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BUSINESS AND ROMANCE

1795 Aetat.24

The earliest letter of this year was sent as a second part of that of 26 December last. In matter it is not at all related to what precedes it and had the earlier part been sent as soon as written the present part would be an entirely separate letter. When sent it was

(addressed Joseph Bringhurst,Junr. Wilmington.
I. or T. or J. Bader bearer.)

(Philadelphia,Thursday) January 8th.1795.

A long interval my friend. E.H.Smith I have heard from since. His friend Dunlap has been here these two days. I am very sorry you were not here,to treat him with the Civilities due to his character.

Wilkins I believe is well. I have not seen him but once or twice for a few minutes since your departure. His engagements ingross the whole of his time. I must however I suppose congratulate him. If in grasping at gain he does not lose his health or his friends he may be esteemed happy. Without competence there is no enjoyment,when that is attained we may sit down and reap the fruits of our industry in repose and leisure. Alas! Luck is the philosophy of the moment,which experience has so often confuted that the contrary is in my opinion an infallible and unexceptionable maxim. He that sets out with this view will never live to execute it. Yet perhaps I falsely estimate happiness or dignity. The amassing of wealth is at least as meritorious as quiet inactivity. He that is done working for himself will find a plea for perserverance in the duty which he owes his family. While he should be enjoying the present he is catering for posterity. Nay is not such catering at length become the sole enjoyment of which he is capable.

Ca ira,ca ira,&c.1

Adieu

C.B.Brown.

1 The famous French Revolutionary Song motif. In France when asked about the prospects of the American War of Independence Franklin's invariable reply was "Ça Ira".

This letter shows firmly established Brown's acquaintance with Dunlap--which was to last for the remainder of Brown's life and ~~with~~ in Dunlap's memory for forty years. They had first met in New York more than a year ago, probably as early as the autumn of 1793 ~~in February~~, under the auspices of Smith. Dunlap was now in Philadelphia to attend the second[1] Convention of the Abolition Societies, opening on the evening of 7 January, to which he was a New York delegate together with William Johnson, John Murray, junior, (attending one day only) ~~and~~ W.W. Woolsey while and Walter Franklin of Philadelphia serving as secretary and all of whom were ~~we shall later see~~ among Brown's friends ~~and~~ It is apparent Dunlap ~~he had~~ stayed the first two days with Brown.

(1-7 January 1794)

1 He was a delegate to the first convention ~~a year ago~~ but apparently ~~had not met Brown; anyway~~ Brown ~~was~~ not in Philadelphia ~~then~~. or they either Then ~~being~~ had not become intimate.

but a letter to his brother James to be given presently makes it clear Brown was more than depressed by their loss. The letter also records the defeat of some plan to meet the wishes of James to enter the profession by resuming the reading of law under the instruction of Wilkins who had been appointed in October 1794 by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to the office of state bar-examiner. We have already found this idea of Brown's suggested in the 25 July 1793 letter and the persistence of it shows how slow his relatives--and probably friends--were to realize the true condition of his mind.

The relation of Brown to his brothers' business as a possible legal adviser is again forced upon us. Dunlap says[1] he was a sleeping partner until July 1796, which not only corroborates the idea of his being the legal member of the firm but also explains his supply of money.

The next letter is somewhat enigmatic but sufficiently clear to show Brown's position. It is

(addressed Mr.James Brown Mercht. Edenton N.Carolina.)

Philada. April 14,17952

Dear Brother
Our brother Joseph is just leaving us. Had I any thing to occupy a Sheet, a sheet should be employed, but there

1 National Portrait Gallery memoir, p.4.
2 Dated from the end of the letter.

are no topics of conversation between us which will not be much better discussed by word of mouth,between my two brothers. What of importance has occured since your departure? An event of very great moment and the least expected that could almost possibly occur,has indeed been witnessed by us. It has been of particular importance to me. Wilkins' life was,indeed,the pledge of my success in the legal profession. It was necessary also to my qualification as an attorney. The knowledge that was necessary,most necessary,practical skill, the result of experience,was only derivable from him. It is his death that hath prevented me from fulfilling your expectations,and obliged me to defer my admission till the succeeding term.

Of my health of body or of mind,it is in my power to say very little in favor,but all, sooner or later, will,I trust,be well,both to you and me, if fortunes smile not deceitfully. I suppose your present adventure will, in a great measure,ascertain your future prosperity. I am much inclined to moralize,but I am afraid to attempt it. It would appear rather awkward coming from my lips. My practise is,indeed,not much to be commended;and yet,though that be a miserable kind of consolation,if thoroughly known,I believe I should be an object of compassion and forgiveness, rather than of anger or resentment.

You are speedily to supply the place of our brother Joseph in this family. This inspires all with the most agreable expectations. In spite of some inconveniences, I cannot but think that your abode will be much more agreable than it could possibly be at Edenton. I am indeed an utter stranger to the localities of Edenton, except by second hand,and yet have imbited most formidable prejudices against it.

I am still inclined to moralize,but should,I fear, be seduced into reflections of too sable a complexion for the occasion. I will therefore conclude my hasty epistle with sincere wishes for your health and prosperity,and for your speedy return to this city. And am, dear brother,in spite of a disease,called by some nosographers,the dumps,

Affectionately yours,
C.B.Brown.

