



JAMES H. BROWN.

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In Memoriam :

JAMES HAMPTON BROWN, J.P.

Born 4th April, 1851.

Died 16th August, 1902.

WE again mourn the death, in his prime, of an enthusiastic member of the Club. James H. Brown was the most popular and likeable man in Ellon, where he had been in business over thirty years. But there were few districts in Scotland where he was not known, and with him to be known was to be loved.

Brown was a successful man of business. His energy was only equalled by his tact, and thus he was the *beau ideal* of a country banker. When he gave his support to any public movement, it was in no half-hearted manner; and, as a consequence, the result was usually success. "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country"; but this did not apply in his case. He received formal recognition of his public usefulness in being elected a member of the Town Council, and thereafter appointed a Magistrate. He was associated with all that was for the practical benefit of his fellow-townsmen; but his *magnum opus* was the erection of the Ellon Victoria Hall. It is mainly through his energy that this beautiful and important building is now the property of the community,

practically free of debt. That hall will be his best memorial in the town where he spent the best years of his busy life; the opening of part of it as a Public Library he was not permitted to see.

Those who knew James Brown best loved him most. His friendship was valued by all who had the privilege of meeting him, either in public or in private life. When free of the cares of business, he was keenly interested in art and literature. He had many art friends, and it is to be noted that he did not long survive the death of his particular friend, Mr. G. W. Johnstone, R.S.A. He was much at home with the poets, and was a special admirer of Burns. It may be mentioned that he had determined a few months before his untimely death to form a little gallery of portraits of local artists, and had even ordered one or two portraits as a nucleus of his collection.

Brown was an enthusiastic golfer, and was a familiar figure at the Cruden Links and at Newburgh of an afternoon when he had a half-holiday. He was, however, well known on links in the south of Scotland, where his yearly appearance, along with friends from the north, was one of the pleasant fixtures of the royal game.

It is, however, as a mountaineer that we best knew our late friend. He valued his association with the Club and the opportunities it gave him of meeting kindred spirits on the hill. He has been described as one of the Club's "stalwarts," and well he deserved that classification. Frequently he declared that the bracing air of the mountains and the exertion to get into it was just what he needed to counteract his sedentary occupation. When he could not get away to the hills, he was content with a long walk. It added considerably to one's pleasure to have such a companion on our higher mountains; his feeling of enjoyment on such occasions was so keen that it was infectious. The day's work well done, what a happy evening the little band would spend together! Old climbs would be re-climbed, and stories of the hills made the hours fly. Each told of an experience in some remote glen more wonderful than the other, and all

were interesting. Plans would be made for future ascents when a holiday for the little party could be arranged. Winter and summer were alike for such enthusiasts, who began the season on 1st January and recognised no close time, the mountains being as fascinating in winter as they were grand in autumn. Our *Journal* and the newspapers of the day are not lacking in references to Brown's hill expeditions, for he generally contrived to take part in ascents which somehow or other became pleasantly memorable. To that he himself contributed in no small measure; his invariable good humour and utter unselfishness made the best of temporary discomforts. One now reads "'Twiixt Loch Ericht and Strath Ossian" in our third volume with different feelings, for it was Brown's last contribution to our pages, as well as his last important climbing excursion in the Highlands.

With such an apprenticeship in Scotland, it was no marvel that Brown longed for an acquaintance with the Alps, though it was not till last season that he started with serious climbing designs. He set out on Wednesday, 6th August, with his friend and fellow-clubman, Mr. William Garden, for a mountaineering holiday in Switzerland, the Bear Hotel at Grindelwald being their headquarters. The weather was bad on their arrival, as it continued for most of the season, but on Saturday, 16th August, it was so much improved that, on the advice of their guides, they made an early start for the Wetterhorn. They spent some hours at the Gleckstein hut, which is the starting point for the Wetterhorn, from the Grindelwald side, and they left this hut soon after two a.m. The guide was Knubel, of St. Niklaus, and his companion was Imboden, of the same place, who acted as second guide. Garden had been in the Alps in 1901, and had made successful ascents, including the Matterhorn and the Weisshorn.

The ascent was trying, because of the recent falls of snow. The upper couloir was particularly difficult. In the earlier part of the morning, when the snow retained

some of the night's frost, progress was satisfactory, but as the sun melted it, and it became soft and deep, the climb was very fatiguing. However, in due time the summit was reached, and the view from it was magnificent.

