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Revised 22 September 1924  
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24

14

42 ~~Edwards~~ First

1800

Hugh Maxwell invented the  
printer's ink roller

76 Fessenden Register of Arts Phila 1802, p. 363

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

His life and works  
by  
Daniel Edwards Kennedy

In nine volumes

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CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

a biography

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Daniel Edwards Kennedy

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## THE DULLEST OF TRADES

1800 Aetat.29

*During*  
 This year when Brown was editing the Monthly Magazine and novel  
<sup>realistic novels</sup> writing as a sort of embroidery <sup>there is no ~~surprise~~ <sup>wonder</sup> that</sup> <sup>gave up</sup> he ~~seems to have found~~ little time  
 to write <sup>ing</sup> letters. Whether the three which have survived ~~for us~~ are  
 all, it is impossible to know but it is probable <sup>rather</sup> ~~few of this year~~  
 are missing <sup>even though it would seem</sup> <sup>well enough</sup> ~~because~~ his reputation was ~~too firmly~~ established to  
 lead any recipients to <sup>preserve</sup> ~~destroy~~ them.

Letters asking for patronage for a periodical ~~would seem to be~~ <sup>are</sup> a  
 part of the business of conducting one; too often they are of little if  
 any literary value and with most writers they seldom, ~~if ever~~ are of  
 any interest, as biographical material, for the simple reason that they  
~~do nothing but beg the support of a prospective subscriber.~~ In Brown's  
 present case we have an interesting exception for the letter which  
 follows <sup>to an</sup> ~~shows some~~ acquaintance, with the person <sup>is</sup> addressed and in ~~one~~  
~~particular~~, the postscript, ~~it contains what is~~ distinctively literary.  
~~material. It is~~

<sup>to</sup> <sup>1</sup>  
 (addressed Wm. P. Beers, Esq., Attorney at Law, Albany.)

New York (Wednesday) Feb'y 12, 1800. 2

2 Dated from the end of the letter.

1 William Pitt Beers was born at Stratford, Conn. <sup>after being</sup> and graduated from Yale  
 in 1785; he studied law with Tapping Reeve, settled at Albany, was appointed  
 Attorney for the Northern District of New York ~~in~~ (1801) and Clerk of  
 Albany County ~~in~~ (1810). ~~Five days later~~ He died at the residence of  
 his father-in-law in Fairfield, Conn., leaving a widow and four sons  
 one of whom graduated from Union College in 1812.

in the  
 fall of  
 1810

Dear Sir

I am sorry that the first time I should have the pleasure of addressing you, should be, in some sort, soliciting a favor, and imposing on you trouble, but you have the goodness to excuse me.

The inclosed paper contains the conditions of a publication which it is presumed will be, at this time, generally acceptable. Will you bestow a moment's attention on it? If you should think it worthy of your subscription, and that of any of your friends you will particularly oblige the compiler, who is, at the same time,

Yours respectfully

Charles B. Brown.

Permit me to present you my thanks for your oration. I have perused it with much pleasure, and only wish for the honor of our country, that most of those eulogies which have been delivered on the same occasion were equal to yours in merit.

The Washington oration mentioned was <sup>it was about to be</sup> well and favorably reviewed—  
 most probably by Brown himself—in <sup>the</sup> his Monthly Magazine <sup>2</sup> and American  
~~Review~~ <sup>2</sup> the criticism ending with a summary like ~~that~~ in the postscript  
 to that <sup>2</sup> letter. ~~It is possible~~ <sup>may have</sup> Beers read or heard Brown's Monody on  
 Washington spoken by Cooper on 24 December 1799, for his oration has  
 a similar climax in its second paragraph. As a piece of documentary  
 evidence of Brown's sincerity toward those to whom he wrote, the  
 letter is <sup>a good</sup> ~~one of the best of~~ examples. The postscript might ~~have been~~ <sup>appear to be</sup>  
<sup>dash</sup> a clever, of flattery to draw a subscription, but with Brown is was  
 his sincere opinion.

1 It is reprinted in Hough's Washingtoniana, Roxbury, 1865, Vol. II, p. 69 ff., in the note to which Brown's criticism is credited to the New York Magazine.

2 Vol. II, p. 131 ff., in the February number to be issued in March.

1797-ib not 1793- (311)

Evidently Beers was one of the old acquaintances of Brown, it

being probable that they were made acquainted by <sup>Smith</sup> Dwight, who later <sup>knew</sup> him and his wife well.

lodged at Beers' house when on his <sup>Dwight later</sup> Journey to <sup>1</sup> Whitestown. Mr.

and Mrs. Beers were remembered in June 1806 by Brown in his letter

to his sister-in-law, and Mrs. Beers called at the Linns' house

about 16 June 1806<sup>2</sup> when Brown was there seeking a rest and restoration of his failing health.

