

CHOICE LITERATURE.

RAB AND HIS FRIENDS.

BY JOHN BROWN, M.D.

(Concluded.)

The operating theatre 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 match, her neckerchief, her white dimity short-gown, her black bombazine 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 perplexed and dangerous; forever cocking her ear and dropping it as fast.

Ailie stepped upon 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 some thing 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;—all the better for James, it kept his eye and his mind off Ailie.

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 hopped her up carefully,—and, resting on James and me, Ailie went to her room. Rab following. We put her to bed. James took off his heavy shoes, crammed with tacketts, heel-capt and toe-capt, and put them carefully under the table, saying, "Maister John, I'm for name o' yer stryngie nurse bodies for Ailie. I'll be her nurse, and I'll gang about on my stockin' soles as canny as pussy." And so he did; and handy and clever, and swift and tender as any woman, was that horny-handed, snell, peremptory little man. Every thing she got he gave her; he seldom slept; and often I saw his small shrewd eyes out of the darkness, fixed on her. As before, they spoke little.

Rab behaved well, never moving, showing us how meek and gentle he could be, and occasionally, in his sleep, letting us know that he was demolishing some adversary. He took a walk with me every day, generally to the candle-maker Row; but he was sombre and mild; declined doing battle, though some hot cases offered, and indeed submitted to sundry indignities; and was always very ready to turn and come faster back, and trotted up the stairs with much lightness, and went straight to that door.

Jess, the mare, had been sent, with her weather-worn cart, to Howgate, and had doubtless her own dim and placid meditations and confusions, on the absence of her master and Rab, and her unnatural freedom from the road and her cart.

For some days Ailie did well. The wound healed "by the first intention," for as James said, "Oor Ailie's skin's ower clean to beil." The students came in quiet and anxious, and surrounded her bed. "He said he liked to see their young honest faces." The surgeon dressed her, and spoke to her in his own short kind way, pitying her through his eyes. Rab and James outside the circle.—Rab being now reconciled, and even cordial, and having made up his mind that as yet nobody required worrying, but, as you may suppose, *semper paratus*.

So far well, but four days after the operation my patient had a sudden and long shivering, a "groosin'," as she called it. I saw her soon after; her eyes were too bright, her cheek coloured; she was restless, and ashamed of being so; the balance was lost; mischief had begun. On looking at the wound, a blush of red told the secret; her pulse was rapid, her breathing anxious and quick, she wasn't herself, as she said, and was vexed at her restlessness. We tried what we could. James did every thing, was every where; never in the way, never out of it. Rab subsided under the table into a dark place, and was motionless, all but his eye, which followed every one. Ailie got worse; began to wander in her mind, gently; was more demonstrative in her ways to James, rapid in her questions, and sharp at times. He was vexed, and said, "She was never that way afore; no, never." For a time she knew her head was wrong, and was always asking our pardon—the dear gentle old woman; then delirium set in strong, without pause. Her brain gave way, and then came that terrible spectacle,

"The intellectual power, through words and things, Went sounding on its dim and perilous way;"

she sang bits of old songs and psalms, stopping suddenly, mingling the Psalms of David, and the diviner words of his Son and Lord, with homely odds and ends and scraps of ballads.

Nothing more touching, or in a sense more strangely beautiful, did I ever witness. Her tremulous, rapid, affectionate, eager Scotch voice—the swift, aimless, bewildered mind, the baffled utterance, the bright and perilous eye; some wild words, some household cares, something for James, the names of the dead, Rab called rapidly in a "fremyt" voice, and he starting up, surprised, and slinking off as if he were to blame somehow, or had been dreaming he heard. Many eager questions and leechings which James and I could make nothing of, and on which she seemed to set her

all, and then sink back un-understood. It was very sad, but better than many things that are not called sad. James hovered about, put out and miserable, but active and exact as ever; read to her, when there was a lull, short bits from the Psalms, prose and metre, chanting the latter in his own rude and serious way, showing great knowledge of the fit words, bearing up like a man, and doating over her as his "ain Ailie." "Ailie, ma woman!" "Ma ain bonnie wee dawtie!"

"The end was drawing on: the golden bowl was breaking; the silver cord was fast being loosed—that *animula blandula, vagula, hospes, comesque*, was about to flee. The body and the soul—companions for sixty years—were being sundered, and taking leave. She was walking, alone, through the valley of that shadow, into which one day we must all enter—and yet she was not alone, for we know whose rod and staff were comforting her.

One night she had fallen quiet, and as we hoped, asleep; her eyes were shut. We put down the gas and sat watching her. Suddenly she sat up in bed, and taking a bedgown which was lying on it rolled up, she held it eagerly to her breast—to the right side. We could see her eyes bright with surpassing tenderness and joy, bending over this bundle of clothes. She held it as a woman holds her sucking child; opening out her nightgown impatiently, and holding it close, and brooding over it, and murmuring foolish little words, as one whom his mother comforteth, and who sucks and is satisfied. It was pitiful and strange to see her wasted dying look, keen and yet vague—her immense love.

