

**RECOLLECTIONS OF
DR. JOHN BROWN**

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Recollections of Dr. John Brown by Alexander Peddie

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ALEXANDER PEDDIE

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DR. JOHN BROWN**

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RECOLLECTIONS OF
DR. JOHN BROWN

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DR. JOHN BROWN

Author of 'Rab and His Friends,' etc.

WITH A SELECTION FROM
HIS CORRESPONDENCE

BY

ALEXANDER PEDDIE

M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S.E.

'His life was gentle. . . .
Nature he loved, and next to Nature Art.'

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1893

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INTRODUCTION

A LARGE reprint from the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* of my presidential address to the Harvcian Society in April 1890, entitled 'Dr. John Brown: His Life and Work, with Narrative Sketches of Syme in the Old Minto House Hospital and Dispensary Days,' having been expended among town and country members of that Society, a few other medical men, and old friends of the late Professor Syme and Dr. John Brown, I have been induced by its favourable reception and at the suggestion of many friends to reproduce it more as a biographical sketch of Dr. Brown. To this end much new matter has been introduced, while the bulk of what appeared in the original paper relating to Mr. Syme has been transferred to an Appendix.

Shortly after Dr. Brown's removal from our midst, several touching *In Memoriam* notices appeared in the newspapers of the day; and subsequently articles in some of the monthlies—namely, an obituary notice in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* of June 1882; a highly artistic sketch by Mr. Andrew Lang in the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* in December 1882;¹ an erudite article by Professor Masson in *Macmillan's Magazine* of February 1883;² a short but lively paper in 1887 by Miss G. T. Ross; a bright and loving 'Outline' in 1889 by Miss E. T. M'Laren;³ and in the recent January and February numbers of the *United Presbyterian Magazine* a clever and discriminating article by Robert Richardson, B.A. But notwithstanding these various somewhat fragmentary productions, I am aware that there is a call by many who ardently admired and loved 'Dr. John,' and a strong desire felt by others who have known him only from his writings or name,

¹ F. Warne & Co., London and New York.

² Reprinted lately in *Edinburgh Sketches and Memories*. A. & C. Black, London and Edinburgh.

³ *Dr. John Brown and his Sister Isabella*. Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890.

to have an extended memoir, from which they might learn more about him. I am well aware that the difficulties in undertaking satisfactorily such a task are great; but inspired by long familiar acquaintance with Dr. Brown, and an intimate knowledge and sympathetic appreciation of his character and work, I have endeavoured in the following pages to do my best. In this effort I have chosen, by quotations from his published papers and private correspondence now before me, and from varied reminiscences, to make him to a large extent his own biographer, thus presenting to the reader a truer ideal of the man than could be conveyed by any amount of editorial description, criticism, or literary embellishment.

The occasion when the address or 'oration' was delivered was the one hundred and eighth Festival of the Harveian Society of Edinburgh, when I held the honoured position of its President. Then, instead of attempting to dress up in a new garb the well chronicled facts connected with the illustrious William Harvey,¹ his great discovery of the circulation of the

¹ See Appendix, No. II.

blood, or the times in which he lived, or attempting anything on the lines of scientific research, I chose, in accordance with the spirit of Harvey's will, to discourse on those of professional reminiscence and biography. With that intent I selected the memories of James Syme, the distinguished surgeon and teacher, and John Brown, the popular writer and beloved physician; and in the accomplishment of that design I naturally had much to say of their relations to each other and to myself during the important period of our lives—from 1829 to 1852—when Minto House existed, first as a surgical hospital and dispensary, and afterwards as a private *maison de santé*, and a public dispensary.

Many of the Harveians present on the occasion of the Festival were only boys at school in 1870, when Syme died; a larger number were unborn in 1843, the end of his first decade as Professor of Clinical Surgery in the University of Edinburgh; and only one besides myself, namely, Sir Douglas Maclagan, was then present who knew anything of Mr. Syme or John Brown in the early days of Minto House Surgical Hospital. I considered, therefore, that it