The next letter is principally literary and contains considerable of importance. It refers briefly to the difficulties attending the publication of the Monthly Magazine; to the temporary suspension of Stephen Calvert; it gives his brother's criticism on Edgar Huntly and promises amendment of the faults noticed; and it comments on the condition of literary work in the United States.

<sup>3</sup>Dunlap gives it as follows:

TO JAMES BROWN.

New York, (Wednesday 2, ) April, 1800.<sup>4</sup>

DEAR BROTHER,

I received your letter and the volumes, by Mr. D. <sup>5</sup>but not till several days after he received them from you, in consequence of a stop which he made at Woodbridge and Perth Amboy. It is a source of some regret that M. <sup>6</sup>is

1 Dwight's Travels, Vol. III, p. 202.  
2 See Brown's letter to his wife dated 17 June 1806.  
3 Vol. II, .p. 99.  
4 Dunlap.  
5 Hugh Maxwell.  
6 The "yesterday" of the second paragraph indicates the date of the letter as probably the 2nd.

so reluctant and dilatory in the fulfilment of his promises, but allowances must be made for his indigence on one hand, and his sanguine and promise-ful disposition on the other.

Yesterday the due number of copies of number three of the Magazine was put on board the stage for your city, where I hope they have seasonably arrived. This once the printers have been tolerably punctual, and, hereafter, I have reason to think that they will be regular and exact in their publication. I know how much depends upon punctuality and regularity, and nothing shall be wanting on my part.

I gave you, I thought, a good reason for the temporary suspension of Calvert. It will, in the ensuing number, be resumed, and I hope not again checked in its course, till its course be finished.

Your remarks upon the gloominess and out-of-nature incidents of Huntly, if they be not just in their full extent, are, doubtless, such as most readers will make, which alone, is a sufficient reason for dropping the doleful tone and assuming a cheerful one, or, at least substituting moral causes and daily incidents in place of the prodigious or the singular. I shall not fall hereafter into that strain. Book-making, as you observe, is the dullest of all trades, and the utmost that any American can look for, in his native country, is to be reimbursed his unavoidable expenses.

I know not whether the advantageous publication of Mervyn (the sequel of it) can be brought about in this city, but shall have it done in the way you mention. The saleability of my works will much depend upon their popularity in England, whither Caritat has carried a considerable number of Wieland, Ormond and Mervyn.

Adieu,

C. B. B.

A study of Edgar Huntly and the Monthly Magazine will show how

Brown took the advice of James<sup>5</sup> in the matter of the prodigious and singular. Though he probably had no choice in the matter, he should not have listened to James' criticism of Edgar Huntly--it

1 March, No. III of Vol. II of the Monthly Magazine.

2 Monthly Magazine, Vol. II, p. 173 had said it would be tedious to the reader to give the reasons.

3 It was resumed in the ensuing number--April.

4 Ormond was given a new half-title, title, and final page by Lane and issued in 1800 as printed at the Minerva Press.

5 In 1800 James lived at 119 South Second street.

lead him away from what had given him fame--if not fortune--to the poorest product of his pen. It lost for him the enchanted kingdom of romance and substituted a Circean banquet before driving him on to the barren plain of the realistic novel. Had he been of a sterner nature--had those eyes steeled instead of softened or suffused with tears he would never have had cause as he did this year to renew his dejected disappointment. The family, saturated with money matters, business people if you will, surely mired of Mammon, won the field by starvation as they always do and sacrificed the best of Brown's genius for a miserable mess of potage.

1

Some time in the summer of 1800 Joseph, Brown's eldest brother, paid a visit to the members of the family, stopping at Philadelphia and Princeton, New Jersey, where his sister Elizabeth having married had her home. Brown was possibly in New York at the time Joseph was in Philadelphia for he went to Princeton to meet Joseph and on his way stopped with friends at New Brunswick.

2

According to Dunlap Joseph wanted Brown to return to North Carolina with him "but" says Brown "I am reluctant to comply. I know not why, scarcely. Seldom less happy than at present. Seldom has my prospect been a gloomier one. Yet it may shine when least expected."

