

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TEEMS THE DOOR-KEEPER.

BY JOHN BROWN, M.D.

(Concludes.)

Now, my dear friends, I am in the *fancical* line as well as *Teems*, and, in virtue of my *lectures*, I begin my exegetical remarks on the pursuit of truth. By the by, I should have told Sir Henry that it is truth, not knowledge, I was to be after. Now, all knowledge should be true, but it isn't; much of what is called knowledge is very little worth, even when true, and much of the best truth is not in a strict sense knowable—rather it is felt and believed.

Exegetical, you know, is the grand and fashionable word now-a-days for explanatory, it means bringing out of a passage all that is in it and nothing more. For my part, being in *Teems's* line, I am not so particular as to the nothing more. We *fancical* men are much given to make somethings of nothings; indeed the noble Italians call imagination and poetic fancy *the little more*; its very function is to embellish and intensify the actual and the common. Now, you must not laugh at me, or it, when I announce the passage from which I mean to preach upon the pursuit of truth and the possession of wisdom;

"On Tintock tap there is a mist,
And in the mist there is a kist,
And in the kist there is a cap;
Tak' up the cap and sup the drop,
And set the cap on Tintock tap."

As to what Sir Henry* would call the context, we are saved all trouble, there being none, the passage being self-contained, and as destitute of relations as Melchisedec.

Tintock, you all know, or should know, is a big prophetic hill in Lanarkshire, standing alone, and dominating like a king over the Upper Ward. Then we all understand what a *mist* is; and it is worth remembering that as it is more difficult to penetrate, to illuminate, and to see through mist than darkness, so it is easier to enlighten and overcome ignorance than error, confusion, and mental mist. Then a *kist* is Scotch for chest, and a *cap* the same for cup, and *drop* for drop. Well, then, I draw out these queer old lines.

First,—That to gain real knowledge to get it at first hand—you must go up the Hill Difficulty—some *Tintock*, something you see from afar; and you must *climb*, you must energize, as Sir William Hamilton and Dr. Chalmers said and did; you must turn your back upon the plain and you must mainly go alone and on your own legs. Two boys may start together on going up *Tintock* and meet at the top, but the journeys are separate—each takes his own line.

Secondly,—You start for your *Tintock* top with a given object—to get into the mist and get the drop, and you do this chiefly because you have the truth-hunting instinct; you long to know what is hidden there, for there is a wild and urgent charm in the unknown; and you want to realize for yourself what others, it may have been ages ago, tell they have found there.

Thirdly,—There is no road up; no omnibus to the top of *Tintock*; you must zig-zag it in your own way, and as I have already said, most part of it alone.

Fourthly,—This climbing, this exaltation, and buckling to of the mind, of itself does you good; it is capital exercise, and you find out many a thing by the way. Your lungs play freely; your mouth fills with the sweet waters of keen action; the hill tries your wind and mettle, supples and hardens your joints and limbs; quickens and rejoices, while it tests your heart.

Fifthly,—You may have many a fall, many a false step; you slip back, you tumble into a *morhagg* you stumble over the baffling stones; you break your shins and lose your temper, and the finding of it makes you keep it better the next time; you get more patient, and yet more eager, and not unoften you come to a stand-still; run yourself up against, or to the edge of some impossible precipice, some insoluble problem, and have to turn for your life; and you may find yourself overhead in a treacherous *weller*, whose soft inviting cushion of green has decoyed many a one before you.

Sixthly,—You are forever mistaking the top, thinking you are at it, when, behold! there it is, as if further off than ever, and you may have to humble yourself in a hidden valley before reascending; and so on you go, at times flinging yourself down in the elastic heather, stretched, panting, with your face to the sky, or gazing far away athwart the widening horizon.

Seventhly,—As you get up, you may see how the world below lessens and reveals itself, comes up to you as a whole, with its just proportions and relations; how small the village you live in looks, and the house in which you were born; how the plan of the place comes out; there is the quiet churchyard, and a lamb is nibbling at that infant's grave; there, close to the little church, your mother rests till the great day; and there far off you may trace the river winding through the plain, coming like human life, from darkness to darkness—from its source in some wild, upland solitude to its eternity, the sea. But you have rested long enough, so up and away! Take the hill once again! Every effort is a victory and joy—new skill and power and relish takes you farther from the world below, nearer the clouds and heavens; and you may note that the more you move up towards the pure blue depths of the sky—the more lucid and the more unsearchable—the farther off, the more withdrawn into their own clear infinity do they seem. Well, then, you get to the upper story, and you find it less difficult, less steep than lower down; after so plain and level that you can run off in an ecstasy to the crowning cairn, to the sacred mist—within whose cloudy shrine rests the unknown secret; some great truth of God and of your own soul; something

that is not to be gotten for gold down on the plain, but may be taken here; something that no man can give or take away; something that you must work for and learn yourself, and which, once yours, is safe beyond the chances of time.

