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Preface to the biography

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face half-title

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

His life and works
by
Daniel Edwards Kennedy

In nine volumes

I
An Introduction to
Charles Brockden Brown

II–IV
Charles Brockden Brown
a biography

V–VII
Studies of the works of
Charles Brockden Brown

VIII
Charles Brockden Brown
as precursor

IX
Charles Brockden Brown
miscellanies

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CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

a biography

by

Daniel Edwards Kennedy

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In three volumes

Vol. I.

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192-

PREFACE

The study of Brown's life has been no matter of a year or two of literary research,nor has its writing been a mere summer afternoon's exhibition. At first the scarcity of material promised that what I intended could be done in at least a part of the time it has taken; but untiring search soon was rewarded and the difficulty became one of selection and rejection rather than a quest for more to make a tolerable volume or two. I have spared no effort to find anything that directly or indirectly relates to the subject,though success has not always crowned my efforts to secure it for publication for some people hate publicity more than they do back-stairs gossip. Many of the most valuable hints that lead to finding facts have been found in places passed by others as undoubtedly remote. Like all literary workers who have a pretense to,if not an actual,thoroughness; I have been delayed time and time again by the failure of many otherwise reputable publishers to insist on having their publications properly indexed; a woeful defect which has been felt most in the case of books that are indexed, but inadequately so. Those without indexes have either been of a character that needs none or were published before even the conception of an Index Society. At least they

are innocent for they do not deceive--which poorly indexed ones do.

As Johnson said in a preface of his, "I have met the sullenness of one and the roghness of another" but I would put on record that for a surprisingly large part people have unselfishly offered material and help. At the same time it is only just to them to say that the opposite picture has presented those who have told me how to write my book and have withheld material I might have used, others who have "rehashed" articles on Brown so that I am not the only "thunder in the heavens", others who have so tried to cover their material with conceit and pride that they resemble William Austin's Man of Cloaks who put on more and more instead of taking off what was already a great hindrance,and still others whose interest really consisted of the opportunity for merchandising some wares at fat profiteer's prices.

The thing most obvious to any careful investigator of Brown's life is the number of erratic statements made by most of the writers on the subject. Such a discovery logically leads to revision of the reference books and when one has fallen that far the crime of writing a book on the subject comes as naturally as anything evil in human nature. So the

reader should understand that a set of circumstances with its train of consequences made me an innocent sacrifice before Brown's shrine and if he wishes I had not written the book he will have to blame my forerunners and to make sure that in the future all Brown books have none

of the errors I have pursued.

It seems to me that biography, from its very name and nature, to be human should be chronological for obviously no man ever lived his life otherwise; but because many biographers have believed it necessary to apologise to the reader for that arrangement, I am lead to express myself with moderation and to say that in the case of the present work there is no reason why that natural method should not be followed. Of course some man of genius may come along some day and excel all works on Brown by having him die before he was born, but until that magician appears this work will have to be taken as it is: constructed according to a chronological arrangement.

In the study of one of the periodicals[1] I found an article on this subject which appears to have some reason to be accepted as written by Brown and the closing paragraph is particularly appropriate as a motto for any one who would write his biography. The passage reads::

> "A biographer should be more solicitous of displaying the genius of the man whose history he writes,than his own. He should not obtrude his own talents on the eye,so much as those of the person whose life he records. Some have written the life of another,merely to show that they were themselves fine writers."

On the whole I have made an attempt to follow that advice throughout my book and if a modicum of that effort meets with success I shall accept it as a proof that my real object has been attained of presenting a faithful and full picture of Brown and his work.

Speaking of biography I should say that I have come to no particular conclusion in regard to what constitutes the best in biographical structure. Those that have attained classic rank differ so widely in their methods it is not wise to follow slavishly any one of them.. However there are some details of the best biographies which I have considered defective and have therefore avoided.

The man who knew a wonderful lot about this type of literature is the subject of what is generally spoken of as the greatest English biography.

1 Literary Magazine,Vol.V,p.51.

only to the extent of giving some criticism with biography have I become somewhat of an imitator of the great Doctor Johnson because I believe that most Brown biographers too often have not realized the very simple fact that his work was generally the most important part of his life.

