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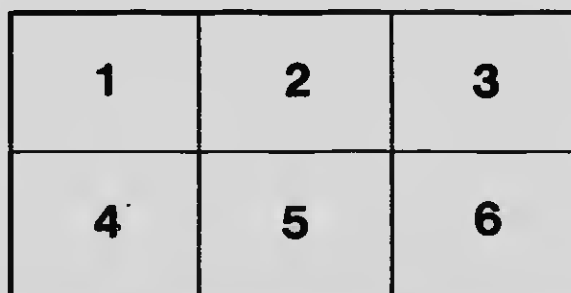
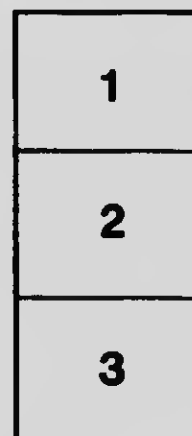
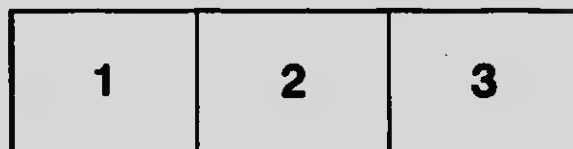
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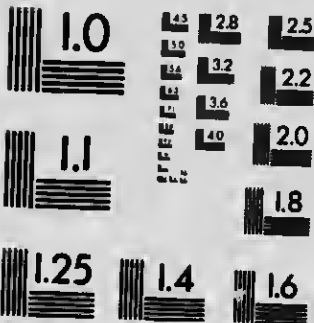
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# RELIGIO MEDICI

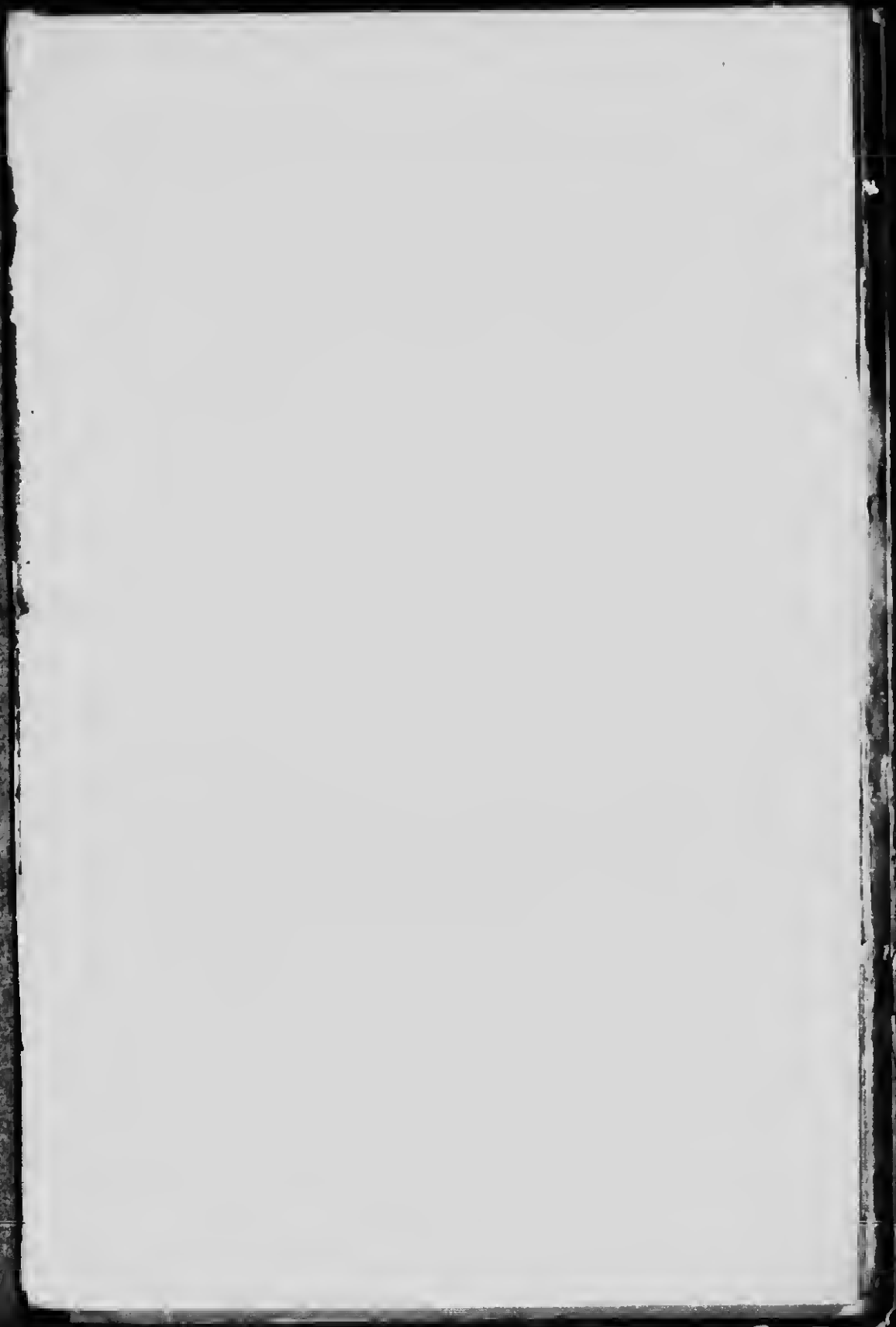
AN ADDRESS DELIVERED  
AT GUY'S HOSPITAL  
OCTOBER, 1905

BY  
WILLIAM OSLER, M.D., F.R.S.  
REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE, OXFORD

