equipped than thousands who have attended the Arts classes and made very little use of them. It remains in succeeding articles to give an account of his ministerial career at Haddington, and to make reference to a few of his works which were, and are still, highly appreciated by serious-minded readers.

AFTER being licensed to preach the Gospel, John Brown was long in receiving a call. Two congregations invited him to be their minister - Haddington and Stow on Gala Water. He made choice of the former, although it was a smaller and less attractive sphere. It was with no light heart that he undertook the responsibilities of the solemn duties of his life work. In his "Reflections of a Candidate for the Ministerial Office" he writes: "Say, then, my conscience, as thou shalt answer at the judgment seat of Christ, am I taking this honour of myself, or am I called of God as was Aaron? Is Christ sending me, and laying a necessity upon me to preach the Gospel? While He determines me to follow

Providence, and to take no irregular step toward thrusting myself into the office, is He breathing on my soul, and, causing me to receive the Holy Ghost? Is He endowing me with tender compassion for the souls of men, and with a deep sense of my own unfitness, and earnest desire to, be sanctified and be made meet for the Master's use? In the progress of my education am I going bound in the Spirit, with - the love of Christ burning in my heart, and constraining me, rendering me willing cheerfully to suffer poverty, contempt, and hatred of all men, for His name's sake; willing, if possible, to risk my own salvation in winning others to Christ?"

It is recorded that, while the candidates for the vacancy were being heard, an old lady of deep Christian experience, On being asked as to her choice of the preachers, singled out Brown, giving as her reason, "There's a sweet savour of Christ about him." Brown entered on his work as one consecrated to the Master's service, and did not shirk the heavy duties that lay before him. He tells us: "There is a lecture, a sermon, and an evening exercise on Sabbath in the months of November, December, January, and February; and public worship begins at eleven o'clock forenoon: During the other eight months there is a lecture, two sermons, and an evening exercise; and public worship begins at ten o'clock. Only in the east country is there ordinarily no exercise on Sabbath evening. The congregation is visited once, and examined twice every year."

The pastoral visitation in itself was no small task, when it is borne in mind that his congregation was drawn from the parishes of Sport, Whittinghame, Dunbar, and Pencaitland, places seven to ten miles apart. Mr. Brown was possessed of a ready wit which helped him at times to overcome opposition. One interesting story is told of his masterly diplomacy in turning an opponent into a staunch friend. The opponent in question had utterly refused to sign Brown's call, and on the occasion of the minister's first visit to the man's house, he gave as, his reason the youth, of the minister being "owre young and inexperienced for the work." "That is just what I think myself, David," was the unexpected reply, "but, since all the rest think different, we had better not say much, since it would never dae for the like o' you and me to go in the face of the whole congregation."

As a preacher John Brown occupied a foremost place among the great preachers of Scotland. Even David Hume, the infidel, felt the genuine ring in his message, when he described Brown preaching as "if he were conscious that

the Son of God stood at his elbow.” Brown's own estimate of his work as a preacher is worth recording. “The morning,” he says; “before I was licensed, that awful Scripture, Isaiah vi. 9, 10, was much impressed on my spirit; and it hath since been, I know not how often, heavy to my heart to think how much it was fulfilled in my ministry. I know not how often I have had an anxious desire to be removed by death from, being a plague to my poor congregation. But I have often taken myself, and considered this as my folly, and begged of Him that, if it was not for His glory to remove me by death, He would make me successful in His work; for as to transportations; I had not a good opinion of most of them, and I looked on it as, so far my mercy that my congregation was so small. After all, I dare not but confess Christ to be the best Master ever I served. Often in preaching, and otherwise, I have found His words the joy and rejoicing of my heart. He hath often laid matter before me in my studies, and enabled me with pleasure to deliver it. God in our nature, and doing all for us, and being all to us; free grace reigning through His imputed righteousness; God's free grant of Christ and His salvation, and of Himself in Christ, and the believing appropriation founded on that grant, and the comfort and holiness of heart flowing from that, have been my most delightful themes. And though I sometimes touched on the public evils of the day, yet my soul never so entered into these points. No sermons I ever preached were, I think, sweeter to my own soul than those on Psalm cxlii. 7 (first clause); Isaiah xlv. 5 (first clause); Isaiah xlv. 4; lx. 20 (last clause); I Tim. i. 15, 16; Rev. iii. 21; and John xi. 28. The little knowledge which I had of my own uncommonly wicked heart, and of the Lord's dealings with my own soul, helped me much in my sermons. And I observed that I was apt to deliver that which I had extracted thence in a more feeling and earnest manner than other matters.”

