

# JOHN BROWN

HEALTH: FIVE LAY  
SERMONS TO  
WORKING-PEOPLE

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**Health: Five Lay Sermons  
to Working-People**

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# Health: Five Lay Sermons to Working-People

*Affectionately inscribed to the memory of the Rev. James Trench, the heart and soul of the Canongate Mission, who, while he preached a pure and a fervent gospel to its heathens, taught them also and therefore to respect and save their health, and was the Originator and Keeper of their Library and Penny Bank, as well as their Minister.*

## PREFACE

**THREE** of these sermons were written for, and (shall I say?) preached some years ago, in one of the earliest missionary stations in Edinburgh, established by Broughton Place Congregation, and presided over at that time by the Reverend James Trench; one of the best human beings it was ever my privilege to know. He is dead; dying in and of his work, – from typhus fever caught at the bedside of one of his poor members – but he lives in the hearts of many a widow and fatherless child; and lives also, I doubt not, in the immediate vision of Him to do whose will was his meat and his drink. Given ten thousand such men, how would the crooked places be made straight, and the rough places plain, the wildernesses of city wickedness, the solitary places of sin and despair, of pain and shame, be made glad! This is what is to regenerate mankind; this is the leaven that some day is to leaven the lump.

The other two sermons were never preached, except in print; but they were composed in the same key. I say this not in defence, but in explanation. I have tried to speak to working men and women from my lay pulpit, in the same words, with the same voice, with the same thoughts I was in the habit of using when doctoring them. This is the reason of their plain speaking. There is no other way of reaching these sturdy and weather and work-beaten understandings; there is nothing fine about them outside, though they are often as white in the skin under their clothes as a duchess, and their hearts as soft and tender as Jonathan's, or as Rachel's, or our own Grizel Baillie's; but you must speak out to them, and must not be mealy-mouthed if you wish to reach their minds and affections and wills. I wish the gentlefolks could hear and could use a little more of this outspokenness; and, as old Porson said, condescend to call a spade a spade, and not a horticultural implement; five letters instead of twenty-two, and more to the purpose.

You see, my dear working friends, I am great upon sparing your strength and taking things cannily. "All very well," say you; "it is easy speaking, and saying, Take it easy; but if the pat's on the fire it maun bile." It must, but you needn't poke up the fire forever, and you may now and then set the kettle on the hob, and let it sing, instead of leaving it to burn its bottom out.

I had a friend who injured himself by overwork. One day I asked the servant if any person had called, and was told that some one had. "Who was it?" "O, it's the little gentleman that *aye rins when he walks!*" So I wish this age would walk more and "rin" less. A man can walk farther and longer than he can run, and it is poor saving to get out of breath. A man who lives to be seventy, and has ten children and (say) five-and-twenty grandchildren, is of more worth to the state than three men who die at thirty, it is to be hoped unmarried. However slow a coach seventy may have been, and however energetic and go-ahead the three thirties, I back the tortoise against the hares in the long run.

I am constantly seeing men who suffer, and indeed die, from living too fast; from true though not consciously immoral dissipation or scattering of their lives. Many a man is bankrupt in constitution at forty-five, and either takes out a *cessio* of himself to the grave, or goes on paying ten per cent for his stock-in-trade; he spends his capital instead of merely spending what he makes, or better still, laying up a purse for the days of darkness and old age. A queer man, forty years ago, – Mr. Slate, or, as he was called, *Sclate*, who was too clever and not clever enough, and had not wisdom to use his wit, always scheming, full of "go," but never getting on, – was stopped by his friend, Sir Walter Scott, – that wonderful friend of us all, to whom we owe Jeanie Deans and Rob Roy, Meg Merrilies and Dandie Dinmont, Jinglin' Geordie, Cuddie Headrigg, and the immortal Baillie, – one day in Princess Street. "How are ye getting on, Sclate?" "Oo, just the auld thing, Sir Walter; *ma pennies a' gang on tippenny eerands.*" And so it is with our nervous power, with our vital capital, with the pence of life; many of them go on "tippenny eerands." We are forever getting our bills renewed, till down comes the poor and damaged concern with dropsy or consumption, blazing fever, madness, or palsy. There is a Western Banking system in living, in using our bodily organs, as well as in paper-money. But I am running off into another sermon.