1 Joseph Armit Brown was born 16 October 1763. He engaged in mercantile business and afterward became a resident of North Carolina. He is said to have married an A. Harrison of Upper Brandon, Norfolk, Virginia, and had two daughters both of Hillsboro, North Carolina, Jane Hunter and Mary Elizabeth who married a Scott. According to Earle: Home Life in Colonial Days, N.Y., 1898, p.14 the home of Joseph was finer than Mount Vernon. In the Wigland note-book (p.78) we find in Elijah Brown's handwriting the following: "If son Jos. choses this side of the Delaware to sit down on a Farm--that of Tench Francis consists of 40 acres 4 miles from the City, the orchard is young 250 grafted fruit trees were planted in 1792. The mansion of stone 40 by 38 2 parlors and one small room below stairs 4 chambers & finished garrets the kitchen below--a tennant's house, a stone spring house, woodland sufficient (?) 50 acres in arable in clover & grain the stock farming untilled (?) to go with the premises the price asked 16000 Dollars the improvements cost 8000 there is a good quarry on the premises a barn is wanted." According to his diaries in the summer of 1811 with his brother Armit he made a business voyage to Lisbon. He became a member of the Presbyterian Church, being baptised 6 May 1827 and on 27 December 1828 he was made an Elder. His death has been given as 29 October 1807 at Flushing Holland--probably an error for 1837.

2 Vol. II, p.49.

In that brief extract, apparently from a letter to Dunlap, we see the same despondency over the prospects of a literary man which we have found in his letter to James.

According to Dunlap it was about this time that Brown became attached to Elizabeth Linn. How they met and where is not, <sup>positively</sup> known; he probably had met her, when she was about eleven years old, at <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> father's in New York in 1796, he <sup>could</sup> have renewed his acquaintance with her, he may have ~~met~~ <sup>seen</sup> her in Philadelphia where her brother was a well known Presbyterian minister, <sup>there</sup>. A need for money, which his books could not yet supply, perhaps prospects of marriage, lead him to leave New York, the one place on earth which up to this time had given him <sup>literary</sup> encouragement.

at her father's or

she visited

which, according to his 7 December 1802 letter to her, seems hoped for,

The next letter makes it clear that Brown had returned to  
 Philadelphia. It is given by Dunlap and is

To R(ober) P(roud)

Philadelphia, (Monday, )September 1st. 1800.

My Friend  
 I hope you are in this city, yet that has been che-  
 rished for my own sake, since to wish for any other  
 place than in the country, would be wishing the loss of  
 pleasure and of health. Yet that is a maxim to which I have  
 been accustomed to pay no attention; since, without any other  
 guide than inclination, I have changed the residence of one city  
 for that of another much inferior to it in every circumstance of  
 salubrity and scenery.

1 Vol. II, p. 100 ff.

2 Notice that Brown affects the Quaker form for his old Quaker  
 teacher and yet neglects the most obvious ninth month instead of  
 September.

Place, indeed, is of little, or rather of no importance in my estimation. What does this indifference argue. In the way in which I am employed, or in the places in which my lot has been cast, my health has been nearly independent of influences merely local. Equally well or ill, am I, in town or country, or might I be, if I chose to mingle with my labour, practicable exercise. As to the pleasure of pure airs, and brilliant prospects, ten minutes walk from my dwelling in New York, always sufficed to place me on a spot, fanned by the purest breezes, and embellished with the widest and most splendid scene that our country can any where exhibit. A scene whose variety, in consequence of Heaven's every varying face, is inexhaustible, and which I, every time, contemplated with more pleasure than the last.

What then were the recommendations of a change? I had no engagements that detained me in New York, and so I came hither, not to see different scenes, to breathe different airs, but merely to see a different set of faces. I staid in Jersey, at Newark, Brunswick and Princeton half a week, and now have I come back to my ancient neighbourhood.

All the inanimate objects in this city, are uniform, monotonous and dull. I have been surprised at the little power they have over my imagination. At the sameness that every where reigns. A nine months absence<sup>2</sup> has cast upon surrounding objects not a gleam of novelty. All the old impressions seem to exist with their pristine freshness in my memory. Under this sun I discover nothing new, but this sameness pleases not. More irksome, more deadening to my fancy is this city, on its *own* account, than ever. I am puzzled to guess how it happens, but it is of little moment to inquire, since walls and pavements were never any thing to me, or, at least, were next to nothing. Social and intellectual pleasures being every thing.

The G.'s<sup>3</sup> are gone to Lancaster or thereaway. I saw them at New York with a pleasure, not easily described. Thou hast not heard the history of their journey thither, and their stay there. To me, in its relation to me, it was extremely in-

1 The Battery.

2 According to Johnson to Kent, 20 December Brown had gone to Philadelphia in August which would make nine months absence figure back to November of 1799.

3 Probably Cope. Cf. 26 July 1799 letter to James Brown and Oct., 1801 letter to Bleecker. Thomas P. Cope originally came from Lancaster.

...and I think of it with very lively feelings. Such incidents as that do not happen every day to me.

Thy T<sup>e</sup> gives me reason to expect a meeting with thee, ere I depart. That will not be within a fortnight, and then I can say to thee a thousand things, which my pen cannot say at all. I cannot say so well: yet I feel an irresistable inclination to take up the pen, and to inform thee that I am once more in Bond and Front Streets.

