VERSES

BY

JAMES MORGAN BROWN

[Front Cover]

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JAMES M. BROWN,

OF GLASGOW,

(Died 7th March, 1893,)

WITH PREFATORY NOTES

By E.C. AND J.B.G.

GLASGOW;

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The following verses, written by our late comrade, James Morgan Brown, are printed in accordance with the wish of a good many of his friends, who will be glad to have them, not only as a remembrance of a genial and loved companion, but for their own sake, on account of their tenderness and beauty. Brown has a great gift of poetic expression, and wrote easily when prompted by feeling. In a letter to a friend, of June, '92, he says, "I am still writing poetry – and I cannot help it. The mood comes, and along with it the theme. I will collect them all together and call them 'Songs of the Heart'." This, however, he never did; and in a later letter he says, "I am very indifferent to seeing any of my own productions in print. I shall have to satisfy myself first if they will be of any real help to anybody." Many of his pieces are, as may be supposed in consequence of this "indifference," unfinished in one way or another, and unsuitable for printing; but some of the following are real gems. Perhaps most of his verses were inspired – as will be recognised by those who knew him best – by that spirit of attached comradeship which is so marked and important a feature of the Labor movement to-day. Some articles from his pen appeared in Commonweal on October 6th, 1888; November 1st, 1890; and January, 1891; and he has left, besides, several MS. papers and essays – on Theosophy, Anarchism, Robert Burns, J. J. Rousseau, &c. – which show the subjects his mind was interested in.

A short notice of James Brown's life by our comrade Glasier is reprinted below from Freedom. After he settled in the neighbourhood of Sheffield (in 1890), Brown's health became gradually worse.

The fault was always laid to his brain and his heart, from whence the worst symptoms seemed to proceed; and it was not till a fortnight before his death that it was discovered that he was suffering from "Bright's Disease" – and then, though tenderly nursed by Shortland and others of his friends, it was too late for anything effective to be done. Brain-poisoning set in, and he died on the 7th March, 1893. He was buried at Norton cemetery, overlooking the moors on the south side of Sheffield.

E.C.

A BELOVED COMRADE AND GENIAL PROPAGANDIST.

Reprinted from *Freedom* for May, '93.

IT would be a regrettable omission if a few words did not appear in *Freedom* commemorative of one of the most lovable spirits of our movement – James M. Brown, who died at Dore, near Sheffield, on the 7th of last month. Being one of his oldest comrades, it perhaps falls to me to perform that little duty.

Brown, together with his then inseparable chum, Dan McCulloch, became a member of the Glasgow Branch of the Socialist League immediately after its formation, early in the year 1885. I had previously known him in connection with the Secular Society as an enthusiastic student of Goethe and Carlyle, and was attracted towards him alike by what I had observed and what I had heard of his kindliness and self-abnegation.

He soon became one of the most earnest and helpful members of the League. Although not a public speaker, yet, by his good humour, good sense, and his remarkable gift of "chumminess" he exercised a most healthy and nurturing influence upon the propaganda. He attended all the meetings, indoor and outdoor, and sold literature. None of our propaganda excursions were successful without him – his snatches of song and amusing stories and comments enlivening our long tramps. He was always making converts, and ever and anon

introduced to us new comrades of the most wonderfully diverse external and internal characteristics. He was a tailor by trade, and the confinement of his occupation, coupled with an organic weakness of the heart, brought him latterly into a state of serious ill-health and great physical suffering. Then it was that a comrade, better circumstanced socially, lifted him right out of the workshop, and gave him a chance of recovering his health by complete rest in the country; and in the course of a year or so his sojourn in the beautiful village of Comrie, in Perthshire, made Brown almost a new man, and he was able to resume work.

This he did in the town of Beith, Ayrshire, where he remained for about a year, making frequent visits to his old comrades in Glasgow. Some three years ago he removed to Dore, near Sheffield, at the solicitation of his friends R. F. Muirhead and Edward Carpenter. Brown at once became a favourite with the Sheffield Socialists and Anarchists, and did not a little to impart good humour and enthusiasm into their work. He, as he himself put it, "tried to keep them right by laughing at them when they went wrong." His enthusiasm during Dr. Creaghe's agitation, and his zealous efforts in defence of out Walsall comrades, are well known to the local comrades.

The above brief account of his career in the Socialist movement fails – as would any mere record however full – to give anyone who did not know him personally a notion either of his actual helpfulness to the propaganda or the remarkable and pleasant dominion which his friendship had over his comrades.