"Preserve me!" groaned James, giving away. And then she rocked back and forward, as if to make it sleep, hushing it, and wasting on it her infinite fondness. "Wae's me, doctor; I declare she's thinking it's that bairn." "What bairn?" "The only bairn we ever had; our wee Mysie, and she's in the Kingdom, forty years and mair." It was plainly true: the pain in the breast telling its urgent story to a bewildered, ruined brain, was misread and mistaken; it suggested to her the uneasiness of a breast full of milk, and then the child; and so again once more they were together, and she had her ain wee Mysie in her bosom.

This was the close. She sank rapidly: the delirium left her; but, as she whispered, she was "clean silly;" it was the lightning before the final darkness. After having for some time lain still—her eyes shut, she said, "James!" He came close to her, and lifting up her calm, clear, beautiful eyes, she gave him a long look, turned to me kindly but shortly, looked for Rab but could not see him, then turned to her husband again, as if she would never leave of looking, shut her eyes, and composed herself. She lay for some time breathing quick, and passed away so gently, that when we thought she was gone, James, in his old-fashioned way, held the mirror to her face. After a long pause, one small spot of dimness was breathed out; it vanished away, and never returned, leaving the blank clear darkness of the mirror without a stain. "What is our life? it is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Rab all this time had been full awake and motionless; he came forward beside us: Ailie's hand, which James had held, was hanging down; it was soaked with his tears; Rab licked it all over carefully, looked at her, and returned to his place under the table.

James and I sat, I don't know how long, but for some time—saying nothing: he started up abruptly, and with some noise went to the table, and putting his right, fore and middle fingers each into a shoe, pulled them out, and put them on, breaking one of the leather latches, and muttering in anger, "I never did the like o' that afore!"

I believe he never did; nor after either. "Rab!" he said roughly, and pointing with his thumb to the bottom of the bed. Rab leapt up, and settled himself, his head and eye to the dead face. "Maister John, ye'll wait for me," said the carrier, and disappeared in the darkness, thundering down stairs in his heavy shoes. I ran to a front window: there he was, already round the house, and out at the gate, and fleeing like a shadow.

I was afraid about him, and yet not afraid; so I sat down beside Rab, and being wearied, fell asleep. I awoke from a sudden noise outside. It was November, and there had been a heavy fall of snow. Rab was *in statu quo*; he heard the noise too, and plainly knew it, but never moved. I looked out; and there, at the gate in the dim morning—for the sun was not up, was Jess and the cart—a cloud of steam rising from the old mare. I did not see James; he was already at the door, and came up to the stairs, and met me. It was less than three hours since he left, and he must have posted out—who knows how—to Howgate, full nine miles off; yoked Jess, and driven her astonished into town. He had an armful of blankets, and was streaming with perspiration. He nodded to me, spread out on the floor two pairs of clean old blankets, having at their corners "A. G., 1794," in large letters in red worsted. These were the initials of Alison Graeme, and James may have looked in at her from without—himself unseen but not unthought of—when he was, "wat, wat, and weary," and after having walked many a mile over the hills, may have seen her sitting while "a' the lave were sleepin'," and by the firelight working her name on the blankets, for her ain James's bed.

He motioned Rab down, and taking his wife in his arms, laid her in the blankets, and hopped her carefully and firmly up, leaving the face uncovered; and then lifting her, he nodded again sharply to me, and with a resolved but utterly miserable face, strode along the passage, and down stairs, followed by Rab. I followed with a light; but he didn't need it. I went out holding stupidly the candle in my hand in the calm frosty air; we were soon at the gate. I could have helped him, but I saw he was not to be meddled with, and he was strong, and did not need it. He laid her down as tenderly, as safely, as he had lifted her out ten days before—as tenderly as when he had her first in his arms when she was only "A. G."—sorted her, leaving that beautiful scaled face open to the heavens; and then taking Jess by the head, he moved away. He did not notice me, neither did Rab, who presided behind the cart.

I stood till they passed through the long shadow of the

College, and turned up Nicholson Street. I heard the solitary cart sound through the streets, and die away and come again; and I returned, thinking of that company going up Libberton Brae, then along Roslin Muir, the morning light touching the Pentlands and making them onlooking ghosts; then down the hill through Auchindinny woods, past "haunted Woodhouselee;" and as daybreak came sweeping up the bleak Lammermuirs, and fell on his own door, the company would stop, and James would take the key, and lift Ailie up again, laying her on her own bed, and, having put Jess up, would return with Rab and shut the door.