*Reprinted from THE LIBRARY, January, 1906*

LONDON  
PRINTED AT THE CHISWICK PRESS  
1906









**SIR THOMAS BROWNE**  
From the portrait at St. Peter's Mancroft, Norwich

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## THE 'RELIGIO MEDICI.'<sup>1</sup>



As a boy it was my good fortune to come under the influence of a parish priest of the Gilbert White type, who followed the seasons of Nature no less ardently than those of the Church, and whose excursions into science had brought him into contact with physic and physicians. Father Johnson, as his friends loved to call him, founder and Warden of the Trinity College School near Toronto, illustrated that angelical conjunction (to use Cotton Mather's words) of medicine and divinity more common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than in the nineteenth. An earnest student of Sir Thomas Browne, particularly of the 'Religio Medici,' he often read to us extracts in illustration of the beauty of the English language, or he would entertain us with some of the author's quaint conceits, such as the man without a navel (Adam), or that woman was the rib and crooked piece of man. The copy which I hold in my hand (J. T. Fields's

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the Physical Society, Guy's Hospital, October 12, 1905.

edition of 1862), my companion ever since my schooldays, is the most precious book in my library. I mention these circumstances in extenuation of an enthusiasm which has enabled me to make this almost complete collection of the editions of his works I show you this evening, knowing full well the compassionate feeling with which the bibliomaniac is regarded by his saner colleagues.

#### I.—THE MAN.

The little Thomas was happy in his entrance upon the stage, 19th October, 1605. Among multiplied acknowledgements, he could lift up one hand to Heaven (as he says) that he was born of honest parents, 'that modesty, humility, patience, and veracity lay in the same egg, and came into the world' with him. Of his father, a London merchant, but little is known. There is at Devonshire House a family picture which shows him to have been a man of fine presence, looking not unworthy of the future philosopher, a child of three or four years, seated on his mother's knee. She married a second time, Sir Thomas Dutton, a man of wealth and position, who gave his stepson every advantage of education and travel. We lack accurate information of the early years—of the school days at Winchester, of his life at Broadgate Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford, and of the influences which induced him to study medicine. Possibly he got his inspiration from the Regius Professor of Medicine, the elder Clayton, the Master of Broadgate Hall and afterwards of Pembroke College. That he was a dis-

tinguished undergraduate is shown in his selection at the end of the first year in residence to deliver an oration at the opening of Pembroke College. Possibly between the years 1626, when he took the B.A., and 1629, when he commenced M.A., he may have been engaged in the study of medicine; but Mr. Charles Williams, of Norwich, who is perhaps more familiar than any one living with the history of our author, does not think it likely that he began until he went abroad. In these years he could at least have 'entered upon the physic line' and could have proceeded to the M.B. He was too early to participate in the revival of science in Oxford, but even after that had occurred Sydenham flung the cruel reproach at his Alma Mater that he would as soon send a man to her to learn shoemaking as practical physic. It was possible, of course, to pick up a little knowledge of medicine from the local practitioners and from the Physic Garden, together with the lectures of the Regius Professor, who, as far as we know, had not at any rate the awkward failing of his more distinguished son, who could not look upon blood without fainting, and in consequence had to hand over his anatomy lectures to a deputy.

Clayton's studies and work would naturally be of a somewhat mixed character, and at that period even many of those whose chief business was theology were interested in natural philosophy, of which medicine formed an important part. Burton refers to an address delivered about this time by Clayton dealing with the mutual relations of mind and body. The 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' which appeared in 1621, must have proved a stimulating *bonne bouche* for

the Oxford men of the day, and I like to think of the eagerness with which so ardent a student as Browne of Pembroke would have pounced on the second and enlarged edition which appeared in 1624. He may, indeed, have been a friend of Burton, or he may have formed one of a group of undergraduates to watch Democritus Junior leaning over the bridge and laughing at the bargees as they swore at each other. It is stated, I know not with what authority, that Browne practised in Oxford for a time.

After a visit to Ireland with his stepfather he took the grand tour—France, Italy, and Holland—spending two years in study. Of his Continental trip our knowledge is very meagre. He went to Montpellier, still famous, but failing, where he probably listened to the teaching of Riviere, whose 'Praxis' was for years the leading textbook in Europe—thence to Padua, where he must have heard the celebrated Sanctorius of the *Medicina Statica*—then on to Leyden, just rising into prominence, where it is said he took his doctor's degree in 1633. Of this, however, there is no certainty. A few years ago I looked through the register of that famous University, but failed to find his name. At the end of two years' travel he may have had cobwebs in his pocket, and the Leyden degree was expensive, as that quaint old contemporary of Browne, the Rev. John Ward of Stratford-on-Avon, tells us ('Diary'): 'Mr. Burnet had a letter out of the Low Countries of the charge of a doctor's degree, which is at Leyden about £16, besides feasting the professors; at Angers in France, not above £9, and feasting not necessary neither.' No doubt the

young Englishman got of the best that there was in the teaching of the day, and from the 'Religio' one learns that he developed from it an extraordinary breadth of culture, and a charity not always granted to travellers. He pierced beneath the shell of nationalism into the heart of the people among whom he lived, feeling at home everywhere and in every clime; hence the charity, rare in a Protestant, expressed so beautifully in the lines: 'I can dispense with my hat at the sight of a cross, but scarce with the thought of my Saviour.'

He must have made good use of his exceptional opportunities as he was able to boast, in a humble way it is true, that he understood six languages.