Health of mind and body, next to a good conscience, is the best blessing our Maker can give us, and to no one is it more immediately valuable than to the laboring man and his wife and children; and indeed a good conscience is just moral health, the wholeness of the sense and the organ of duty; for let us never forget that there is a religion of the body, as well as, and greatly helpful of, the religion of the soul. We are to glorify God in our souls and in our bodies, for the best of all reasons, *because they are his*, and to remember that at last we must give account, not only of our thoughts and spiritual desires and acts, but *all the deeds done in our body*. A husband who, in the morning before going to his work, would cut his right hand off sooner than injure the wife of his bosom, strangles her that same night when mad with drink; that is a deed done in his body, and truly by his body, for his judgment is gone; and for that he must give an account when his name is called; his judgment was gone; but then, as the child of a drunken murderer said to me, "A' but, sir, wha goned it?" I am not a teetotaler. I am against teetotalism as a doctrine of universal application; I think we are meant to use these things as not abusing them, – this is one of the disciplines of life; but I not the less am sure that drunkenness ruins men's bodies, – it is not for me to speak of souls, – is a greater cause of disease and misery, poverty, crime, and death among the laboring men and women of our towns, than consumption, fever, cholera, and all their tribe, with thieving and profligacy and improvidence thrown into the bargain: these slay their thousands; this its tens of thousands. Do you ever think of the full meaning of "he's the waur o' drink?" How much the waur? – and then "dead drunk," – "mortal." Can there be anything more awfully significant than these expressions you hear from children in the streets?

You will see in the woodcut a good illustration of the circulation of the blood: both that through our lungs, by which we breathe and burn, and that through the whole body, by which we live and build. That hand grasps the heart, the central depot, with its valves opening out and in, and, by its contraction and relaxation, makes the living fluid circulate everywhere, carrying in strength, life, and supply to all, and carrying off waste and harm. None of you will be the worse of thinking of that hand as His who makes, supports, moves, and governs all things, – that hand which, while it wheels the rolling worlds, gathers the lambs with his arm, carries them in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young, and which was once nailed for "our advantage on the bitter cross."

J. B.

23 Rutland Street,  
December 16, 1861.

## SERMON I

### THE DOCTOR: OUR DUTIES TO HIM

**EVERYBODY** knows the Doctor; a very important person he is to us all. What could we do without him? He brings us into this world, and tries to keep us as long in it as he can, and as long as our bodies can hold together; and he is with us at that strange and last hour which will come to us all, when we must leave this world and go into the next.

When we are well, we perhaps think little about the Doctor, or we have our small joke at him and his drugs; but let anything go wrong with our body, that wonderful tabernacle in which our soul dwells, let any of its wheels go wrong, then off we fly to him. If the mother thinks her husband or her child dying, how she runs to him, and urges him with her tears! how she watches his face, and follows his searching eye, as he examines the dear sufferer; how she wonders what he thinks, – what would she give to know what he knows! how she wearies for his visit! how a cheerful word from him makes her heart leap with joy, and gives her spirit and strength to watch over the bed of distress! Her whole soul goes out to him in unspeakable gratitude when he brings back to her from the power of the grave her husband or darling child. The Doctor knows many of our secrets, of our sorrows, which no one else knows, – some of our sins, perhaps, which the great God alone else knows; how many cares and secrets, how many lives, he carries in his heart and in his hands! So you see he is a very important person the Doctor, and we should do our best to make the most of him, and to do our duty to him and to ourselves.

A thinking man feels often painfully what a serious thing it is to be a doctor, to have the charge of the lives of his fellow-mortals, to stand, as it were, between them and death and eternity and the judgment-seat, and to fight hand to hand with Death. One of the best men and greatest physicians that ever lived, Dr. Sydenham, says, in reference to this, and it would be well if all doctors, young and old, would consider his words: —

"It becomes every man who purposes to give himself to the care of others, seriously to consider the four following things: *First*, That he must one day give an account to the Supreme Judge of all the lives intrusted to his care. *Secondly*, That all his skill and knowledge and energy, as they have been given him by God, so they should be exercised for his glory and the good of mankind, and not for mere gain or ambition. *Thirdly*, and not more beautifully than truly, Let him reflect that he has undertaken the care of no mean creature, for, in order that we may estimate the value, the greatness of the human race, the only begotten Son of God became himself a man, and thus ennobled it with his divine dignity, and, far more than this, died to redeem it; and *Fourthly*, That the Doctor, being himself a mortal man, should be diligent and tender in relieving his suffering patients, inasmuch as he himself must one day be a like sufferer."

