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45

Scribbler - 1881

1877-1890

THE SCRIBBLER

1809

Among the miscellaneous items ~~included by~~ Dunlap in the ~~biography of~~ Brown was an essay ~~of about ten pages~~ entitled The Scribbler.[1] It ~~appears in volume two and~~ was not given by Allen in his one volume biography.

Whether ~~this Scribbler~~ it was ever published in any form ~~we have~~ is not ~~been able to learn~~ known but ~~our~~ the search for it in likely places has brought to light ~~some new material undoubtedly written by our author.~~ six more instalments, which appeared in

~~In~~ Dennie's Portfolio for January, February, April, May, July and August 1809[2] ~~there are six essays entitled The Scribbler.~~[3] By their identical titles and ~~certain~~ conclusive internal and external evidence, to be noticed presently, they were Brown's.

The date of the composition ~~of the Portfolio and Dunlap Scribbler~~ ~~whole seven~~ is possibly to be placed about the time of Jessica, say 1798 or 9, but our study of them is deferred to this date because of the Portfolio public-

1 Vol. II, pp. 264-273.
2 Jan., No. I, ~~pp.~~ 55-9; Feb., No. II, pp. 162-8; Apl., No. III, pp. 338-42; May, No. IV, pp. 421-4; July, No. V, pp. 29-34; Aug., No. VI, pp. 124-6;
3 The apt title has appeared a surprisingly few times. In Brown's day it was not used ~~as a title~~ for a book and besides the instances ~~here noted~~ the only other is in the New York Magazine, Vol. I and II, 1790-91.

cation of six of the seven. ~~In the case of the one given by Dunlap it is possible that it had appeared in print as so many of his selections had, but it is more probable that it was found among Brown's manuscripts.~~

In ~~our~~ the study of the Weekly Magazine we ~~found cause to~~ attributed ~~the piece entitled~~ A Lesson on Sensibility to Brown and the reader is referred ~~for~~ the ~~proof~~ evidence. there ~~adduced~~ given. The second Scribbler ~~essay~~ of the Portfolio series is ~~about~~ nearly equally divided into parts and the latter ~~being~~ given a separate title[1] set in small caps ~~of~~ Insanity: a fragment. In essentials this fragment is the Lesson on Sensibility of the Weekly Magazine[2], though it has been considerably revised and ~~added to~~ extended. The characters Mr. and Mrs. Ellen and Archibald are ~~all~~ familiar to us in other works by Brown, ~~Mrs. Ellen we find in Adini and Henry Colden; Archibald is in Henry Colden; and Mr. Ellen is in the Medway fragment, in Adini and in Henry Colden.~~

~~So far as one can judge it appears that~~ apparently the Scribbler appearance ~~of this tragic tale~~ was the earlier version, perhaps part of a larger work ~~of Brown's apprentice days~~, and ~~that it was~~ drawn on

1 That the running title of the later half was not a typographical error is clear from the fact that new subjects were invariably headed with a type larger than small caps of the text though not ~~as~~ large as the capitals of the text. The index lists it separately. But that is due to the practise of the times.

2 Vol.II, p.71 ff.

to supply an article for the Weekly Magazine in the form in which it stood in the original essay and later was worked over and allowed to go into the Portfolio. ~~Thus~~ If we add to the Weekly Magazine appearance the opening paragraph and the closing four paragraphs of the Portfolio version we have the whole story at its best.

The connection between the essays not being formal ~~known~~ ~~it is our intention to~~ we shall consider first the Dunlap one, apart from the ~~rest.~~ Portfolio group.