In a great many of the best known biographies I have found that there has been too much editing of the letters. To omit parts of letters too often excites curiosity and arouses the imagination sometimes to the diadvantage of the author. Two writers telling half the truth do not serve as faithfully as one telling the whole truth. Of course in some cases certain details appear unimportant, in others they do not harmonize with the editor's intention of presentation of his author, in still others so-called good taste suppresses them; in fact, various are the motives for their imperfect appearance, and be the cause what it may the effect is that too often the lasting interest has been edited away so that what we search for in the obvious places we do not find. Oftentimes the attitude toward things changes with the years so that what is important or useful or proper to the editor at the time he wrote has lost its importance or belied its intention or altered its

meaning. It is only in the case of a few of the more celebrated authors that we can mend the defect by consulting another work in which the letters are given in full.

Of course the reader should not understand me to mean that in all cases all of the letter and all of the letters should always be given;but I do mean that the attempt should be made to find a reason for giving them all rather than to conclude that certain ones should be mutilated or omitted. Also I would have the reader look more closely into the editor's reasons for omitting or altering,rather than to accept the letters as they are given.

In this particular I have not agreed with Brown who said[1] in characteristic language:

> "Letters are the ghosts,the skeletons,of conversation with bones as marrowless and blood as cold as any gibbeted representation of death whatever."

Many times letters indeed expose the "family skeletons"--Brown's have a wonderfully healthy marrow and blood that warms the heart to human sympathy. Occasionally they deal with death but on the whole they are very pleasantly alive.

1 In E.H.Smith's letter to John Allen dated 13 December 1795.

I have made no selection from Brown's letters for I have not found one of so little value as to warrant its omission. You only need to search for them to find that old Father Time has done a great deal of editing; in fact,too much. This is partly due to the fact that there was no systematic search for material at the time when it was least scattered,so that now there are very few traces of it left;and in part due to the peculiarity that all through his life Brown was not much of a writer of letters though at certain periods of it he wrote a great number exceptionally voluminous. After the reader has read all of Brown's letters which I have been able to assemble for biographical use I believe he will agree with me that they have one peculiarity; they need no omission of names of individuals for fear of offending sensitive descendants. In every instance where words are given by me as illegible they are actually so--I have not found it necessary to use this method for the purpose of concealing indelicacies.

The letters published in the so-called Dunlap's Brown will be given exactly as they appeared in the New York 1815 edition. I should here call attention to the fact that they were somewhat corrected in the London 1822 reprint. To make a correct copy of a letter demands considerable attention and inasmuch as I have found not a few instances of

copying that resembled originality more than accuracy I can only vouch for those of my own copying. Needless to say I soon began to be positively finicky in my attitude toward copying and while I am not able to prove the fact--and would do so if I were--I have cause to believe that Dunlap was a poor copier and probably made many errors. How many omissions he committed I have never dared to imagine.

In this place It is necessary to repeat only one thing that has been said in the Introduction-volume. Because of the peculiarity of plan of publication which would ordinarily compel me to give the whole list of my grateful acknowledgments four times it has been deemed wiser to point once and forall in a final volume of my Brown studies to the sources of new and original material.

PREFACE

There are two kinds of biographical studies; the short superficial sketch which is often popular, widely known and frequently referred to, and the long scholarly study which from its aim at completeness is restricted in its appeal to the student, is little known and too often is merely a storehouse from which the writer of the more popular work draws his supplies. The present work is an attempt to supply one book that will meet the requirements of the two classes of readers who read the two kinds of biography. The method which has been devised for this purpose is so perfectly obvious that it appears to have escaped observation. It is founded in the fact that the greater work has within it the lesser and the only way to make sure that the reader who seeks the lesser will find what he seeks is to guide him to find it. The formula therefore becomes simply this: read the whole book if you want the whole story. Skip the chapters that relate to Brown's works if you merely wish to read his life. If you want only a "skimmer's" knowledge dip into the introduction or actually read the index.

Until I made this study I held the common belief that many

of the parts of a book were as unnecessary as the doctor tells us the vermiform appendix is to human anatomy. Much to my surprise I found that I could not follow out the work to what I considered a high state of completion if I omitted any of the usual anatomical parts of a book. For that reason the reader will find it fully equipped with all of them and metaphorically speaking he will like a surgeon be free on the first twinges of pain to apply the knife to the book and "cut out" any objectionable part.