I shall never forget a proof I myself got twenty years ago, how serious a thing it is to be a doctor, and how terribly in earnest people are when they want him. It was when cholera first came here in 1832. I was in England at Chatham, which you all know is a great place for ships and sailors. This fell disease comes on generally in the night; as the Bible says, "it walks in darkness," and many a morning was I roused at two o'clock to go and see its sudden victims, for then is its hour and power. One morning a sailor came to say I must go three miles down the river to a village where it had broken out with great fury. Off I set. We rowed in silence down the dark river, passing the huge hulks, and hearing the restless convicts turning in their beds in their chains. The men rowed with all their might: they had too many dying or dead at home to have the heart to speak to me. We got near the place; it was very dark, but I saw a crowd of men and women on the shore, at the landing-place. They were all

shouting for the Doctor; the shrill cries of the women, and the deep voices of the men coming across the water to me. We were near the shore, when I saw a big old man, his hat off, his hair gray, his head bald; he said nothing, but turning them all off with his arm, he plunged into the sea, and before I knew where I was, he had me in his arms. I was helpless as an infant. He waded out with me, carrying me high up in his left arm, and with his right levelling every man or woman who stood in his way.

It was Big Joe carrying me to see his grandson, little Joe; and he bore me off to the poor convulsed boy, and dared me to leave him till he was better. He did get better, but Big Joe was dead that night. He had the disease on him when he carried me away from the boat, but his heart was set upon his boy. I never can forget that night, and how important a thing it was to be able to relieve suffering, and how much Old Joe was in earnest about having the Doctor.

Now, I want you to consider how important the Doctor is to you. Nobody needs him so much as the poor and laboring man. He is often ill. He is exposed to hunger and wet and cold, and to fever, and to all the diseases of hard labor and poverty. His work is heavy, and his heart is often heavy, too, with misery of all kinds, – his heart weary with its burden, – his hands and limbs often meeting with accidents, – and you know if the poor man, if one of you falls ill and takes fever, or breaks his leg, it is a far more serious thing than with a richer man. Your health and strength are all you have to depend on; they are your stock-in-trade, your capital. Therefore I shall ask you to remember *four things* about your duty to the Doctor, so as to get the most good out of him, and do the most good to him too.

*1st*, It is your duty to trust the Doctor;

*2dly*, It is your duty to obey the Doctor;

*3dly*, It is your duty to speak the truth to the Doctor, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and,

*4thly*, It is your duty to reward the Doctor.

And so now for the *first*. It is your duty to *trust* the Doctor, that is, to believe in him. If you were in a ship, in a wild storm, and among dangerous rocks, and if you took a pilot on board, who knew all the coast and all the breakers, and had a clear eye, and a firm heart, and a practised hand, would you not let him have his own way? would you think of giving him your poor advice, or keep his hand from its work at the helm? You would not be such a fool, or so uncivil, or so mad. And yet many people do this very same sort of thing, just because they don't really trust their Doctor; and a doctor is a pilot for your bodies when they are in a storm and in distress. He takes the helm, and does his best to guide you through a fever; but he must have fair play; he must be trusted even in the dark. It is wonderful what cures the very sight of a doctor will work, if the patient believes in him; it is half the battle. His very face is as good as a medicine, and sometimes better, – and much pleasanter too.

One day a laboring man came to me with indigestion. He had a sour and sore stomach, and heartburn, and the water-brash, and wind, and colic, and wonderful misery of body and mind. I found he was eating bad food, and too much of it; and then, when its digestion gave him pain, he took a glass of raw whiskey. I made him promise to give up his bad food and his worse whiskey, and live on pease-brose and sweet milk, and I wrote him a prescription, as we call it, for some medicine, and said, "Take *that*, and come back in a fortnight and you will be well." He did come back, hearty and hale; – no colic, no sinking at the heart, a clean tongue, and a cool hand, and a firm step, and a clear eye, and a happy face. I was very proud of the wonders my prescription had done; and having forgotten what it was, I said, "Let me see what I gave you." "O," says he, "I took it." "Yes," said I, "but the prescription." "*I took it*, as you bade me. I swallowed it." He had actually eaten the bit of paper, and been all that the better of it; but it would have done him little, at least less good had he not trusted me when I said he would be better, and attended to my rules.

So, take my word for it, and trust your Doctor; it is his due, and it is for your own advantage. Now, our next duty is to *obey* the Doctor. This you will think is simple enough. What use is there in calling him in, if we don't do what he bids us? and yet nothing is more common – partly from laziness and sheer stupidity, partly from conceit and suspiciousness, and partly, in the case of children, from

false kindness and indulgence – than to disobey the Doctor's orders. Many a child have I seen die from nothing but the mother's not liking to make her swallow a powder, or put on a blister; and let me say, by the by, teach your children at once to obey you, and take the medicine. Many a life is lost from this, and remember you may make even Willie Winkie take his castor-oil in spite of his cries and teeth, *by holding his nose*, so that he must swallow.