Returning to England in 1634 he settled at Shibden Dale, close to Halifax, not, as Mr. Charles Williams has pointed out, to practice his profession, but to recruit his health, somewhat impaired by shipwreck and disease. Here, in Upper Shibden Hall, he wrote the 'Religio Medici,' the book by which to-day his memory is kept green among us. In his travels he had doubtless made many observations on men and in his reading had culled many useful memoranda. He makes it quite clear—and is anxious to do so—that the book was written while he was very young. He says: 'My life is a miracle of thirty years.' 'I have not seen one revolution of Saturn.' 'My pulse hath not beat thirty years.' Indeed, he seems to be of Plato's opinion that the pace of life slackens after this date, and there is a note of sadness in his comment, that while the radical humour may contain sufficient oil for seventy, 'in some it gives no light past thirty,' and



he adds that those dying at this age should not complain of immaturity. In the quiet Yorkshire valley, with leisurable hours for his private exercise and satisfaction, the manuscript was completed, 'with,' as he says, 'such disadvantages that (I protest) from the first setting pen to paper I had not the assistance of any good book.' 'Communicated to one it became common to many,' and at last in 1642, seven years after its completion, reached the press in a depraved form.

In 1637, at the solicitation of friends, Browne moved to Norwich, with which city, so far as we know, he had had no previous connection. At that date the East Anglian capital had not become famous in the annals of medicine. True, she had given Caius to the profession, but he had only practised there for a short time and does not seem to have had any special influence on her destinies. Sir Thomas Browne may be said to be the first of the long list of worthies who have in the past two and a-half centuries made Norwich famous among the provincial towns of the kingdom. Here for forty-five years he lived the quiet, uneventful life of a student-practitioner, absorbed, like a sensible man, in his family, his friends, his studies and his patients. It is a life of singular happiness to contemplate. In 1641 he married Dorothy Mileham, 'a lady of such a symmetrical proportion to her worthy husband—that they seemed to come together by a kind of natural magnetism.' In the 'Religio' he had said some hard things of the gentle goddess and had expressed himself very strongly against Nature's method for the propagation of the race. He be-

lieved, with Milton, that the world should have been populated 'without feminine,' and in almost identical words they wish that some way less trivial and vulgar had been found to generate mankind. Dame Dorothy proved a good wife, a fruitful branch, bearing ten children. We have a pleasant picture of her in her letters to her boys and to her daughter-in-law in a spelling suggestive of Pitman's phonetics. She seems to have had in full measure the simple piety and the tender affection mentioned on her monument in St. Peter's Church. The domestic correspondence (Wilkin's edition of the 'Works') gives interesting glimpses of the family life, the lights and shadows of a cultured English home. The two boys were all that their father could have wished. Edward, the elder, had a distinguished career, following his father's footsteps in the profession and reaching the dignity of the Presidency of the Royal College of Physicians. Inheriting his father's tastes, as the letters between them prove, his wide interests in natural history and archaeology are shown in his well-known book of 'Travels,' and I am fortunate in possessing a copy of the 'Hydriotaphia' with his autograph.

Edward's son, the 'Tommy' of the letters, the delight of his grandfather, also became a physician, and practised with his father. He died in 1710 under rather unfortunate circumstances, and with him the male line of Sir Thomas ended. Of the younger son we have, in the letters, a charming picture—a brave sailor-lad with many of his father's tastes, who served with great distinction in the Dutch wars, in which he met (it is supposed) a sailor's death. The eldest

daughter married Henry Fairfax, and through their daughter, who married the Earl of Buchan, there are to-day among the Buchans and Erskines the only existing representatives of Sir Thomas.

The waves and storms of the Civil War scarcely reached the quiet Norwich home. Browne was a staunch Royalist, and his name occurs among the citizens who in 1643 refused to contribute to a fund for the recapture of the town of Newcastle. It is astonishing how few references occur in his writings to the national troubles, which must have tried his heart sorely. In the preface to the 'Religio' he gives vent to his feelings, lamenting not only the universal tyranny of the Press, but the defamation of the name of his Majesty, the degradation of Parliament, and the writings of both 'depravedly, anticipatively, counterfeitedly, imprinted.' In one of the letters he speaks of the execution of Charles I as 'horrid murther,' and in another he calls Cromwell a usurper. In civil wars physicians of all men suffer least, as the services of able men are needed by both parties, and time and again it has happened that an even-balanced soul, such as our author, has passed quietly through terrible trials, doing the day's work with closed lips. Corresponding with the most active decades of his life, in which his three important works were issued, one might have expected to find in them reference to the Civil War, or, at least, echoes of the great change wrought by the Commonwealth, but, like Fox, in whose writings the same silence has been noticed, whatever may have been his feelings, he preserved a discreet silence. His own rule of life,

no doubt, is expressed in the advice to his son: 'Times look troublesome, but you have an honest and peaceable profession which may employ you, and discretion to guide your words and actions.'

Busy with his professional work, interested in natural history, in archaeology, and in literature, with a wide circle of scientific friends and correspondents, the glimpses of Browne's life, which we have from the letters, are singularly attractive. He adopted an admirable plan in the education of his children, sending them abroad, and urging them to form early habits of independence. His younger boy, Thomas, he sent at the age of fourteen to France, alone, and he remarks in one of his letters to him: 'He that hath learnt not in France travelleth in vain.' Everywhere in the correspondence with his children there is evidence of good, practical sense. He tells one of the boys to 'cast off *pudor rusticus*, and to have a handsome garb of his body.' Even the daughters were taken to France. In his souvenir of Sir Thomas Browne Mr. Charles Williams has given an illustration of his house, a fine old building which was unfortunately torn down some years ago, though the handsome mantelpiece has been preserved.

An interesting contemporary account has been left by Evelyn, who paid a visit to Sir Thomas in 1673. He says: '. . . the whole house being a paradise and a cabinet of rarities, and that of the best collections, especially medails, books, plants, and natural things. Amongst other curiosities, Sir Thomas had a collection of the eggs of all the foule and birds he could procure, that country, especially

the promintory of Norfolck, being frequented, as he said, by several kinds which seldom or never go further into the land, as cranes, storkes, eagles, and a variety of other foule.'