Because it deals with the adoption of the title ~~by the writer~~ this ~~one~~ essay is quite likely ~~may be a~~ the preliminary to the ~~whole~~ collection under that title; though ~~but~~ the absence of ~~any reference to~~ "sister Jenny" in the other six essays might ~~leads~~ us to believe ~~that~~ it ~~may have~~ has no relation at all. ~~except the title, to any other work by Brown.~~

From the second paragraph it appears ~~seems that~~ the essay was ~~intended~~ for some two or more column publication such as a newspaper or the Weekly Magazine but certainly not for Dennie's Portfolio ~~but possibly for some newspaper.~~ If it appeared in such a publication ~~were published where intended~~ it has not ~~yet~~ been found by no. ~~the present writer, and~~ Aside from ~~the possible facts~~ that, ~~hang thereby and~~ which may be worthy of notice, it may ~~is probably~~ be not of importance ~~for us.~~

~~If we recall that~~ Edwin was a variant of the name of Alcuin so we may infer ~~that~~ the date of composition was as early as 1797. The reference to the debtor's portion of a prison, the pestilential atmosphere and the thoughts of suicide may take it back ~~earlier~~ even to 1792. The appeal of Jenny to take a stroll on the Battery and the reference to the walk from the Bowery house to Albany pier, ~~also~~ might date it at the time Brown was in New York in 1798-9 or 1806. Other than these ~~few~~ hints the dating is uncertain so ~~that~~ we have temporarily ~~at least~~ placed it chronologically with the Portfolio essays. ~~which appear to belong to a later date in the life of our author.~~

The essay concerns the writer, giving his reasons for writing, his hopes and fears, all interwoven with the pathetic position of himself and his sister Jenny. It is the kind of ~~an attempt~~ that in the hands of an Elia would have its rough ~~edges so~~ ness polished ~~off as~~ to make it sparkle. Without Lamb's powers it is ~~still~~ well worth reading.

It has no artificial structure and with a few unimportant exceptions proceeds logically to its formal end. As an introduction to a series, ~~if Brown intended it to be such,~~ it has more than

usual promise, would excite the interest and curiosity of the reader and if the essays to follow were to include more ~~pictures~~ of the pretty singing sister as well as ~~the story of~~ the writer's vicissitudes it would deserve ~~to be given~~ high rank among Brown's essays and those of his contemporaries. Its greatest merit ~~probably~~ consists of the opinions ~~expressed.~~ He says he is a boy and if true ~~the essay~~ it may be taken as an ~~fair~~ excellent example of ~~Brown's~~ his precocity; But the expression perhaps cannot be taken literally. ~~it being perfectly obvious that no boy, not even Brown, ever wrote such mature thoughts.~~

Several passages relating to the writer's love for writing ~~are not only~~ may be ~~probably~~ autobiographic ~~in character but~~ and deserve ~~to be~~ quotation; but we know so much of that side of Brown's life we do not need them. Instead, here is an amazing record.

> "When I was a boy, a froward wretch, whom I met on the highway, thought proper to be angry at some jest that escaped me, and snatching up a pebble about half the size of my fist, knocked me down with it. My skull was fractured by the blow, and I was a long time in getting well. While sick, an ideot that strolled about the village, chanced to stroll into my chamber. Somebody, in answer to his questions, gave him an account of my mishap. The historian outdid Tacitus in brevity, for the whole tragedy was summoned up in, why, Dick, the waggoner broke his head with a brick-bat.
>
> Bless me, said the fool, what a mercy that it was not a mill stone." [1]

While that ~~may~~ can not ~~actually~~ be corroborated as autobiographic the next extract ~~is undoubtedly so.~~ can be, by comparison with the Rhapsodist and Alcuin.

1 Dunlap, Vol. II, p. 266.

"Perhaps, reader, you want to know my name and dwelling. Now these are the only things that I am anxious to hide. My character and history I have no [illegible] to disclose; nay, it would give me pleasure to tell them, but I do not wish to be known by name and abode.

Not likely, indeed, that my name would be of service to you. You never heard it before. An obscure and forlorn lad like me, was never noticed in your pleasurable walks or social circles. The meanness of my garb, indeed, and my boyish [illegible] conceal me even from suspicion, and far, far distant and different are the spheres in which you and I move." [1]

~~Like the Rhapsodist of 1789~~ This essay is full of promise. Because of its maturity and its connection, at least by title, with ~~the~~ essays ~~in~~ the Portfolio it must be placed ~~in this work~~ here; fortunately it appears, for ~~the fact that~~ the promise was for the greater part fulfilled ~~is~~ by this time ~~evident~~ in many other works that made ~~more of~~ a stir in the world. The ~~whole~~ situation as presented ~~in the Dunlap essay~~ is fiction pure and simple ~~save for the~~ except the autobiographic touches ~~noticed~~ none of it represents Brown's actual situation at any time of his life.