Eighthly,—You enter that luminous cloud, stooping, and as a little child—as indeed all the best kingdoms are entered—and, pressing on, you come in the shadowy light to the long-dreamt-of ark—the chest. It is shut—it is locked; but if you are the man I take you to be, you have the key; put it gently in, steadily, and home. But what is the key? It is the love of truth; nothing more nor less; no other key opens it; no false one, however cunning, can pick that lock, no assault of hammer, however stout, can force it open. But with its own key a little child may open it—often does open it—it goes so sweetly, so with a will. You lift the lid, you are all alone, the cloud is round you with a sort of tender light of its own, shutting out the outer world, filling you with an *ecce* joy, as if alone, and yet not alone. You see the cup within, and in it the one crystalline, unimaginable, inestimable drop; glowing and tremulous, as if alive. You take the cup, you sup the drop; it enters into and becomes of the essence of yourself; and so, in humble gratitude and love—"in sober certainty of waking bliss"—you gently replace the cup. It will gather again—it is forever, ever gathering; no man, woman, or child ever opened that chest, and found no drop in the cup. It might not be the very drop expected; it will serve their purpose none the worse, often much the better.

And now, bending down, you shut the lid, which you hear locking itself afresh against all but the sacred key. You leave the now hallowed mist. You look out on the old familiar world again, which somehow looks both new and old. You descend, making your observations over again, throwing the light of the present on the past, and past and present set against the boundless future. You hear coming up to you the homely sounds—the sheep-dog's bark, "the cock's shrill clarion"—from the farm at the hill-foot; you hear the ring of the blacksmith's *study*; you see the smoke of his forge; your mother's grave has the long shadows of evening lying across it, the sunlight falling on the letters of her name, and on the number of her years; the lamb is asleep in the field of the infant's grave. Speedily you are at your own door. You enter with wearied feet and thankful heart; you shut the door, and you kneel down and pray to your Father in heaven, the Father of lights, your reconciled Father, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and our God and Father in and through Him. And as you lie down in your own delightful bed, before you fall asleep, you think over again your ascent of the Hill Difficulty—its baffling heights, its reaches of dreary moorland, its shifting gravel, its precipices, its quagmires, its little wells of living waters near the top, and all its dread magnificence; its calm, restful summit, the hush of silence there, the all-aloneness of the place and hour; its peace, its sacredness, its divineness. You see again the mist, the ark, the cup, the gleaming drop, and recalling the sight of the world below, the earth and all its fullness, you say to yourself:

"Those are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty, thine, this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair; Thyself how wondrous then!
Unspeakable, who sit'st above these heavens."

And finding the burden too heavy even for these glorious lines, you take refuge in the Psalms:

Praise ye the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise Him in the heights.
Praise Him in the firmament of His power.
Praise Him, all His angels: praise ye Him, all His hosts.
Praise ye Him, sun and moon: praise Him, all ye stars of light.
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps.
Fire, and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfilling His word:
Mountains, and all hills, fruitful trees, and all cedars.
Beasts, and all cattle, creeping things, and flying fowl.
Kings of the earth, and all people, princes, and all judges of the earth.

Both young men, and maidens, old men, and children.
Let them praise the name of the Lord. For His name alone is excellent: His glory is above the earth and heaven.
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.
Bless THE LORD, O, my soul!

I need hardly draw the moral of this our somewhat *fancical* exertion and exegesis. You can all make it out, such as it is. It is the toil, and the joy, and the victory in the search of truth; not the taking on trust, or learning by rote, not by heart, what other men count or call true; but the vital appropriation, the assimilation of truth to ourselves, and of ourselves to truth. All truth is of value, but one truth differs from another in weight and in brightness, in worth; and you need not me to tell you that spiritual and eternal truth, the truth as it is in Jesus, is the best. And don't think that your own hand has gotten you the victory, and that you had no unseen aid, it may be, unfelt and unacknowledged hand guiding you up the hill. Unless the Lord had been at and on your side, all your labour would have been in vain, and worse. No two things are more inscrutable, or less uncertain, than man's spontaneity and man's helplessness. Freedom and grace are the two poles. It is His doing that you are led to the right hill and the right road, for there are other *Tintocks*, with other *kists*, and other drops. Work out, therefore, your own knowledge with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, and to know of His good pleasure. There is no explaining, and there is no disbelieving this.

And now, before bidding you good-bye, did you ever think of the spiritual meaning of the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, as connected with our knowledge and our ignorance, our light and darkness, our gladness and our sorrow? The every-day use of this divine alternation to the wandering children of Israel is plain enough. Darkness is best seen against light, and light against darkness; and its use, in a deeper sense of keeping for ever before them the immediate presence of God in the midst of them, is not less plain; but I sometimes think that we, who are still in the wilderness, and coming up from our Egypt, and its flesh-pots, and, on our way, let us hope, through God's grace,

to the celestial Canaan, may draw from those old-world signs and wonders that, in the mid-day of knowledge, with daylight all about us, there is, if one could but look for it, that perpetual pillar of cloud—that sacred darkness which haunts all human knowledge, often the most at its highest noon; that "look that threatens the profane;" that something, and above all, that sense of *Some One*, that Holy One, who inhabits eternity and its praises, who makes darkness His secret place, His pavilion round about, darkness and thick clouds of the sky.