After Dr. Edward Browne was established in London the letters show the keen interest Sir Thomas took in the scientific work of the day. Writing of his son's lecture on anatomy at the Chirurgical Hall, he warns him that he would have more spectators than auditors, and after that first day, as the lecture was in Latin, 'very many will not be earnest to come here-after.' He evidently takes the greatest interest in his son's progress, and constantly gives him suggestions with reference to new points that are coming up in the literature. Here and there are references to important medical cases, and comments upon modes of treatment. It is interesting to note the prevalence of agues, even of the severe hæmorrhagic types, and his use of Peruvian bark. In one of the letters a remarkable case of pneumothorax is described: 'A young woman who had a julking and fluctuation in her chest so that it might be heard by standers-by.' Evidently he had a large and extensive practice in the Eastern Counties, and there are numerous references to the local physicians. There is a poem extolling his skill in the despaired-of case of Mrs. E. S., three or four of the lines of which are worth quoting:

He came, saw, cur'd! Could Caesar's self do more;  
Galen, Hippocrates, London's four-score  
Of famous Colledge . . . had these heard him read  
His lecture on this Skeliton, half dead;

And seen his modest eye search every part,  
Judging, not seeing.

The correspondence with his son is kept up to the time of his death. Only part of the letters appears in Wilkin's 'Life,' and there are many extant worthy of publication.

In 1671 he was knighted by Charles II. In 1664 he was made an honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, with which, through his son, he had close affiliations. His name does not appear in the roll of the Royal Society, with the spirit and objects of which he must yet have had the warmest sympathy. He was in correspondence with many of the leading men of the day—Evelyn, Grew, Elias Ashmole, Dugdale, Paston, Aubrey, and others. The letters deal with a remarkable variety of subjects—natural history, botany, chemistry, magic and archaeology, etc. The 'Pseudodoxia Epidemica' (1646) extended his reputation among all classes and helped to bring him into close relationship with the virtuosi of the period. There is in the Bodleian a delightful letter from Mr. Henry Bates, a wit of the court, a few extracts from which will give you an idea of the extravagant admiration excited by his writings: 'Sir,—Amongst those great and due acknowledgements this horizon owes you for imparting your sublime solid phansie to them in that incomparable piece of invention and judgment, R. M. gives mee leave, sir, here at last to tender my share, which I wish I could make proportionable to the value I deservedly sett upon it, for truly, sir, ever since I had the happiness to know your religion I have religiously honoured

you; hug'd your Minerva in my bosome, and voted it my *vade mecum*.' . . . 'I am of that opinion still, that next the "Legenda Dei," it is the master piece of Christendome; and though I have met sometimes with some *omnes sic ego vero non sic* men prejudicating pates, who bogled at shadowes in 't, and carpt at atoms, and have so strappadoed me into impatience with their senseless censures, yet this still satisfied my zeal toward it, when I found *non intelligunt* was the nurse of theire *vituperant*, and they onely stumbled for want of a lanthorne.'<sup>1</sup>

While interested actively in medicine, Browne does not seem to have been on intimate terms with his great contemporaries—Harvey, Sydenham, or Glisson—though he mentions them, and always with respect. He was a prudent, prosperous man, generous to his children and to his friends. He subscribed liberally to his old school at Winchester, to the rebuilding of the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, and to the repairs at Christ Church, Oxford. A life placid, uneventful, and easy, without stress or strain, happy in his friends, his family, and his work, he expressed in it that harmony of the inner and of the outer man which it is the aim of all true philosophy to attain, and which he inculcated so nobly and in such noble words in the 'Religio Medici' and in the 'Christian Morals.'

A description of him given by his friend, the Rev. John Whitefoot, is worth quoting: 'He was never seen to be transported with mirth or dejected with sadness; always cheerful but rarely merry, at any sensible rate; seldom heard to break a jest, and

<sup>1</sup> Wilkin, vol. i., p. 253.

when he did he would be apt to blush at the levity of it. His gravity was natural, without affectation.'

The end came unexpected<sup>1</sup> in his seventy-seventh year, after a sharp attack of colic, on his birthday, October 5th, 1682—a curious coincidence of which he speaks in the 'Letter to a Friend': 'But in persons who outlive many years, and when there are no less than 365 days to determine their lives every year—that the first day should make the last, that the tail of the snake should return into its mouth precisely at that time, and they should wind up upon the day of their nativity—is, indeed, a remarkable coincidence, which, though astrology hath taken witty pains to solve, yet hath it been very wary in making predictions of it.'

There are three good portraits of Sir Thomas—one in the College of Physicians, London, which is the best known and has been often reproduced, and from which is taken the frontispiece in Greenhill's edition of the 'Religio Medici'; a second is in the Bodleian, and this also has frequently been reproduced; the third is in the vestry of St. Peter's Mancroft, Norwich. Through the kindness of Mr. Charles Williams it is here reproduced as a frontispiece to this number of 'The Library.' In many ways it is the most pleasing of the three, and Browne looks in it a younger man, closer to the days of the 'Religio.' There is a fourth picture, the frontispiece to the fifth edition of the 'Pseudodoxia,' but it is so unlike the others that I doubt very much if it could have been Sir Thomas. If it was, he must have suffered from the artist, as did Milton, whose picture in the frontispiece to the



'Poems,' 1645, is a base caricature, but Browne has not had the satisfaction of Milton's joke and happy revenge.

## II.—THE BOOK.

As a book the 'Religio Medici' has had an interesting history. Written at 'leisurable hours and for his private exercise and satisfaction,' it circulated in manuscript among friends, 'and was by transcription successively corrupted, until it arrived in a most depraved copy at the press.' Two surreptitious editions were issued by Andrew Crooke in 1642 (Fig. 1), both in small octavo, with an engraved frontispiece by Marshall representing a man falling from a rock (the earth) into the sea of eternity, but caught by a hand issuing from the clouds, under which is the legend 'A Coelo Salus.' Johnson suggests that the author may not have been ignorant of Crooke's design, but was very willing to let a tentative edition be issued—'a stratagem by which an author panting for fame, and yet afraid of seeming to challenge it, may at once gratify his vanity and preserve the appearance of modesty.'