John Brown was a voluminous writer, and, though his works are not much read nowadays, they deserve a better fate. His Dictionary of the Bible, which first saw the light in 1769, had been on the stocks for ever ten years. Brown was well equipped for the work; his knowledge of oriental languages, classics, history, divinity and natural science was beyond anything possessed by his contemporaries. To this must be added his extraordinary knowledge of Scripture. There were three editions called for in the author's lifetime, and down to 1868 few years elapsed when a publisher did not announce a new edition. His biographer has well said of it; “While it revealed Brown's extraordinary powers, it proved of immense service to biblical study, and was

treasured as being a source of information on Bible themes, and acknowledged by not a few as being, in addition, a means of spiritual quickening.”

In 1767 John Brown was appointed Theological Professor of the Burgher Secession Church, and his work among his students made a lasting impression upon some of them. There was a faithful, direct dealing, which, though at times disconcerting to the student, showed the fatherly interest of the teacher. “I know the vanity of your heart,” he says, in writing to one of his students, “and that you will feel mortified that your congregation is very small in comparison with those of your brethren around you; but assure yourself, on the word of an old man, that when you come to give an account, you will think you have had enough.” Among his most famous students may be mentioned the name of Dr. Lawson, Selkirk, whose biography by Dr. Macfarlane is one of the classics of Scottish ecclesiastical biography.

It was not only to his students that John Brown wrote letters of wise council, and admonition, perfumed with the sweet piety fragrance of gracious piety, but to the sorrowful and distressed; whose burdens were heavy, and whose hearts were sore distressed.

He carried on a correspondence with the Countess of Huntingdon on the doctrine of justification by faith, and in one of his letters as seraphic as one of Samuel Rutherford’s, he says: “Truly, noble Lady, let your life have Christ for its all and in all (Phil. i. 21). Let it be a looking to Christ, a coming to Christ, a receiving out of Christ’s fullness, a resting on, and rejoicing in Christ; and, *in fine*, a worshipping and serving of the Lord Christ. Amidst all, the temptations of a high life; let your meditation on Him be sweet. When you awake, may you still be with Him! What are all the dignities, the glories of creation, in respect of Him, the brightness of His Father’s glory, the King, the God of glory? O! sweet to us, the man, God’s fellow! The Word made flesh! God bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh! Our Brother born for adversity! Our Friend that sticketh closer than a brother! Immanuel, God with us! Our Mediator between God and us! Thrice blessed, thrice wondrous, and effectual means of reconciliation! Blessed surety of the better, testament, that, undertook and paid our infinite debt, till God could take no more! Powerful Redeemer that takes us as a prey from the mighty, and delivers us, the lawful captives! Blessed Prophet, to whom God hath given the tongue of the learned to speak words in season to our weary souls, and whose words are spirit and life, and, like new wine that goes down sweetly, they cause our dull and dumb hearts to

sing! Great High Priest of things to come, that loved us and gave Himself for us! All-prevailing Advocate with the Father, that welcomes us, with all our perplexed cases, and desperate-like cases! Our Prince of Peace, to command deliverance for us, subdue our mighty lusts, defend and support us against every foe! “