James buried his wife, with his neighbours mourning, Rab inspected the solemnity from a distance. It was snow, and that black ragged hole would look strange in the midst of the swelling spotless cushion of white. James looked after every thing; then rather suddenly fell ill, and took to bed; was insensible when the doctor came, and soon died. A sort of low fever was prevailing in the village, and his want of sleep, his exhaustion, and his misery, made him apt to take it. The grave was not difficult to reopen. A fresh fall of snow had again made all things white and smooth; Rab once more looked on, and slunk home to the stable.

And what of Rab? I asked for him next week at the new carrier who got the goodwill of James's business, and was now master of Jess and her cart. "How's Rab?" He put me off, and said rather rudely, "What's your business wi' the dowie?" I was not to be so put off. "Where's Rab?" He, getting confused and red, and intermeddling with his hair, said, "Deed, sir, Rab's deid." "Dead! what did he die of?" "Weel, sir," said he, getting redder, "he didna exactly dee; he was killed. I had to brain him wi' a rackpin; there was nae doin' wi' him. He lay in the treviss wi' the meat, and wadna come out. I temptit him wi' the kail and meat, but he wad tak naething, and keepit me frae feedin' the beast, and he was aye gur gurra, and grup gruppin' me by the legs. I was laith to make awa wi' the auld dowie, his like wasna atween this and Thornhill,—but, deed, sir, I could do naething else." I believed him. Fit end for Rab, quick and complete. His teeth and his friends gone, why should he keep the peace and be civil?

SAYINGS OF GREAT MEN.

The essence of the grandest sayings appears to be that in such sayings the speaker flings down his glove to all the forces which are fighting against him, and deliberately regards himself as the champion of some dramatic conflict the centre of which he is. Cromwell's "Paint me as I am," and the more elaborate, though not more memorable, "I have sought the Lord night and day that He would rather slay me than put me upon the doing of this work," or his reputed saying of Charles, "We will cut off is head with the crown on it," all implied his supreme conviction that he was the involuntary minister of a great series of providential acts. It is the same with Mirabeau's contemptuous thrusting aside of the part taken by Lafayette with the scornful remark, "He would fain be a Grandison-Cromwell?" and still more with his inflated, but still genuinely sincere, avowal in the Constitutional Assembly, "When I shake my terrible locks, all France trembles," and his brushing away of the thought "impossible,"—"Never mention that stupid word again." Even Voltaire, in his flippant way, regarded himself, and deliberately elected to regard himself as the one personal enemy of the Roman Catholic Church, when he said in reply to a friend who had noticed his reverence as the host passed, and who asked whether he had been reconciled to the Church, "We bow but do not speak." It is true that many such sayings acquire their dramatic meaning by the artificial moderation rather than the emphasis of their language, as when the Duke of Wellington spoke of the battle of Navarino simply as "an untoward event," but this, too, was supreme assumption in disguise, for it meant that he was able entirely to ignore its drift as a battle, and to concentrate his attention and the attention of the world solely on its tendency to unsettle "the balance of power." The perfect silence in which he passed over the common place view of Navarino, and insisted in looking at it solely in the attitude of a diplomatist, indicated in the most graphic manner how completely indifferent he felt to the class of consequences which would first strike the popular mind. His serene indifference to the Turkish disaster as a disaster was quite Olympian. Perhaps the finest thing ever said was Burke's answer to Pitt, who declared that England and the British Constitution were safe till the day of judgment; "It is the day of no judgment I am afraid of;" but it is not certain that Burke really meant to convey all that the words do convey. Possibly, he meant it chiefly as a sarcasm on Pitt's want of judgement; but the larger sense of the saying, in which it means that it is not the day of divine judgment that is to be feared, so much as the day when the reality of divine judgment is hidden from men, and human beings go on in the frivolous, irresponsible pursuit of their own wishes, is quite worthy of Burke, and conveys a grander conception of the spiritual scales in which political negligence will be judged, than any other saying which even Burke himself has uttered.—*Spectator*.

THE HUMOURS OF EXAMINATIONS.

It is related of a rough-and-ready examiner in medicine that on one occasion, having failed to elicit satisfactory replies from a student regarding the muscular arrangement of the arm and leg, he somewhat brusquely said, "Ah, perhaps, sir, you could tell me the names of the muscles I would put in action were I to kick you!" "Certainly, sir," replied the candidate, "you would put in motion the flexors and extensors of my arms, for I should use them to knock you down!" History is silent, and perhaps wisely so, concerning the fate of this particular student. The story is told of a witty Irish student, who, once upon a time, appeared before the Examining Board to undergo an examination in medical jurisprudence. The subject of the examination was poisons, and the examiner had selected that deadly poison prussic acid as the subject of his question.