There are at least six manuscripts of the 'Religio' in existence, all presenting minor differences, which bear out the author's contention that by transcription they had become depraved. One in the Wilkin collection, in the Castle Museum, Norwich, is in the author's handwriting. Had Browne been party to an innocent fraud he would scarcely have allowed Crooke to issue within a year a second imperfect edition—not simply a second impression, as the two differ in the size and number of the pages,

and present also minor differences in the text. The authorized edition appeared in the following year by the same publisher and with the same frontispiece, with the following words at the foot of the plate: 'A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed before under the name of "Religio Medici"' (Fig. 2). It was issued anonymously, with a preface, signed 'A. B.': 'To such as have or shall peruse the observations upon a former corrupt copy of this Booke.' A curious incident here links together two men, types of the intellectual movement of their generation—both students, both mystics—the one a quiet observer of nature, an antiquary and a physician; the other a restless spirit, a bold buccaneer, a politician, a philosopher, and an amateur physician. Sir Kenelm Digby, committed to Winchester House by the Parliamentarians, had heard favourably from the Earl of Dorset of the 'Religio Medici.' Though late in the day, 'the magnetic motion,' as he says, 'was impatience to have the booke in his hands,' so he sent at once to St. Paul's churchyard for it. He was in bed when it came. 'This good natur'd creature I could easily perswade to be my bedfellow and to wake me as long as I had any edge to entertain myselfe with the delights I sucked in from so noble a conversation. And truly I closed not my eyes till I had enrich myselfe with (or at least exactly surveyed) all the treasures that are lapt up in the folds of those new sheets.' Sir Kenelm holds the record for reading in bed; not only did he read the 'Religio' through, but he wrote 'Observations' upon it the same night

in the form of a letter to his friend, which extends to three-fourths of the size of the 'Religio' itself. As Johnson remarks, he 'returned his judgement of it not in the form of a letter but of a book.' He dates it at the end 'the 22nd. (I think I may say the 23rd, for I am sure it is morning and I think it is day) of December, 1642.' Johnson says that its principal claim to admiration is that it was written within twenty-four hours, of which part was spent in procuring Browne's book and part in reading it. Sir Kenelm was a remarkable man, but in connection with his statements it may be well to remember the reputation he had among his contemporaries, Stubbs calling him 'the Pliny of our age for lying.' However this may be, his criticisms of the work are exceedingly interesting and often just. This little booklet of Sir Kenelm has floated down the stream of literature, reappearing at intervals attached to editions of the 'Religio,' while his weightier tomes are deep in the ooze at the bottom.

The 'Religio Medici' became popular with remarkable rapidity. As Johnson remarks, 'It excited attention by the novelty of paradoxes, the dignity of sentiment, the quick succession of images, the multitude of abstrusive allusions, subtlety of disquisition, and the strength of language.' A Cambridge student — Merryweather — travelling in Europe, translated it into Latin, and it was published in 1644 by Hackius at Leyden in a very neat volume. A second impression appeared in the same year, and also a Paris edition—a reprint of the Leyden. The Continental scholars were a good deal puzzled and not altogether certain of the

orthodoxy of the work. Merryweather, in a very interesting letter (1649) says that he had some difficulty in getting a printer at Leyden. Salmasius, to whom Haye, a book merchant, took it for approbation, said 'that there was in it many things well said, but that it contained also many exorbitant conceptions in religion and would probably find much frowning entertainment, especially amongst the ministers.' Two other printers also refused it. The most interesting Continental criticism is by that distinguished member of the profession, Guy Patin, professor in the Paris Faculty of Medicine. In a letter to Charles Spon of Lyons, dated Paris, October 21st, 1644, he mentions having received a little book called the 'Religio Medici,' written by an Englishman, 'a very mystical book containing strange and ravishing thoughts.' In a letter, dated 1645, he says 'the book is in high credit here; the author has wit, and there are abundance of fine things in the book. He is a humorist whose thoughts are very agreeable, but who, in my opinion, is to seek for a master in religion may in the end find none.' Patin thought the author in a parlous state, and as he was still alive he might grow worse as well as better. Evidently, however, the work became a favourite one with him, as in letters of 1650-1653-1657 he refers to it again in different editions. It is remarkable that he nowhere mentions the author by name, but subsequently when Edward Browne was a student in Paris Patin sends kindly greetings to his father.

Much discussion occurred on the Continent as to the orthodoxy of the 'Religio.' It is no slight

compliment to the author that he should have been by one claimed as a Catholic, by another denounced as an Atheist, while a member of the Society of Friends saw in him a likely convert. The book was placed on the 'Index.' In England, with the exception of Digby's 'Observations,' there were no

adverse criticisms of any note. Alexander Ross, that interesting old Southampton schoolmaster, who seems always to have been ready for an intellectual tilt, wrote a criticism entitled 'Medicus Medicatus, or the Physician's Religion cured by a Lenitive or Gentle Potion.'

In England there were two reprints in 1645, and it appeared again in the years 1656, 1659, 1669, 1672, and in 1682, the year of Browne's death.

A comparison of the early

editions shows that all have the same frontispiece and are, with slight variations, reprints of that of 1643. The work also began to be reprinted with the 'Pseudodoxia Epidemica' (third edition, 1659). The Latin editions followed each other rapidly. As I mentioned, it first appeared at Leyden in 1644, and was reprinted the same year there and in Paris; then in 1650 in Leyden again, in 1652 in Strassburg, and in the same place in 1665 and 1667.