And, again, that in the deepest, thickest night of doubt, of fear, of sorrow, of despair; that then, and fall the more, then—if we will but look in the right *air*, and with the seeing eye and the understanding heart—there may be seen that Pillar of fire, of light and of heat, to guide and quicken and cheer knowledge and love, that everlasting love which we know to be the Lord's. And how much better off are we than the chosen people? Their pillars were on earth, divine in their essence, but subject, doubtless, to earthly perturbations and interferences; but our guiding light is in the heavens, towards which may we take earnest heed that we are journeying.

"Once on the raging seas I rode,
The storm was loud, the night was dark;
The ocean yawned, and rudely blowed
The wind that tossed my foundering bark.

Deep horror then, my vitals froze,
Death-struck, I ceased the tide to stem,
When suddenly a star arose—
It was the Star of Bethlehem!

It was my guide, my light, my all,
It bade my dark forebodings cease;
And through the storm and danger's thrall,
It led me to the port in peace.

Now safely moored, my peril's o'er,
I'll sing first in night's diadem,
For ever and for evermore,
The Star, the Star of Bethlehem!"

THE END.

CHINESE ORIGIN OF GUNPOWDER.

A writer in the *North China Herald* on the history of gunpowder in China, asserts that this explosive was known in the seventh century of our era. The alchemists of the Han dynasty and subsequently in the fourth and following centuries, worked with saltpetre and sulphur, as well as cinnabar, red oxide of lead, and other common compounds. But in the seventh century we find gunpowder used to make a cracking sound, and to afford an agreeable sight to the court of Sui Yang-ti, Emperor of that time. The earliest exhibitions of fire-works mentioned in Chinese history belong to that date. The substances used in the composition of gunpowder are all native to China, and the writer appears to prove conclusively that the Arabs derived the art of fire-work making, as well as gunpowder, from the Chinese. The discovery once made, the Chinese alchemists, owing to the badness of their hypotheses and the fatality of their aims, were slow at improvement. But the doctors of the Arab colonies in China, carried to Bagdad the germs of the Chinese discoveries, and there they were elaborated into new forms. In short, in many arts and sciences, the Arabs learned from China, and, assisted by Nestorians, Jews, and Greeks, improved on what they learned. In course of years cannon, matchlocks, and shells for use in sieges were brought to China from Mohammedan countries. There are faint traces in the eleventh century of rude firearms; in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the records of their use in the Chinese wars become frequent and distinct. The Golden Tartars, in their wars with South China in the twelfth century, used cannon which they called "heaven-shaking thunder." In an iron tube was placed powder, which was "set fire to, and would burn down half a square of houses and pierce a coat of mail made of iron rings." It is expressly stated that Genghis Khan, the Mongol conqueror, used cannon in his wars. Kublai Khan also used these weapons at a siege celebrated in Chinese history—that of Siangyang. Hearing, it is said, the sound of the explosion, which shook the sky, and seeing that the balls entered seven feet into the earth, the Chinese defenders of the city capitulated. It is clear that China owed its knowledge of artillery, to the Mohammedans. In the fourteenth century commenced the European intercourse with China, which then abandoned the Arabs and took the Portuguese as teachers in the construction of weapons of warfare.

ITALIAN DOCTORS.

The October "Century" contains some amusing experiences of "A Foreigner in Florence," who says of Italian doctors: "Physicians have, like judges of the criminal courts, no social position and no knowledge of medicine, according to our ideas. They are, as a rule, far behind the age. They still cling blindly to bleeding—unless they have changed during the last few years—and weaken their patients by the old system of dieting. I have seen cases conducted with such ignorance of the commonest laws of nature as would make any of our physicians faint with horror. Heat, starvation, and dirt are their general remedies for almost everything. In cases of scarlet fever, which are not common, however, they order the doors and windows to be carefully shut, that no breath of air may get to the patient—absolutely drawing the bed-curtains around them; forbid washing of any description, even to the hands and face, and no change of bed or body linen during the entire illness.

"There is one malady prevalent in Italy which I sincerely believe to be produced, nine times out of ten, by these doctors, and that is miliary fever. Unless a patient's symptoms in the beginning of an illness indicate the disease very clearly, the doctor, on the principle of 'when in doubt play trumpets,' pronounces it 'miliary'; but there being no eruption, which is an evidence of that disease, they regard it as suppressed, and so, very dangerous. They then proceed to produce a rash by covering the poor sufferer with as many blankets as he can bear, excluding every breath of air from the room (canning him, so to speak), and then forbidding

*This was read to Sir Henry W. Moncrieff's Young Men's Association, November, 1882.

†In this pursuit, whether we take or whether we lose our game, the chase is certainly of service.—Burd.