From the Saddle down to the upper couloir the quantity of soft snow made the descent rather trying, and it was not always very safe. There was the probability either of the party by their own weight starting an avalanche or of their being caught in one. It was the state of the snow and its quantity, and not the natural features of the mountain, which were the source of the greatest danger. Owing to so much extra step cutting having to be done, the party reached the summit of the Wetterhorn about an hour later than they had calculated upon, and consequently the lower couloir had to be crossed later in the afternoon than was intended, by which time the sun had rendered the new snow more treacherous, and liable to drop off the cliffs at the top of the couloir. Coming down the lower couloir, therefore, there was no slight anxiety, and every effort was made to get out of it as soon as possible. Imboden and Garden had got across the couloir, and had anchored. The danger of the position was quite appreciated, and Knubel remarked that no time must be lost in crossing, and urged Brown to hasten across. This he was just proceeding to do when an avalanche overwhelmed the party, and they were carried away with irresistible force, by three or four tons of soft snow, which originated from the cliffs some 1500 feet above, and had increased in its descent, which was, on an average, at an angle varying from 60° to 65° . They were hurled hither and thither, and tumbled over again and again, and were blinded by snow and threatened with suffocation. When the avalanche stopped, after sweeping them down over 1200 feet, Knubel and Brown were some 5 feet above Garden, and Imboden about 40 feet below him. The rope was cut to pieces even round Garden's waist, and knapsacks and ice axes were all gone. After a moment or two, Garden, more or less dazed by the

terrible fall, rose to his feet, spoke to Brown, and by shaking endeavoured to rouse him, but in vain. Knubel was gasping for breath, and Garden tried to pour some wine into his mouth; but it was too late, and in a few moments he too died. Garden's attention was next turned to Imboden, whose mind was wandering, and who was crying aloud in mingled distress and fear. He attempted to move him out of the bed of the avalanche, but was not able to accomplish this. He himself struggled to some rocks on his left, and on the chance, which was very remote, of attracting the attention of someone, he shouted again and again at the top of his voice for assistance.

It happened that a German climber, with his guides, who had come over the mountain from Rosenlauri, appeared on the rocks above, and after three-quarters of an hour reached Garden, who had previously rushed across the couloir to a place of safety on the rocks to the right. They immediately went to the assistance of Imboden, and one of the guides carried him on his back to the side of Garden. They gave Garden to understand that they would hurry on and send up guides and succour, and meantime they left him alone with his two dead companions and with poor Imboden, who was quite delirious, from about three o'clock in the afternoon till after ten p.m. The evening closed in; the heavens became black with portentous clouds. Presently hail pelted furiously. The cold was intense. The moonlight tried to struggle through the darkness, but receded again immediately. No human sound broke the solitude except the piteous wailings of the half-demented Imboden. The lightning flashed and made everything around look ghastly. It was no dream, no nightmare, but terrible reality, and those hours of indescribable misery moved with the slowness of a lifetime. No outsider can enter the sacred enclosure of the inner being at such a time—the keen sensibilities, the vivid and crowded memories, the activities of a living conscience, the emotions true and deep and tender, the submissiveness mingling with the hope that life may yet be spared, and be lived as it never was before.

Succour came at length. Guides carried the living and the dead with the skill and tenderness which always characterise them. From the hut, Garden walked, supported on either side by a guide, and with all his pains and bruises this must have been no easy task. Nature gave no relief to the gloom; rain poured in torrents.

It may be remarked as an extraordinary feature of the accident, and one which climbing experts have so far been unable to explain satisfactorily, that, though the party was roped by 100 feet of absolutely new Alpine rope, yet after the accident took place there was not a trace of it remaining round the bodies either of the two dead men or of the survivors. It was quite to be expected that the rope should be broken between the individuals, but that it should be cut off each of their waists, where it was tightly knotted, is an occurrence which must ever be a mystery, and that all the more so because no clothing was torn.

Brown's body was taken home to Ellon, and laid to rest in the old churchyard of Fetteresso. The very large funeral party started from Ellon by special train, and was joined *en route* at Aberdeen by more friends there, and at Stonehaven, the place of Brown's birth, by a considerable number of the inhabitants.

There is one trait of Brown's character which we have yet to mention specifically. He was one of the most generous of men and the most charitable. Not that charity which vaunteth itself, however; yet he literally "gave tithes of all he possessed." Only his more intimate friends knew of this peculiarity, and to them he declared that he prospered as he gave.