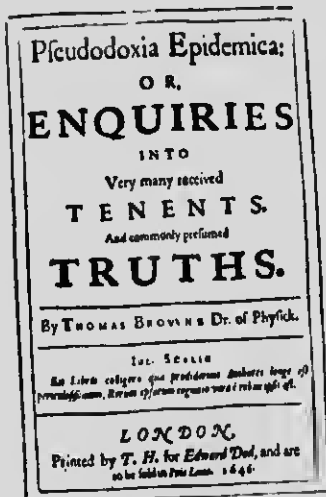


FIG. 3.—TITLE-PAGE OF THE  
'PSEUDODOXIA.'

The most important of these editions was that of Strassburg, 1652, with elaborate notes by Moltkuis, of which Guy Patin speaks as 'miserable examples of pedantry,' and indeed stigmatizes the commentator as a fool. The Dutch translation appeared in 1655 and a French in 1668, so that altogether during the author's lifetime there were at least twenty editions of the work.

In the seventeenth century there were in all twenty-two editions. In the eighteenth century there were four English editions, one Latin, and one German. Then a long interval of seventy-seven years elapsed, until in 1831 Thomas Chapman, a young Exeter College man, brought out a neat little edition, my own copy of which is made precious by many marginal notes by S. T. Coleridge, who was one of the earliest and most critical among the students of Sir Thomas. In the same year the first American edition was published, edited by the Rev. Alexander Young, of Boston. In 1838 appeared an excellent edition by J. A. St. John, 'traveller, linguist, author, and editor,' and in 1844 Longman's edition by John Peace, the librarian of the City Library, Bristol. This edition was re-published in America by the house of Lea and Blanchard,<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia, the only occasion, I believe, on which the 'Religio' has been issued by a firm of medical publishers. In 1845 appeared Pickering's beautiful edition, edited, with many original notes, by the Rev. Henry Gardiner, in many ways the most choice of nineteenth century issues. In 1862 James Ticknor

<sup>1</sup> They did not issue an edition in 1848, as mentioned by Greenhill on the authority of J. T. Fields.

Fields, the well-known Boston scholar and publisher, brought out a very handsome edition, of which, for the first time in the history of the book, an *édition de luxe* was printed on larger paper. In 1869 appeared Sampson Low and Co.'s edition by Willis Bund; and in 1878 Rivington's edition edited by W. P. Smith. Then in 1881 there came what must always remain the standard edition, edited by Dr. Greenhill for the Golden Treasury Series, and reprinted repeatedly by Macmillan and Co. To his task Dr. Greenhill brought not only a genuine love of Sir Thomas Browne, but the accuracy of an earnest, painstaking scholar. Since the year 1881 a dozen or more editions have appeared, of which I may mention the excellent one by Dr. Lloyd Roberts, of Manchester. I may finish this dry summary by noting the contrast between the little parchment-covered surreptitious edition of 1642 and the sumptuous folio of the Vale Press. In all, including those which have appeared with the collected works, there have been about fifty-five editions. Browne states that the work had also been translated into High Dutch and into Italian, but I can find no record of these editions, nor of a German translation, 1680, mentioned by Watt.

Space will allow only a brief reference to Browne's other writings. 'Pseudodoxia Epidemica: or, Inquiries into very many received Tenets and commonly presumed Truths,' appeared in 1646 in this small folio (Fig. 4). In extent this is by far the most pretentious of Browne's works. It forms an extraordinary collection of old wives' fables and popular beliefs in every department of human know-

ledge, dealt with from the standpoint of the science of that day. In a way it is a strong protest against general credulity and inexactness of statement, and a plea for greater accuracy in the observation of facts and in the recording of them. Walter Pater has drawn attention to the striking resemblance between Browne's chapter on the sources of Error and Bacon's doctrine of the Idola—shams which men fall down and worship. He discusses cleverly the use of doubts; but, as Pater remarks, 'Browne was himself a rather lively example of entertainments of the Idols of the Cave—Idola Specus—and, like Boyle, Digby, and others, he could not quite free himself from the shackles of alchemy and a hankering for the philosopher's stone.' The work was very popular, and extended the reputation of the author very widely. Indeed, in 1646 Browne was not known at large as the author of the 'Religio,' as his name had not appeared on the title-page of any edition issued at that date. The Pseudodoxia was frequently reprinted, a sixth edition being published in 1672, and it appeared in French both in France and in Holland.

Equalling in popularity among certain people the 'Religio,' certainly next to it in importance, is the remarkable essay known as 'Hydriotaphia—

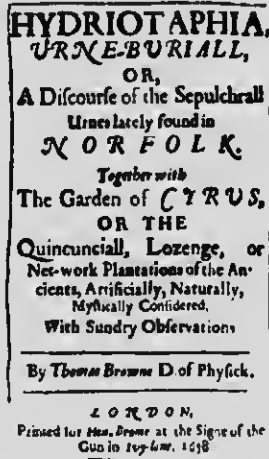


FIG. 4.—TITLE-PAGE OF  
THE 'URN-BURIAL.'



Urne-Burial: or, A Discourse of the Sepulchrale Urnes lately found in Norfolk' (1658). Printed with it is 'The Garden of Cyrus,' a learned discourse on gardens of all forms in all ages. Naturally, when an unusual number of funeral urns were found at Walsingham, they were brought to the notice of Browne, the leading antiquary of the county. Instead of writing a learned disquisition upon their date—he thought them Roman, they were in reality Saxon—with accurate measurements and a catalogue of the bones, he touches upon the whole incident very lightly, but, using it as a text, breaks out into a noble and inspiring prose poem, a meditation upon mortality and the last sad rites of all nations in all times, with learned comments on modes of sepulchre, illustrated with much antiquarian and historical lore. Running through the work is an appropriate note of melancholy at the sad fate which awaits the great majority of us, upon whom the iniquity of oblivion must blindly scatter her poppy.' 'The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man.'