The six essays of The Scribbler in the Portfolio need not be considered as a ~~whole~~ group though connected by the title and related to the Dunlap one. ~~When we come to study them we find that~~ Though important to the reader of the Portfolio, the numbering ~~of them~~ is of no ~~further particular~~ essential consequence. ~~to us.~~ ~~Any~~ Each one ~~of them~~ might have been given a title of its own, instead of marshalling it under ~~the~~ a general title. ~~of The Scribbler.~~ ~~Thus~~ The one numbered I might be

1 Dunlap, Vol. II, p. 267.

named Our Own Writings;II,The Appreciation of Our Literary Offspring; III,On Ridicule;IV,Wealth and Power;V,Reading in the United States; and VI,On Subjects for Essays. However,they have a slight connection:I and II deal with the same general subject;IV and V are logically connected;but III and VI stand aloof and are distinct. ~~They can hardly be called a series of essays for they lack connected sequence~~.

~~Let us consider each one separately.~~

I. The reference to the pages of the essay seem to imply ~~that~~ it was intended for book publication. There are some details, such as the reference to vanity,the author's ideas of the reader's interest,and the use of the title,which are connectives with the Dunlap essay,and from which we may infer internal proof of authorship. The opening paragraph is a step logically related to the Dunlap essay,and is worthy of quotation as autobiographical.

> "I have often been struck by the different value which men annex to their own literary productions,and to those of others. It is not simply that the fame and success of our own performance is dear to us,that we wish it to be read,studied and admired for the sake of being extolled or revered by others,as the authors of so much eloquence or wisdom. We feel unspeakable complacency and satisfaction in the survey of the work. Review it frequently and with new pleasure,and when it has been

> laid aside or disappeared so long as to be nearly forgotten, we fasten upon it anew with the utmost eagerness, and give it a dozen successive readings without satiety or weariness." 1

II. The reference to his favorite walk, which in Brown's case when in New York we know ~~to have been~~ was the Battery, recalls the pathetic character of Jenny whom we sorely miss in these Portfolio essays. When the subject ~~begins to~~ lags Brown turns to his reading for material. ~~The details of the writer~~ Writing for his own pleasure and the allusion to political scribbling are important connectives ~~of this essay~~ with the one supplied by Dunlap. On the whole this essay has a breadth of expression that is lacking in the Dunlap one. What we have to say of the obvious "padding," the Insanity fragment, ~~we have already said in attributing~~ may be found where we ascribe the Lesson on Sensibility to Brown in ~~our~~ studying ~~of~~ the Weekly Magazine.

III. An essay on Ridicule by Brown immediately connects itself ~~with~~ to Brown's relations with William Wood Wilkins and perhaps helps to ~~suggest the~~ date ~~of~~ the composition as ~~about~~ 1792. The allusion to the guilt and misery ~~of the mind~~ of the victim of ~~the~~ ridicule likewise belongs to Brown's biography. The essay is ~~hardly as~~ not so dull as ~~on first appearance it~~ would seem to ~~be~~ promise and those who

1 Portfolio, Jan., 1809, p.55.

~~are inclined to~~ avoid it ~~should not~~ will miss ~~the~~ a passage that may be autobiographic. At least it is of interest though not one of the pleasant things of the life of Brown's time. The fact that Bedlam was a place for sight-seers is generally known of English life but that it was also true of the Pennsylvania Hospital[1] when Brown was ~~very~~ young is vouched for by a foot-note to the following description.