It is one of the huge blunders of our modern journalistic system of publicity that only men who make big speeches or do great deeds are regarded as of importance in the making of every-day history. Looking back upon the early days of the propaganda in Glasgow, I am sure I can say that not one of the orators has a greater influence upon the members and the course of the movement than had Brown. At Comrie and Beith, and wherever else he took up his abode, he succeeded in quite a marvellous way in interesting men of all kinds in the movement – workmen and masters, students and artists, farmers and stable-

boys; and invariably the local physician and policeman. None who knew Brown will forget his beaming face, his infecting cheerfulness of disposition, his comical reproofs, his droll hypotheses, his quaint blasphemy, and, withal, his most-serious and deeply sympathetic interest in problems affecting the wellbeing of the race. Nor will they forget his songs – we all knew Brown's songs" – "John Grumlie," "Quivedo," "Annie Laurie" "When the Stares," "The Marseillaise" etc. He made us all become poets and musicians!

There is surely no living being – man, woman or child – yea, or animal, for he was a great friend of animals – that thinks otherwise than with affection of the "large, sweet soul that is gone."

He was a type of the highly socialised and intellectually sensitive natures that are growing up and quietly presenting themselves in the midst of the alien conditions of our time.

Physical suffering, and the actual modifications which ill-health induces in mental temperament, may latterly have told somewhat on the original sweetness and altruism of his disposition; but when in good health, he was certainly as well fitted as anyone to live, and be glad and make others glad, in a society of complete Anarchist Communism.

It is a pity that his letters cannot be published. The simplicity of his style, his graphic descriptions of men and things, and the humour and fancifulness that flowed, limpid and bright, through every page, made them ever welcome and delightful messengers. His letters descriptive of the men and incidents of local propaganda would, if collected, form an invaluable treasure of reminiscences of the Socialist agitation.

"By the door thou standest, wondering tenderly of him that is gone; presently the doorway shall be empty of thy form, and another shall stand there wondering of thee."

J.B.G.

My life ofttimes seems like a stagnant lake,
Far hidden in some ancient forest dim,
Whose tall trees growing close around its rim
All change of light and shadow from it take,
And the joy-giving sun unable make
To throw upon its waters one bright ray :
So that amid the floweriness of May
No buds or blossoms on its margin wake.

Those tall trees keep it neither cold nor warm,
But shield it from the wind that would be life,
Waking its waters into healthful strife :
So keepeth it a changeless, sullen form,
Below which weeds and rottenness are rife–
Until it shall be purified by storm.

We have forgot what we have been,
And what we are we little know ;
We fancy new events begin,
But all has happened long ago.

Full oft my feelings make me start,
Like footprints on a foreign shore,
As if the chambers of my heart,
Had heard their shadowy step before.

So, looking into thy clear eyes,
Strange memories come to me, as though
Somewhere–perchance in Paradise–
I had adored thee long ago.

POETS.

What are they if they knew their calling high,
But crushed perfumes exhaling to the sky ;
Or passing clouds that but a while are seen,
Yet keep the earth they haste to bright and green.

TO MY IDEAL

I love thee as I love no other;
Nearer thee than any brother;
I could cling to thee.
In thine inmost thought and motion
I could live with sweet emotion
And drink Joy from thee.

When with mystic pain o'ertaken,
And tho soul's deep core is shaken
With perplexity ;
When deep doubts of Life's stern mission
Cast their sadness o'er my vision
Craving sympathy ;

Thou art like a splendour glowing,
All my 'wildered senses throwing
In supreme delight,
By the radiance of thy gleaming
Through the darkness that was seeming
As eternal night.

[1883]

Foolish am I, and very sad sometimes–
The sadness on the folly following fast !
So grief on glee, repentance upon crimes,
Darkness and shadows on the daylight past
Are in attendance ; so funereal chimes
[Do marriage bells outlast.]

I know not whether of my head or heart
Cometh this fault–if fault it be–or if
Some morbid action, of the mind a part,
Dashes it to and fro, like some poor skiff
Upon a fitful sea. I have no art
To guide the wind-blown leaf.

When the short transport of exempted pain
Fills me with strange wild joy, as wine might do,
I cannot answer for the buoyant strain
Of merriment that pierces through and through.
Yet in my momentary glee of health
A hymn–not frivolous, tho' its sounds are gay–
Soars up to heaven, which thus from out its wealth
Hath deigned to scatter on my thorny way
A sunshine all mine own, nor ta'en by stealth
From Earth's imperfect day.

Thou art the light and I the shade ;
If thou fadest I too fade ;
If thy voice be heard no more
Mine, the echo, then is o’er–
Mine is mute for evermore.

Thou art the star that beams on high ;
In the wave beneath am I.
If the star away should flee
Who would then the shadow see?
Where would I, thy shadow, be?

Thou art the breath in which I breath ;
In thy heart mine own I sheathe.
If thou livest I live on,
If thou goest I am gone–
I too vanish cold and wan.

If we be blithe and warm at heart,
If we be sound and pure within,
No sorrow shall abide with us
Longer than dwells the sin ;
Though Autumn fogs the landscape fold,
Though Autumn tempests roam,
Our Summer is not over yet–
We keep the sun *at home*.