Nowhere in his writings does the prose flow with a more majestic roll. Take, for example, this one thought: 'If the nearness of our last necessity brought a nearer conformity unto it, there were a happiness in hoary hairs and no calamity in half senses. But the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying, when avarice makes us the sport of death, when even David grew politically cruel, and Solomon could hardly be said to be the wisest of men. But many are too early old and before the days

of age. Adversity stretcheth our days, misery makes Alcemena's nights, and time hath no wings unto it.'

Closely connected in sentiment with the 'Urn-Burial' is the thin folio pamphlet—the rarest of all Browne's works, printed posthumously in 1698—'A Letter to a Friend on the Occasion of the Death of his Intimate Friend' (Fig. 6). It is a splendid dissertation on death and modes of dying, and is a unique study of the slow progress to the grave of a consumptive. It is written in his most picturesque and characteristic vein, with such a charm of diction that some critics have given it the place of honour among his works. Pater, in most enthusiastic terms, speaks of it with the 'Urn-Burial' as 'the best justification of Browne's literary reputation.'

The tender sympathy with the poor relics of humanity which Browne expresses so beautifully in these two meditations has not been meted to his own. 'Who knows the fate of his bones or how often he is to be buried?' he asks. In 1840, while workmen were repairing the chancel of St. Peter Mancroft, the coffin of Sir Thomas was accidentally opened, and one of the workmen took the skull, which afterwards came into the possession of Dr. Edward Lubbock, who deposited it in the

A  
LETTER  
TO A  
FRIEND.  
Upon occasion of the  
DEATH  
OF HIS  
Intimate Friend.

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By the Learned  
Sir THOMAS BROWN, Knight,  
Doctor of Physick, late of Norwich.

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LONDON:  
Printed by Charles Brown at the Gun at the West End  
of St. Paul's Church-yard. 1698.

FIG. 5.—TITLE-PAGE OF  
'A LETTER TO A FRIEND.'

Museum of the Norfolk and Norwich Infirmary. When I first saw it there in 1872 there was on it a printed slip with these lines from the 'Hydrioptaphia': 'To be knaved out of our graves, to have our skulls made drinking bowls, and our bones turned into pipes, to delight and sport our enemies, are tragical abominations escaped in burning burials.' The skull has been carefully described by Mr. Charles Williams, to whom I am indebted for the loan of photographs.

In addition to the 'Letter to a Friend,' there are three posthumous works, 'Certain Miscellany Tracts' (1684), edited by Archbishop Tenison, and 'Posthumous Works,' 1712, containing chiefly papers of antiquarian interest. In the same year, 1712, appeared the 'Christian Morals,' edited by Archdeacon Jeffrey of Norwich, from a manuscript found among Browne's papers. Probably a work of his later life, it forms a series of ethical fragments in a rich and stately prose which, in places, presents a striking parallelism to passages in the Hebrew poetry. The work is usually printed with the 'Religio,' to which in reality it forms a supplement.

Of the collected editions of Browne's works, the first, a fine folio, appeared in 1686. In 1836, Simon Wilkin, himself a Norwich man, edited the works with the devotion of an ardent lover of his old townsman, and with the critical accuracy of a scholar. All students of Sir Thomas remain under a lasting debt to Mr. Wilkin, and it is pleasant to know, that through the kindness of his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Wilkin, of Sidmouth, a Sir Thomas Browne Library has been founded in connexion

with the Castle Museum, Norwich, in which Mr. Simon Wilkin's collections have been placed. A three-volume edition of the works is in course of publication by Grant Richards. 1904-5.

### III.—APPRECIATION.

Critics from Johnson to Walter Pater have put on record their estimate of Browne and of his place in literature. Among these for keenness of appreciation Pater takes the first rank. Lamb and Coleridge dearly loved the old Norwich physician, in whom they found a kindred spirit. In America the New England writers, Ticknor, Fields, Holmes, and Lowell were ardent students of his works. Lowell in particular is fond of apt quotations from him, and in one place speaks of him as 'our most imaginative mind since Shakespeare.' But no one has put so briefly and so clearly the strong characters of our author as the French critic, Taine: 'Let us conceive a kindred spirit to Shakespeare's, a scholar and an observer instead of an actor and a poet, who in place of creating is occupied in comprehending, but who, like Shakespeare, applies himself to living things, penetrates their internal structure, puts himself in communication with their actual laws, imprints in himself fervently and scrupulously the smallest details of their figure; who at the same time extends his penetrating surmises beyond the region of observation, discerns behind visible phenomena a world obscure yet sublime, and trembles with a kind of veneration before the vast, indistinct,

but populous abyss on whose surface our little universe hangs quivering. Such a one is Sir Thomas Browne, a naturalist, a philosopher, a scholar, a physician, and a moralist, almost the last of the generation which produced Jeremy Taylor and Shakespeare. No thinker bears stronger witness to the wandering and inventive curiosity of the age. No writer has better displayed the brilliant and sombre imagination of the North. No one has spoken with a more elegant emotion of death, the vast night of forgetfulness, of the all devouring pit of human vanity which tries to create an immortality out of ephemeral glory or sculptured stones. No one has revealed in more glowing and original expressions the poetic sap which flows through all the minds of the age.'