> "I remember, in times that are, happily, long past, when the hospital for maniacs in this city, used to be a favorite resort of the dissolute and idle, on Sundays and holidays. The thrifty system that then prevailed allowed every one to enter who paid his doit, and every one was suffered to go where he pleased. The visitants generally repaired to the vaulted gallery, which separates the cells of the lunatics: there, little wickets being open in the cell-doors, they had opportunities of looking in, and making themselves merry with the incoherent exclamations and unmeaning gesticulations of the tenant. To heighten the amusement, it was common to provoke the maniac by insulting gestures or speeches. The threats and execrations of the madman, and the ineffectual efforts at revenge which he made, with his face, or his arm through the wicket, made this dismal vault resound with peals of laughter. To strike, with a club, the hand extended through the opening, to catch the weapon, was accounted excellent sport, and I have seen some of the unhappy victims tormented in this way for many hours."[2]

This is evidence to show ~~that~~ Brown did not lack material to make the horrors of Wieland more horrible. That he did not use ~~this in the story~~ it shows more negative virtue of omission than most of the critics have allowed him. But the piece is good for

2 Portfolio, April 1809, p.340.
1 Lippincott: Early Philadelphia, Phila., 1917, p.317 says ~~a~~ the charge was fourpence ~~was made for visitors to the insane ward~~.

other reasons. ~~and~~ Dennie ~~has~~ very well judged its merits in a note to "Readers and correspondents"[x]: ~~which reads:~~

> "The Scribbler, whose unpretending title is by no means descriptive of his powers, has, in a recent speculation upon the hackneyed topic of ridicule, framed both a novel and ingenious theory, which he has supported with great dexterity of argument. Of the various answers to my lord Shaftsbury's famous assertion, scarcely one has escaped our regard; although many of these were from the pens of the most learned Divines and subtlest disputants in the kingdom, and although we had supposed the question was long since perfectly settled against his lordship, yet our correspondent has been by no means engaged in a work of supererogation, but has discussed a very curious topic, with the feelings of humanity, and the force of reason."[x]

~~In this essay~~ Brown was far ahead of his times. After almost a century we have changed the attitude toward the insane and we are ~~just~~ in the process of awakening to ~~the only~~ a sensible ~~position to be taken~~ view of ~~toward~~ drunkenness. This essay may be profitably compared with the Punishment of Ridicule in ~~the~~ Series of Original Letters contributed ~~by Brown~~ to the Weekly Magazine.

IV. In view of ~~the fact of~~ Brown's abandoning the law--the road to wealth and power of his day--this essay has its biographic interest. However it's ~~has its~~ faulty logic. Occasionally when Brown assumes the role of ~~the~~ preaching ~~clergyman~~ he makes a sorry mess of it. ~~Had he been lead to adopt the profession of so many of his intimates, he probably would have made a failure,~~ for he lacks the detachment necessary for ~~clerical~~ success; in deed, ~~fact, his preaching in this case as in the better one On Ridicule~~ he is entirely too

[x] Portfolio, April 1809, p. 361.

personal. As we shall see in the next essay this one is only an argument to recommend the application of ~~one's~~ wealth to the encouragement of artists,particularly the authors.

V. Brown's dialogue defense of the newspapers. ~~By means~~ With the help of a fictitious companion Brown presents both sides of the argument. The companion expresses his views,~~among which he~~ hit~~s~~ting at the amount of shipping news,perhaps ~~intending~~ to aim a shaft at Brown's brother James. ~~Evidently~~ Our author might have taken up the form of the dialogue for this purpose,but the reader should notice ~~that~~ he is ~~practically~~ presenting a dialogue not in dialogue form. As it is th~~is~~e essay has many sound conclusions and stripped of its ~~obvious~~ defects is an excellent defense of ~~the~~ newspapers of all times. The value of the vast (even in his day!) reading of newspapers was well appreciated by ~~Brown~~ him and was as little known to the "companion" as it generally is to the unthinking.

VI. This essay shows ~~the work beginning to~~ lag,~~a fact~~ of which Brown himself was conscious,for having availed himself of the freedom of the title,he winds up ~~the department~~ by an allusion to his own case and stops. He so far forgets what went before as to condemn "padding",the very thing he had done when he

inserted the fragment, ~~entitled~~ Insanity. ~~The fact that~~ His own ~~peculiar~~ method of snatching ~~his~~ material from his journals is not here enumerated as an interesting detail of how to fill gaping columns of a publication.