*Thirdly, You should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, to your Doctor. He may be never so clever, and never so anxious, but he can no more know how to treat a case of illness without knowing all about it, than a miller can make meal without corn; and many a life have I seen lost from the patient or his friends concealing something that was true, or telling something that was false. The silliness of this is only equal to its sinfulness and its peril.

I remember, in connection with that place where Big Joe lived and died, a singular proof of the perversity of people in not telling the Doctor the truth, – as you know people are apt to send for him in cholera when it is too late, when it is a death rather than a disease. But there is an early stage, called premonitory, – or warning, – when medicines can avail. I summoned all the people of that fishing-village who were well, and told them this, and asked them if they had any of the symptoms. They all denied having any (this is a peculiar feature in that terrible disease, they are afraid to *let on* to themselves, or even the Doctor, that they are "in for it"), though from their looks and from their going away while I was speaking, I knew they were not telling the truth. Well, I said, "You must, at any rate, every one of you take some of this," producing a bottle of medicine. I will not tell you what it was, as you should never take drugs at your own hands, but it is simple and cheap. I made every one take it; only one woman going away without taking any; she was the only one of all those *who died*.

*Lastly, It is your duty to reward* your Doctor. There are four ways of rewarding your Doctor. The first is by giving him your money; the second is by giving him your gratitude; the third is by your doing his bidding; and the fourth is by speaking well of him, giving him a good name, recommending him to others. Now, I know few if any of you can pay your Doctor, and it is a great public blessing that in this country you will always get a good Doctor willing to attend you for nothing, and this *is* a great blessing; but let me tell you, – I don't think I need tell you, – try and pay him, be it ever so little. It does you good as well as him; it keeps up your self-respect; it raises you in your own eye, in your neighbor's, and, what is best, in your God's eye, because it is doing what is right. The "man of independent mind," be he never so poor, is "king of men for a' that"; ay, and "for twice and mair than a' that"; and to pay his way is one of the proudest things a poor man can say, and he may say it oftener than he thinks he can. And then let me tell you, as a bit of cool, worldly wisdom, that your Doctor will do you all the more good, and make a better job of your cure, if he gets something, some money for his pains; it is human nature and common sense, this. It is wonderful how much real kindness and watching and attendance and cleanliness you may get *for so many shillings a week*. Nursing is a much better article at that, – much, – than at *nothing* a week. But I pass on to the other ways of paying or rewarding your Doctor, and, above all, *to gratitude*.

Honey is not sweeter in your mouths, and light is not more pleasant to your eyes, and music to your ears, and a warm, cosey bed is not more welcome to your wearied legs and head, than is the honest, deep gratitude of the poor to the young Doctor. It is his glory, his reward; he fills himself with it, and wraps himself all round with it as with a cloak, and goes on in his work, happy and hearty; and the gratitude of the poor is worth the having, and worth the keeping, and worth the remembering. Twenty years ago I attended old Sandie Campbell's wife in a fever, in Big Hamilton's Close in the Grassmarket, – two worthy, kindly souls they were and are. (Sandie is dead now.) By God's blessing, the means I used saved "oor Kirsty's" life, and I made friends of these two forever; Sandie would have fought for me if need be, and Kirsty would do as good. I can count on them as my friends, and when I pass the close-mouth in the West Port, where they now live, and are thriving, keeping their pigs, and their hoary old cuddie and cart, I get a courtesy from Kirsty, and see her look after me, and turn to the women beside her, and I know exactly what she is saying to them about "Dr. Broon." And

when I meet old Sandie, with his ancient and long-lugged friend, driving the draff from the distillery for his swine, I see his gray eye brighten and glisten, and he looks up and gives his manly and cordial nod, and goes on his way, and I know that he is saying to himself, "God bless him! he saved my Kirsty's life," and he runs back in his mind all those twenty past years, and lays out his heart on all he remembers, and that does him good and me too, and nobody any ill. Therefore, give your gratitude to your Doctor, and remember him, like honest Sandie; it will not lose its reward and it costs you nothing; it is one of those things you can give and never be a bit the poorer, but all the richer.