The growing popularity of Browne's writings testifies to the assured position he holds, if not in the hearts of the many, at least in the hearts of that saving remnant which in each generation hands on the best traditions of our literature. We, who are members of his profession, may take a special pride in him. Among physicians, or teachers of physic, there is, perhaps, but one name in the very first rank. Rabelais stands apart with the kings and queens of literature. Among the princes of the blood there are differences of opinion as to their rank, but Sir Thomas Browne, Holmes, and John Brown of Edinburgh, form a group together high in the circle. Of the three, two were general practitioners; Oliver Wendell Holmes only in the early part of his life, and for forty years a teacher of anatomy; but all three have far closer ties with us

than Goldsmith, Smollett, or Keats, whose medical affiliations were titular rather than practical.

Burton, Browne, and Fuller have much in common—a rare quaintness, a love of odd conceits, and the faculty of apt illustrations drawn from out-of-the-way sources. Like Montaigne—Burton even more—Browne's bookishness is of a delightful kind, and yet, as he maintains, his best matter is not picked from the leaves of any author, but bred among the 'weeds and tares' of his own brain. In his style there is a lack of what the moderns call technique, but how pleasant it is to follow his thoughts, rippling like a burn, not the stilled formality of the technical artist in words, the cadencies of whose precise and mechanical expressions pall on the ear.

As has been remarked, the 'Religio Medici' is a *tour de force*, an attempt to combine daring scepticism with humble faith in the Christian religion. Sir Thomas confesses himself to be 'naturally inclined to that which misguided zeal terms superstition.' He 'cannot hear the Ave Maria bell without an elevation.' He has no prejudices in religion, but subscribes himself a loyal son of the Church of England. In clear language he says, 'In brief, where the Scripture is silent the Church is my text; where that speaks it is but my comment. When there is a joint silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my religion from Rome or Geneva, but from the dictates of my own reason.' He is hard on the controversialist in religion—'every man is not a proper champion for truth, nor fit to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity,' etc. While he disclaims any 'taint or tincture' of heresy, he con-

fesses to a number of heretical hopes, such as the ultimate salvation of the race, and prayers for the dead. He freely criticizes certain seeming absurdities in the Bible narrative. His travels have made him cosmopolitan and free from all national prejudices. 'I feel not in myself those common antipathies that I can discover in others, those national repugnancies do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the French, Italian, Spaniard, or Dutch; but where I find their actions in balance with my countrymen's, I honour, love, and embrace them in the same degree. I was born in the eighth climate, but seem for to be framed and constellated unto all. I am no plant that will not prosper out of a garden; all places, all airs, make unto me one country; I am in England, everywhere, and under any meridian.' Only the 'fool multitude' that chooses by show he holds up to derision as 'that numerous piece of monstrosity, which, taken asunder, seem men, and the reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make but one great beast, and a monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra.' He has a quick sympathy with the sorrows of others, and, though a physician, his prayer is with the husbandman and for healthful seasons. No one has put more beautifully the feeling which each one of us has had at times about patients: 'Let me be sick myself, if sometimes the malady of my patient be not a disease unto me; I desire rather to cure his infirmities than my own necessities; where I do him no good, methinks it is scarce honest gain; though I confess 'tis but the worthy salary of our well-intended endeavours.'

He has seen many countries, and has studied their customs and politics. He is well versed in astronomy and botany. He has run through all systems of philosophy but has found no rest in any. As death gives every fool gratis the knowledge which is won in this life with sweat and vexation, he counts it absurd to take pride in his achievements, though he understands six languages besides the patois of several provinces.

As a scientific man Browne does not take rank with many of his contemporaries. He had a keen power of observation, and in the 'Pseudodoxia' and in his letters there is abundant evidence that he was an able naturalist. He was the first to observe and describe the peculiar substance known as adipocere, and there are in places shrewd flashes, such as the suggestion that the virus of rabies may be mitigated by transmission from one animal to another. We miss in him the clear, dry light of science as revealed in the marvellous works of his contemporary, Harvey. Busy as a practical physician, he was an observer, not an experimenter to any extent, though he urges: 'Join sense unto reason and experiment unto speculation, and so give life unto embryo truths and verities yet in their chaos.' He had the highest veneration for Harvey, whose work he recognized as epoch making—'his piece, "De Circul. Sang.," which discovery I prefer to that of Columbus.' He recognized that in the faculty of observation the old Greeks were our masters, and that we must return to their methods if progress were to be made. He had a much clearer idea than had Sydenham of the value of



anatomy, and tells his young friend, Power of Halifax, to make *Autopsia* his *fidus Achates*.

That he should have believed in witches, and that he should have given evidence in 1664 which helped to condemn two poor women, is always spoken of as a blot on his character; but a man must be judged by his times and his surroundings. While regretting his credulity, we must remember how hard it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not to believe in witches—how hard, indeed, it should be to-day for any one who believes implicitly the Old Testament!—and men of the stamp of Reginald Scot and Johannes Wierus, who looked at the question from our point of view, were really anomalies, and their strong presentation of the rational side of the problem had very little influence on their contemporaries.

For the student of medicine the writings of Sir Thomas Browne have a very positive value. The charm of high thoughts clad in beautiful language may win some readers to a love of good literature; but beyond this is a still greater advantage. Like the 'Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius' and the 'Enchiridion' of Epictetus, the 'Religio' is full of counsels of perfection which appeal to the mind of youth, still plastic and unhardened by contact with the world. Carefully studied, from such books come subtle influences which give stability to character and help to give a man a sane outlook on the complex problems of life. Sealed early of this tribe of authors, a student takes with him, as *compagnons de voyage*, life-long friends whose thoughts become his thoughts and whose ways become his

ways. Mastery of self; conscientious devotion to duty, deep human interest in human beings—these best of all lessons you must learn now or never—and these are some of the lessons which may be gleaned from the life and from the writings of Sir Thomas Browne.

WILLIAM OSLER.





(1). FRONTISPIECE OF THE  
SURREPTITIOUS EDITION



(2). FRONTISPIECE OF THE  
AUTHORIZED EDITION