~~Thus,~~ So these essays having no plan, no goal, ~~merely~~ flit about in any direction and settle to rest when the author feels the faintest pains of fatigue.

Though the Spectator was not his model, it ~~probably was~~ may have been a part of his stimulus. No.445 has a slight allusion to that contemptious and odious class of writers called scribblers.

Just what relation the Scribbler essays may have to the Rhapsodist is not certain, but ~~it seems as if~~ they may have been written about the same time. That they were written ~~about~~ at the time of their publication in the Portfolio is doubtful, though every one has ~~full of~~ reminders of ~~Brown's~~ his maturity and later style. However, we know that in 1809 Brown had plenty of work of a different character ~~to be done~~ and it is probable ~~that~~ he was asked for help by Dennie, that he looked over his old manuscripts, and found the Scribbler suited ~~for his friend's~~ the purpose. Omitting the Dunlap

essay which in 1809 had no appeal to him he may have slightly revised the six others and sent them ~~on~~ to Dennie.

There are plenty of details ~~that~~ to show the probable date of composition to have been late in Brown's life. In I, the reference to the number of authors; in II the political scribbling; in III the Philadelphia Hospital cruelty as long past; in IV the extreme maturity of the opinions expressed; in V the possible reference to John Davis as my "splenetic friend"; in VI the editorial method of padding, the stage coach as a source of supply of adventures, the listening to the clock on the stair landing: all could not have been used by Brown if he had written ~~these essays~~ them early in life. If ~~they are~~ old in conception they are so revised ~~that~~ they become a part of his work of this time.

For their relation to Brown's life and work we must turn back to our beginning. The Dunlap <u>Scribbler</u> and the <u>Portfolio Scribbler</u> essays are merely light pieces ~~in character~~ not unlike the <u>Rhapsodist</u> ~~essays~~ but they have ~~in them~~ faint suggestions of the greater and more pretensious works. As the most evident examples of Brown's

practise of using autobiographic material interwoven with fiction they at least deserve a reading by any one desirious of knowing ~~our author's~~ his work and character. That their ~~actual~~ composition date is unknown and their publication has ~~compelled~~ led us to consider them as late as 1809 detracts not a whit from their presentation of Brown's traits. They may be out of the chronological order, nevertheless they are valuable, ~~to this work.~~

The Dunlap Scribbler was included in the three volume Carwin and other American Tales,[1] London 1822. Other than this it has never appeared except in the Dunlap 1815 biography. The Portfolio essays have never been ~~even~~ attributed to Brown.

In this connection attention must be directed to a series of essays in the New York Magazine for 1790 and 1791. Whether they are Brown's or not we have no conclusive evidence to prove. One is signed B; but that is evidently an error. They do not have

1 Vol.III, pp.239-59. The paragraphing and punctuation are altered to suit the English editor's ideas. Many important changes and omissions are made, such as p.264 (of Dunlap II) If Tom says to I never, omitted; p.264, P.3, of which, though all are liberally distributed, none is thrown away, omitted; p.265, changed to the justice or wisdom of the consolation; p.267, P.4, omitted; p.273, P.2, not for my happiness and the following my omitted; p.273, P.3, prospect is given as proposal. The name Battery (p.273.) is spelled with a small b.

internal evidence of Brown's style and they form a rounded out group with almost a formal opening and closing; showing an appreciation for structural unity that Brown is not known to have had in those days. Most of them are signed S, which may have been for William Shaw or William Tudor both of whom were his contemporaries and used the initial. However, we should remember that possibly Brown had used the initial in the Literary Magazine especially in five cases.[1] In one of the essays the writer speaks of always writing as a scribbler which may be a hint to help in connecting the essays we have identified as actually Brown's with the ones in the New York Magazine. The subjects dealt with are within the range of Brown's interest and some of the unimportant details are connected with our author, but with the evidence we have we cannot ascribe them to Brown.

1 Vol.II, p.43, 117; VI, p.239, 448; VIII, p.94. The Monthly Magazine I, p.151; II, p.85 are doubtful.