Finally it gives me great pleasure to be able to connect with this work the names of many persons and institutions to whom I am in varying degree indebted. Those who have supplied the most ask least credit for their kindliness and seek no parade of their names; but the nature of this work demands they be recorded as a guarantee that it is not a work of fiction. The whole list has been made into an appendix arranged alphabetically which will conveniently identify the actual services rendered. Many of my friends have served me in jest and earnest and the only way I can have the "last laugh" is to refuse to put their names in print. If they have any vanity it will have to be fed by absent treatment.

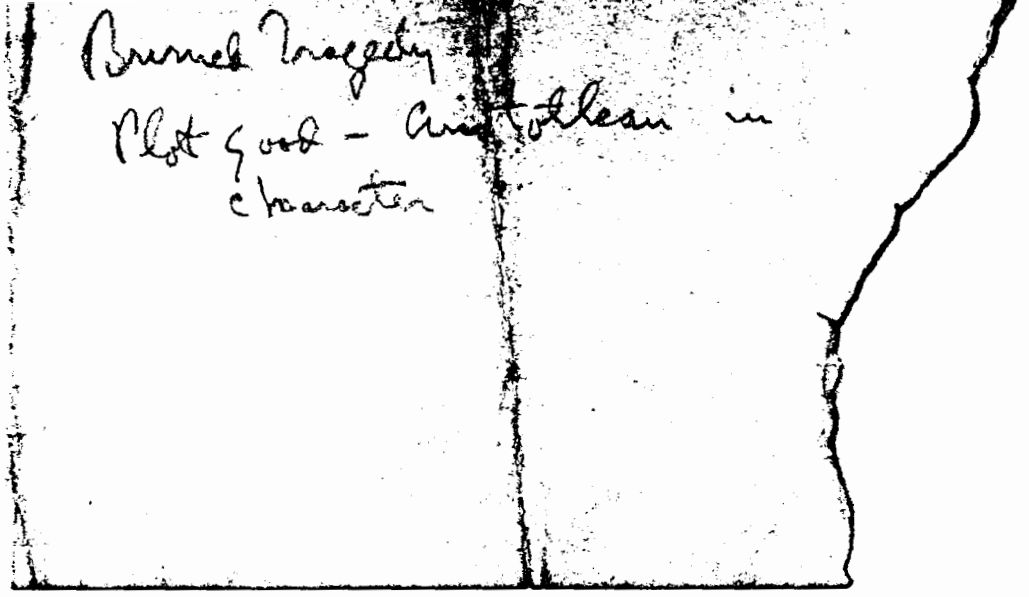
D.E.K.

Chestnut Hill
Massachusetts

Born in December 1783, he was educated at Princeton College, read law with Judge Hopkinson, was admitted to the bar in 1805 and practised at Baltimore, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Maryland, moved to Philadelphia shortly after the Baltimore riot of 1811, probably married Miss Ridley 1806 or

1783

1807, 1808-17 published the American Law Journal, 1810 published the life of Dr. John Shaw prefixed to his collected poems, 1814 compiled a book entitled Office and Duty of Justice of the Peace, corrected and arranged Dennie's Lay Preacher, Philadelphia 1817, editor of the Portfolio 1816, 1827 edited Philadelphia Souvenir and Memoirs of Eminent Persons, and besides all this was the editor of Wirt's British Spy and author of Memoirs of Anacreon, and died 11 June 1829.


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DAB viii 24 1932, p. 138

× Any one who has had occasion to compare
a manuscript letter with the standard
publication in a collection of authors' letters
knows very well how little reliance can
be placed on the accuracy of the text.
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editing done.
We cannot accept any printed text as
any document as a faithful facsimile.

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II Preface
Tell who Allen is - Constantly referred to.

E.H. location
when decided see 1398 (& 1801 trip)

Blue mts. Delaware water gap
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(3) face in moon
not seen by weak eyes
Plutarch Mosc V 235

But if B read it he should
have shown more of it, per-
haps. Sodes Epistrate
& Leo. (263)

Boy story - I wonder if A.
had his head full of the
impressions of Plutarch -
though no sign? he read P.

Frozen words thawing out
next summer Plutarch
Ladies Dialogue on Virtue
(Mor 712)

Mosc
II