One person I would earnestly warn you against, and that is the *Quack Doctor*. If the real Doctor is a sort of God of healing, or rather our God's cobbler for the body, the Quack is the Devil for the body, or rather the Devil's servant against the body. And like his father, he is a great liar and cheat. He offers you what he cannot give. Whenever you see a medicine that cures everything, be sure it cures nothing; and remember, it may kill. The Devil promised our Saviour all the kingdoms of the world if he would fall down and worship him; now this was a lie, he could not give him any such thing. Neither can the Quack give you his kingdoms of health, even though you worship him as he best likes, by paying him for his trash; he is dangerous and dear, and often deadly, – have nothing to do with him.

We have our duties to one another, yours to me, and mine to you: but we have all our duty to one else, – to Almighty God, who is beside us at this very moment – who followed us all this day, and knew all we did and didn't do, what we thought and didn't think, – who will watch over us all this night, – who is continually doing us good, – who is waiting to be gracious to us, – who is the great Physician, whose saving health will heal all our diseases, and redeem our life from destruction, and crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, – who can make death the opening into a better life, the very gate of heaven; that same death which is to all of us the most awful and most certain of all things, and at whose door sits its dreadful king, with that javelin, that sting of his, which is sin, our own sin. Death would be nothing without sin, no more than falling asleep in the dark to awake to the happy light of the morning. Now, I would have you think of your duty to this great God, our Father in heaven; and I would have you to remember that it is your duty to trust him, to believe in him. If you do not, your soul will be shipwrecked, you will go down in terror and in darkness.

It is your duty to *obey* him. Whom else in all this world should you obey, if not him? and who else so easily pleased, if we only do obey? It is your duty to speak the truth to him, not that he needs any man to tell him anything. He knows everything about everybody; nobody can keep a secret from him. But he hates lies; he abhors a falsehood. He is the God of truth, and must be dealt honestly with, in sincerity and godly fear; and, lastly, you must in a certain sense *reward* him. You cannot give him money, for the silver and gold, the cattle upon a thousand hills, are all his already, but you can give him your grateful lives; you can give him your hearts; and as old Mr. Henry says, "Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better."

One word more; you should call your Doctor early. It saves time; it saves suffering; it saves trouble; it saves life. If you saw a fire beginning in your house, you would put it out as fast as you could. You might perhaps be able to blow out with your breath what in an hour the fire-engine could make nothing of. So it is with disease and the Doctor. A disease in the morning when beginning is like the fire beginning; a dose of medicine, some simple thing, may put it out, when if left alone, before night it may be raging hopelessly, like the fire if left alone, and leaving your body dead and in the ruins in a few hours. So, call in the Doctor soon; it saves him much trouble, and may save you your life.

And let me end by asking you to call in the Great Physician; to call him instantly, to call him in time; there is not a moment to lose. He is waiting to be called; he is standing at the door. But he must be *called*, – he may be called too late.

## SERMON II

### THE DOCTOR: HIS DUTIES TO YOU

**YOU** remember our last sermon was mostly about your duties to the Doctor. I am now going to speak about his duties to you; for you know it is a law of our life, that there are no one-sided duties, – they are all double. It is like shaking hands, there must be two at it; and both of you ought to give a hearty grip and a hearty shake. You owe much to many, and many owe much to you. The Apostle says, "Owe no man anything but to love one another"; but if you owe that, you must be forever paying it; it is always due, always running on; and the meanest and most helpless, the most forlorn, can always pay and be paid in that coin, and in paying can buy more than he thought of. Just as a farthing candle, twinkling out of a cotter's window, and, it may be, guiding the gudeman home to his wife and children, sends its rays out into the infinite expanse of heaven, and thus returns, as it were, the light of the stars, which are many of them suns. You cannot pass any one on the street to whom you are not bound by this law. If he falls down, you help to raise him. You do your best to relieve him, and get him home; and let me tell you, to your great gain and honor, the poor are far more ready and better at this sort of work than the gentlemen and ladies. You do far more for each other than they do. You will share your last loaf; you will sit up night after night with a neighbor you know nothing about, just because he is your neighbor, and you know what it is to be neighbor-like. You are more natural and less selfish than the fine folks. I don't say you are better, neither do I say you are worse; that would be a foolish and often mischievous way of speaking. We have all virtues and vices and advantages peculiar to our condition. You know the queer old couplet, —

"Them what is rich, them rides in chaises;  
Them what is poor, them walks like blazes."

If you were well, and not in a hurry, and it were cold, would you not much rather "walk like blazes" than ride listless in your chaise? But this I know, for I have seen it, that according to their means, the poor bear one another's burdens far more than the rich.

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