JOHN BROWN was a voluminous writer, and some of his works carried his name and fame far beyond Scotland. This was notably the case in connection with his Self-Interpreting Bible and Dictionary of the Bible. The former was not issued until 1778, but it was long in preparation. Brown's aim was to reach the common people, and his work was planned with this end in view....a specimen of the pithy and instructive way he commented on Scripture may be taken from his remarks on the Book of Ruth (chapter i.), in, reference to Naomi and her daughter-in-law: - “Numerous and diversified are the arrows in God's quiver for the punishment of men's sins, and often, while His enemies’ riot in plenty, His, people are pinched with scarcity and want. A diligent care to provide for our family is highly commendable; but it is seldom safe to flee from God's land, though He frown on it, or to suffer scarcity of bread to draw us from the ordinances of God. It is not in fleeing from God's mighty hand; but in humbling ourselves under it, that safety lies. It is not in outrunning crosses, but in taking them up and following Christ, that true comfort is to be had. Young people often mistake in their marriage, through want or neglect of their parents’ advice. But marriages and deaths are near neighbours; and one death in a family is but the forerunner and warning of another. Both comforts and crosses are often nearer us than we expect; and if we are shut up into the society of the wicked, we should escape for our life as soon as our hindrances are removed. It is a mercy when God embitters our condition of distance from Himself, that we may be weaned from it, and hastened to our heavenly home; but yet it is pleasant to see near relations knit together in love, and loath to, part. With the most strong and fixed resolution should we set out in the Lord's way, as we know not from what repeated and strong temptations we may have to turn back; but the difficulties of the way, which discourage the temporary believer, will but bind the faithful soul the more closely to Jesus Christ. Nothing, no not death, can separate them from Him and His people. Poverty and age make great alterations on mankind; and it is proper that all around should remark it with solemn awe and cordial sympathy; for surely it is but madness to set our heart on that comeliness and wealth which so quickly fade. Let us, therefore, keep waiting on God in the way of His judgments; in

patience possessing our souls; eyeing the Lord's hand in all that we meet with; humbling ourselves under humbling providences; mourning, but never murmuring, under His hand; and ever remarking how the minutest circumstance of our lives are directed by the over-ruling providence of God."

Charles Simeon, in a letter to Brown, says; "Your *Self-Interpreting Bible* seems to stand in lieu of all other comments; and I am daily receiving so much edification and instruction from it, that I would wish it in the hands of all serious ministers." The fame of the *Self-Interpreting Bible* travelled far afield, and Dr. Brown, of *Horae Subseciva* fame, tells an amusing anecdote of how, on the occasion when cholera was raging in Chatham, he had entered into a house on his professional duties, and on the woman of the house learning that his name was Dr John Brown, she seriously asked him "if he was the son of the *Self-Interpreting Bible*."

The heated and bitter controversy over the Burgess Oath, which rent the Secession Church in twain, took place before Brown was ordained. But his sympathies were with the Burghers, and when the redoubtable Adam Gib published his *Present Truth: A Display of the Secession Testimony*, Brown entered the lists against the noted controversialist of the Anti-Burghers, and in his "*Re-exhibition of the Testimony Vindicated*, in, opposition to the unfair Account given of it by the Rev. Adam Gib," dealt with matters which he considered had not been fairly stated by Gib. Brown had gone to the authoritative documents; Gib had his information from those who had taken part in "the Breach," and once he took up his position, it was not everyone that would move him. The correspondence between Brown and Gib ended more amicably, than is usual with controversialists by the latter writing, "I know myself to be a well-wisher to you - with all those you are in connection with."

Brown took the deepest interest in the instruction of the young in the good way set before them in the Word of Life. Sometimes this was done by letters, sometimes by oral instruction. With this end in view, he published his *Lives of Pious Youths*, containing brief accounts of Emelia Geddie, Christian Ker, Susanna Bicks, Sarah Howley, Katharine Bruen, and John Jimeway, all of whom manifested a tender and childlike trust in their Redeemer.

As he felt the days were drawing near when he must leave the world, and all that was in it, he wrote an affectionate message for his younger children - there were six of them, from four years to fourteen. He thus addressed them:- "My dear children,- Believing that God hath made with me, and with my seed

after me, His everlasting covenant, to be a God to me and to my seed, I did in your baptism, and often since and now do, before God and His angels, make a solemn surrender of you all into the hands of my God, and my father's God, and of the God of your mother, and her father's God: and in the presence of that God, and as ye shall answer at His second coming, I charge you - (1) To learn diligently the principles of our Christian and Protestant religion from your Catechism, and Confession of Faith; but especially from your Bible. God's Word hath a light and life, a power and sweetness in it, which no other book hath, and by it your souls must be quickened and live, or you must be damned for ever: and the more closely you press the words of the Bible to your own hearts; and pray and think over them before God, you will find them the more powerful and pleasant. My soul hath found inexpressibly more sweetness and satisfaction in a single line of the Bible - nay, in two such words as these, *Thy God and My God*,² than all the pleasures found in the things of the world since the creation could equal, etc.