But if our heart be void and cold,
Be sure no good will dwell therein,
But sorrow for the sorrow’s sake,
And sin because of sin ;
And aye the drooping of the leaf,
And aye the falling of the snow,
And aye the barren, barren earth–
Though summer winds do blow.

SONNET.

I could live my life without a care,
Serene in mind, and heart in sweet repose,
With harmonies within me that would dare
The entrance of sharp sorrow, and the foes
That bleed the human heart with cruel pain.

I could live my life as if a fairy-dream
Held fast the senses, bidding me remain,
Forgetting space and time – all save the stream
Of sweet composéd ecstasy,
That mortals feel when heavy-winged sleep
Enchants the brain, obscuring misery,
Sinking all sorrow in oblivion deep.
Thus could I live if conscious that one friend
Did to my soul Love's highest blessing send.

THE POET.

He lives within a world which he has made
But for himself from out all things most fair,
Where perfect light dies into perfect shade
‘Neath endless Summer air.

There is not any winter in that land,
Nor Spring-time born to fade and die too soon ;
But every breeze by which his cheek is fanned
Breathes a perpetual June.

He crowns himself with royal crown of bay,
And laughing, bits the flowers to laugh with him,
Then wonders forth, all happy till the day
Dies and the eve grows dim.

He is a child ! O let him have his will,
And dream his dreams, and use his every breath
In song and rhyme and mirth, until
His voice is hushed in death !

SONNET

If thy pure soul no longer should meet mine
With looks of love, but stranger-like pass by,
And heedlessly gaze at me, as if thine
Heart never knew me, nor thy lips did cry
Sweet words of love which called to life
My drooping heart, and bade my soul be glad ;
I then should be a wanderer, and the strife
With care and sorrow and [with] all things sad
Should make me taste of bitterness again.
To gaze upon the shadow of they love,
Like summer sunset's glories on the wane,
And then depart in Night – and naught above
Save Death and Darkness, pitiless and grim –
Despair would reign and god-like Faith grow dim.

[1888]

Night wrapt in silent mystery
Engulphs the aftermath of day ;
The frolic winds in slumber lie
Upon the heaving bay.

Swiftly the cloudy veil is rent
That hid from mortal's longing gaze
God's glory in the firmament–
The throbbing starry blaze.

Like star-gleams on the wave's unrest –
Mute echoes of a heavenly sphere –
The golden memories flood my breast
Calm, shadowless and clear.

Tho' distance holds thee, thou art near,
In every star thy face I see ;
The flowers' sweet breath is thine, the clear
Still night is full of thee.
[1889]

For him whose soul hath winter,
Spring spends her blooms in vain ;
For him whose ear is heavy
Sweet echo wakes no strain ;
Whose heart no song doth whisper
Shall never know Song’s power ;
Who hath not Love’s sweet quickening
Is alien to Love’s dower.

What counts a life’s endeavour,
Tho’ spurred by finest thought,
That, feeding selfish purpose,
Leaves souls of men unsought?
Avails one kindly impulse
That blossoms to no deed?
What virtue hath the message
That touches no man’s need?

The living, loving spirit,
Will find its spirit-kin ;
When heart-doors swing at Love's light touch
Love surely enters in :
Who bars his soul to others
Shall know the exile's doom,
For him whose soul hath winter
In vain spring spends her bloom

TRUE GREATNESS.

Greatness is only greatness *in itself*.
It rests not on externals, nor its worth
Derives from gorgeous pomps or glittering pelf,
Or chance of arms, or accident of birth.
It lays its deep foundation in the soul
And piles a tower of virtues to the skies,
Around whose pinnacle majestic roll
The clouds of glory starred with angel eyes.

LOVE’S TRIUMPH

I mused on Love, the pure harmonious sense,
Its deeper meanings brightened o’er my soul
And thrilled me with the ecstasy of Hope,
The harbinger of Light and Joy on earth.
A new Life dawned upon my inmost eyes;
And men appeared no longer monsterlike,
But things of reason, beauty, harmony.
The deadly upas nationality
Was wholly razed from out the human breast,
And envy, spite, and rancorous jealousy–
All demons that enthral the mind of man,
Were swept and scattered by the light of Love.
One chain of kindred feeling linked mankind,
And what the poets dreamt of, came to pass.
I stood upon a lofty pinnacle,
And watched the evolution to its goal.
No longer hateful passions shook the breast,
For Love was throned and wore the diadem.

The Old, so wisdom saith, is better than the New;
Friends–like old wine, old books, old days–
With age do ripen into mellower hue ;
And Time, for what he takes, full oft repays
True hearts a hundredfold.

So as the years rush by, old friend,
May all bright memories of the part revive !
And when the hour is come to say “Good-Night,”
May peace and Hope be with us to the end,
Up to the fullness of unfading light !
When by the mystery of Death shall live
Things New and Old

[June 29th, 1892]