The last time I saw thee, I was far from giving that satisfaction which a friend might claim. I was unreasonably reserved, and while it appeared that something lay heavy on my heart, my lips were inviolably closed. I saw a letter to my sister in which thou accountest for my silence in a way not very flattering to me, but a way which I do not know how to prove erroneous. Erroneous it surely was, but how to convince thee of thy error, otherwise than by candid explanations, is the difficulty.

And why not practice candour? What lay heavy then, time has made light. What troubled me then, molests me now but little. Such is the variable fleeting nature of this thing called thought. One idea, in spite of every effort to retain it, will gradually loose its hold, and though it still occasionally come in sight, and flit about us, it stings and vexes us no longer. Thus it is, with that idea which I brought with me from New Jersey, last November, and which spread a cloud over me. It is gone, yet not totally. It revisits me now and then, but holds no formidable place in my thoughts. When I see thee, I will tell thee what it was; I think I will. 'Tis a phantastic apprehension that withholds me. If I do not see thee, it will do to be written.

Possibly I may write to thee again before I see thee. I need not say how acceptable will be a few lines from thee to thy friend,

C. B. B

What the idea which he brought from New Jersey in November of 1799 <sup>was</sup> is not known. It may have had something to do with his admiration for the elusive Miss Potts<sup>or</sup> it may have been the knowledge of his constitutional weakness and probable end <sup>or it</sup> ~~may have been recurring thoughts of suicide.~~ From the expressions used and the idea of writing of it the passage seems to be a reminder of those written to Bringhurst in the critical days of 1792-3.

1 Unidentified.

The reference to the Battery of New York and the expression that walls and pavements were as nothing to him makes it fitting that we recall a reminiscence by John Davis. It appears that Brown had a choice like Mme. De Staël who preferred a fourth story of a Parisian lodging house to all the reported beauties of Lake Geneva. Davis' <sup>1</sup>Travels gives a picture of Brown at New York.

"The author of Arthur Mervyn, living at New York, I sought acquaintance with a man who had acquired so much intellectual renown. I found Mr. Brown quite in the costume<sup>2</sup> of an author, embodying virtue in a new novel, and making his pen fly before him.

Mr. Brown occupied a dismal room in a dismal street. I asked him whether a view of nature would not be more propitious to composition; or whether he should not write with more facility were his window to command the prospect of the Lake of Geneva.--Sir, said he, good pens, thick paper, and ink well diluted, would facilitate my composition more than the prospect of the broadest expanse of water, or mountains rising above the clouds."

In a note Davis adds

"When I mentioned this reply of Mr. Brown to one of the most distinguished literary characters now living,--Sir, said he, this American Author cannot, I think, be a man of much fancy."

About 1800 the actor John Bernard, having been the secretary of a similar organization in England, founded in New York what was called a "Beefsteak Club". In his Retrospections of America<sup>3</sup>

1 London, 1803, p. 149.

2 By costume Davis meant a great coat and shoes worn at the heels.

3 P. 190.

he speaks of it thus:

"I was also instrumental in promoting the public conviviality by founding an American Beefsteak Club, round the table of which I was enabled to collect many able supporters in mind and voice. Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Carroll and C. Brockden Brown were among our visitors."

It is improbable that Brown met Jefferson or Charles Carroll of Carrollton at Bernard's club. With the former the sparks would fly so that Bernard would never have forgotten any such meeting. With the latter Carroll's ancestry which was connected with the lords of Ely and Ormond, his Jesuit education, and his remarkable intelligence could not have failed to make a similar impression on the gossipy Bernard.

Continuing Bernard gives an excellent account of how a fire at Rickett's Circus had broken up one of the meetings; but whether or not Brown was a guest at that time we have no means of knowing. Perhaps his use of a fire alarm in Stephen Calvert and the Series of Original Letters may have been inspired by such an experience, but it is more probable that the earlier similar experience as related by Smith, 7 January 1797, was the real source of any such incident.

The latest we hear of Brown during this year is in a letter of William Johnson to James Kent at Albany. It is dated 20 December 1800 and in part reads:

"Mr. B. who went from here in August last to Phila., has been there ever since, & from his present engagements I do not expect his return very soon. I am alone in my old habitation... Have you any curiosity about the Magazine Review & does it get into your hands? As I have an interest in it, it would gratify me much to hear your opinion of it."

At the same time that he was editing the Monthly Magazine and supplying a great deal of the material for it, he was--probably in August--bringing out in New York the second part of Arthur Mervyn which so far as we know had to be written. He also had a story or two more "growling within him"; and possibly the autumn rid him of his blue devils and stimulated him to write Clara Howard.