

**LETTERS OF THOMAS
EDWARD BROWN,
AUTHOR OF
'FO'C'SLE YARNS'. VOL. II**

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Letters of Thomas Edward Brown, author of 'Fo'c'sle yarns'. Vol. II by Thomas Edward Brown

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THOMAS EDWARD BROWN

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J. W. Kewley.
from E. C. Kewley,
Christmas 1900

LETTERS
OF
THOMAS EDWARD BROWN

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THOMAS EDWARD BROWN

AUTHOR OF 'FO'C'SLE YARNS'

EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

BY

SIDNEY T. IRWIN

VOL. II

WESTMINSTER
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LETTERS OF T. E. BROWN

TO J. R. MOZLEY.

RAMSEY,

January 10, 1894.

IT is not too late, I hope, to wish you a very happy New Year. You shrank from that rough sea, and I don't wonder; it really was very bad. When will you come over in February? Tell me, and I will order a primrose or two. Last year the fine weather began at the opening of March, and lasted all spring and summer. It was quite delicious. I discovered a new country, the flat land lying between the hills and the north shore, more particularly that portion of it which we call the Curragh (*agh* strong guttural). The Curragh is a green bog, many miles in extent. It is full of bog-plants: for instance, there are whole acres of that most lovely flower the bog-bean. I had conjectured the beauty of this level space, with its sweet winding ways, and in 'Tommy Big-eyes' I had expressed what was after all a merely superficial appreciation. Now I know it. The haunt of innumerable cuckoos, the home of gorse and such

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delights, dreams so soothing made up of soft creamy vapours—dreams that are creams in fact, not whipped into artificial luxuries, but placid, smooth, and all but unctuous. So I was very happy there: few people, those that I met very simple and good: for instance, a dear nice woman who was proud of the bog-bean, and knew its *habitat* and the changes of its condition. I felt how much can be done by level surface. The glen, with its rocks and waterfalls and steep hillsides, I absolutely ceased to care for. Tarver felt just the same, and, staying at the Sulby Glen Hotel, always walked out along the plain, not up the glen.

I wish you could come across some time in May, and see this little paradise of a bog. It is perhaps hard to imagine Adam and Eve in a bog, though one of the orchids so abundant there is popularly called 'Adam and Eve.' Add cuckoos galore, and I think you have a fairly decent notion of what might have been the abode of 'our first parents.' Not oriental, I grant, but surely the Orient has had its innings by this time. I should be well content with the Occidental version. Adam was probably a gorgeous sort of person, certainly a *gourmand*. How dreadful all that talk about 'balmy spoils,' 'Sabaeon odours from the spicy shores of Araby the blest,' 'ambrosial fruit of vegetable gold,' 'nectareous draughts,' 'groves of myrrh,' and 'cassia, nard,' and God knows what! *Sabaeon!* In my Manx paradise there are wholesome smells, and plenty of them.

Of course February will not show the Curraghs at their best.

What a thing it is to have the command of your

own time! It must be admitted that I don't do much. My reading is not exactly desultory; at any rate, it is not sporadic or accidental. I *desult*, but of set purpose, knowing the horse I change to. Milton, as perhaps you observe, occupies me much, and I have revived my old '*Rep.*'¹ This, it strikes me, is a great benefit, and it is undoubtedly a pleasant practice. One knew it in one's youth as a harassing, burdensome task. But that was because one never had proper time, could not expatiate, could not lie down in the shady pastures with Tityrus and Menalcas. Happily I find that my memory is not a bit impaired, and this fact adds wings to my energy, and to my pleasure the sense of security, and the ballast of great example.

My lectures (Reminiscences, and so forth). I sometimes speak for upwards of two hours, and the people listen and seem well pleased. These speeches are asynartete, *solutae* to *dissolutae*. They occasionally give offence, and to sundry kinds of people, but, as a rule, are much appreciated by the vulgar!! They were originally intended as an ἀφορμή to a book, *The Island Diocese*. But I don't know whether this will go on.

My tendency at present is to give up all this sort of thing, and to take to poetry again. It would be more serious than most of what I have hitherto written. I have three poems smouldering within me. So there is enough for some time to come. Don't you think it is well to let those things simmer behind the oven for a good long while? I don't feel that they lose at all from the bubblings of Manx

¹ Repetition, 'learning poetry by heart.'

broth and the like that are given off by the crude heat of unpremeditated discourse. I should say that the prose, whether written or orally uttered, is a relief, and that the inner core of gestation (pardon the phrase!) goes on all the better, partly released from the strain of excessive tension, partly recruited from the outer world of converse and experience. In any case I am in no hurry, and I will *read*, whatever betide. For I find that I have read next to nothing all my life; and I will learn Rep. (!); for I find that my mind is singularly lacking in *pabulum*, and wholesome chyle.

TO S. T. IRWIN.

RAMSEY,

January 14, 1894.

Hic et ubique grey and grim, the heavens shut up in surly discontent, and you revelling in sunshine and flowers. Still I know your Riviera, and defy you to catch up the summer, chase it as you will. Short of the tropics, nothing will avail. That is a little comfort to me, envious.

I have been to Peel and delivered a lecture of some two hours. The best fun at Peel was the second day. Hall Caine gave a dinner to the fishermen and their wives. The place was the 'Shelter,' a room intended as a kind of lounge and reading-room for these fine old gentlemen.

The conditions of the feast, the wedding-garment so to speak, required that you were not a *swell*, not a parson, that you were 'dacent,' and over sixty. It

was ruled that I fulfilled these conditions. Parson I was, but as a successor of the Galilean fisherman I passed muster, and carved an enormous joint of roast beef, and made as much row as possible.

When we had dismissed the desire of eating and drinking, we had a grand 'smook'; and speeches and songs were 'indulged in,' under the presidency as chairman of C., the assistant harbour-master. You remember him at Greeba, a magnificent old salt, who interpreted Molly Charane to us, acute, sensible, and sincere. He made an absolutely perfect speech in proposing the health of Mr. and Mrs. Caine.

I perceive that the elation and depression of literary energy is quite as common among these worthies as with ourselves. C. told me afterwards, with unfeigned concern, of all the 'things' he had meant but failed to bring in. Characteristic too of the common predicament was his exaltation next day. Some praise of mine, given, I must say, most justly and most ungrudgingly, had reassured him and a little more. He told his chums that he didn't know how it was, *but he was carried along that night 'tremulously,' and the wind getting into his sails, he was fairly astonished at himself.* And truly it was a most eloquent epideixis. One passage about Mr. and Mrs. Hall Caine's position in London society, 'dining with lords, dukes, *and the lek,*' was simply gorgeous. 'And here they come down to us plain people, humble folk, and it is their joy to receive us and be kind to us¹.' Excellent C. I could have

¹ In another part of the letter (omitted) the speech is thus described.

'Good Heavens! C. tore away, broke Priscian's head a thousand