As the shadows were beginning to lengthen he wrote a *Short Memoir* of his life, in which he surveys the past as one soon to be face to face with the realities of eternity. He recognises God's great kindness to him, notwithstanding the smallness of his salary, and in times when such matters are oftener before the minds of many than ever they have been before, or perhaps should be, it is well that John Brown's words should be pondered over. "Notwithstanding," he says, "my minding earthly things, the Lord so managed my wicked heart, that it has rather been my care to husband well what He provided for me, than to attempt a greedy catching of what did not come of its own accord, and notwithstanding my eager desire of books, I choosed rather to want them, and much more other things, than run into debt. Notwithstanding I had but forty pounds of stipend for a considerable number of years, and then forty-five and at last fifty, in one of the dearest places of the country, the Lord gave me such contentment with it as made my lot preferable to some who had the double or near to it. It was also my mercy that my wives³ were averse to unnecessary wastefulness, and cheerfully ready to add the interest of their money for the helping out of the stipend. When I was the first introducer of the administration of the Lord's Supper twice in the year, I

² Time and again Brown makes such a reference in his correspondence. On one occasion he said to his students: - "I recollect that, when sitting on the braes of Abernethy, hearing Mr. Wilson of Perth, I got more insight into the marrow of the Gospel, thy God and my God, than I ever got before or since. Alas! that it was so long ago."

³ He was twice married

reckoned it a providential favour that I then had no more than twenty shillings allowed me for extraordinary expenses on such occasions, which being the case, no one could pretend that I pushed that more frequent administration of that ordinance in order to enrich myself. By such means the Lord hath so managed my heart, that to-day I think none can say that they ever heard me complain of a small stipend, and I may add that we have never been in debt or in straits, as some who had much more income. I have been helped to live as one that would gladly spend and be spent for my people, and aimed at seeking not theirs but them; Yet not I, but the grace of God; did it all" In one of his dying utterances he says: "Were God to present me with the dukedom of Argyll, on the one hand, and the being a minister of the Gospel, with the stipend which I have had, on the other, so pleasant hath the ministry been to me, notwithstanding all my weakness and fears of little success, I would instantly prefer the latter."

As the days of his pilgrimage were fast hastening to an end, Christ, as his Redeemer, was becoming more and more precious to him, and in his last letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, he writes (and the testimony has a deepened interest when one remembers the great love he had for knowledge and his great attainments as a scholar):- "Little as I know of Christ-and it is my dreadful sin and shame that I know so little of Him - I would not exchange the learning of one hour's fellowship with Christ for all the liberal learning in ten thousand universities, during ten thousand ages, even though angels were to be my teachers. Nor would I exchange the pleasure my soul hath found in a word or two about Christ, as thy God; my God, for all the cried-up pleasures of creation since the world began. For what, then, would I exchange the being for ever with Christ, to behold His glory, see God in Him as He is, and enter into the joy of my Lord?"

On 25th February, 1787, he conducted the three services, preaching, in the morning from Luke ii. 26 - "It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord Christ." His last sermon was from the words, "To you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts xiii. 26). At the three services he affectionately addressed the people, and at the night service he referred to his presence in the pulpit that night as probably for the last time, and bade an affectionate adieu to all who had diligently waited on his ministry. He lingered for about five months after this in much weakness, but in a spirit of resigned contentment. One of his younger children on one occasion slipped into his room to ask how he was. The affectionate father drew her near

to him, and, placing his hand on her head, said :- “Now, truly little dear, mind to pray to God; your father must soon leave you, but cry, unto Jesus, - Thou art my Father, and the guide of my youth, and then, though you will not have a room like this to come to and see your father in, you will be taken to a far, better Father's room.” Three years later she received her call, in the early dawning of her youth, to go hence.

Like John Knox, at the end, Brown made reference to the word on which the Lord had caused him to hope, and said, in reference to the 91st Psalm: “I know a man to whom almost every line of that Psalm has been sweet. I think, if ever God touched my heart, He went through that Psalm with me.” On the 19th June, 1787, he passed to his rest. One of his last utterances, in answer to a question by one of his friends, was: “I have left my anxiety about His Church, and about everything else, on the Lord; and, indeed, were it not for a God in my nature, I would reckon the present case of the Church very hopeless; but, in the view of Christ, I am persuaded that she will yet remarkably revive on earth.”