Evidently the brothers in business were experimenting at an extension of their affairs and Joseph,the senior partner, had decided to bring James back to Philadelphia and to go to Edenton himself.

About this time Brown seems to have turned his attention to

which, as lead to
reading the Bible and a letter to follow will show, him debating on the virtues of Christianity.

On the 9th. of May of this year Timothy Paxson,[1] Joseph Bringhurst and Brown were appointed, by the "Society for the Attainment of Useful Knowledge" a committee to collect materials for and prepare the memoir of Wilkins which after a year and a half had elapsed was read in 1796, being introduced by a letter dated 9 November. This memorial covers forty-nine pages of Elizah Brown's quarto copy book. Brown's hand cannot be found in the work; ~~and the greater part of it was~~ apparently it was entirely written by Bringhurst though ~~it will appear that~~ Brown may have supplied some of the material.

On June 2nd. the Philadelphia Gazette ~~and Universal Daily Advertiser~~ advertised a letter for Charles Brown in the post-office as uncalled for. By the first of September it had been claimed. This tends to corroborate Dunlap's statement of his having been again on a visit to New York. In the Smith letter to Brown, dated 27 March 1796, which later we shall quote we learn that Brown became acquainted with Gahn, the Swedish Consul at New York, in the summer of 1795. Gahn and his friends were members of Smith's circle.

1 Paxson and Thomas P. Cope were two of the five executors of the will of Stephen Girard, see biography by Stephen Simpson, Phila., 1832, p.31., (of the Appendix).

On Tuesday the 22nd. Smith received letters from Brown and Dunlap, on the 23rd. he wrote to Brown and on the 24th. records:

> "As we returned from our Circuit (of yellow fever cases) I mentioned my friend's (C.B.B) plan for a Tale."

This reference to Sky Walk is only one of several but it is followed by almost a month's silence on Smith's part.

In the National Portrait Gallery memoir[1] Dunlap quotes another fragment from another letter of Brown's. From internal evidence it appears to have been written near the end of the month. It was

> (To William Dunlap)
>
> (Philadelphia, September, 1795.)
>
> Soon after my return, I began the design of which we talked so much. I had planned so that I could finish a work equal in extent to Caleb Williams in less than six weeks; and wrote a quantity equivalent to ten of

1 P.3.

> his (Godwin's) pages daily, till the hot weather and inconvenient circumstances obliged me to relax my diligence. Great expedition does not seem very desirable. Tenets so momentous require a leisurely and deep examination; and much meditation, reading, and writing, I presume, are necessary to render my system of morality perfect in all its parts, and to acquire a full and luminous conviction; but I have not stopped--I go on, though less precipitately than at first, and hope finally to produce something valuable for its utility..

According to Dunlap the work mentioned was Sky Walk which was ~~shall be studied with,~~ doomed never to appear being merged in ~~and~~ Edgar Huntly.

The same authority adds that

> "It appears from another part of this letter, that the novelist had thought of accepting his brother's invitation to become a partner in mercantile business, and even to go as supercargo to Spain and Germany. His oldest brother, Joseph, had likewise invited him to "pass the winter on the solitary banks of the Roanoke, where he tells me" says Charles, "there are musty books to read, and wild woods to moralize in. The arrangements above mentioned, will probably fix me here." "

There we see that Joseph had gone to Edenton to live, in accordance with the plan mentioned in the letter of 14 April and Brown ~~in spite of Wilkins' death~~ was planning in some way to become connected with the business, ~~of his brothers'.~~ Whether he did or not is ~~not definitely known~~ another twilight mystery because the only authority Dunlap states one thing one time and another at another. It is highly improbable that he did anything more than some legal or possibly clerical work when ~~the desire for~~ his literary ~~composition~~ activities permitted. ~~This~~ The latter may be what Smith ~~meant by~~ called "mechanical" work in ~~his~~ a letter of 24 July 1797 to Joseph Dennie.

kept

On the 17th. of October Smith resumes his record of Brown and supplies us with some suggestion that Sky Walk had some of Brown's religious discussion which ~~we~~ can be found only ~~may find~~ presented ~~in extenso~~ in his letters. His diary reads:

> "I can account for my not having heard from C.B.Brown only by supposing him busily engaged on his work,of which he spoke in his last letter. He has not written to Dunlap;1 as this last informed me. I feel no small curiosity to see how my friend will manage his plot. But I have no doubt of its being worthy of its author. What different sentiments will it excite! And how much rancor and misrepresentation must he encounter! And not he alone,but all those who are united to him,by the ties of friendship,and bonds of resembling opinions."

The next day as soon as he had finished his dinner Smith sat down and wrote to Brown,probably echoing the sentiments he had expressed on Saturday the seventeenth. He received a letter from Brown on the 23rd. but he does not express any opinion of it or suggest what it contained. It was answered on Sunday the 25th.

Brown's letters to Bringhurst were resumed at this time and the next one is

(addressed Joseph Bringhurst,Junr. Merchant,Wilmington (Delaware)2)

(Saturday)October 24. 1795. 3

> Dear Joseph 4
> I have just received your letter. I delivered the enclosed immediately. Whatever fault is imputable to

1 Brown's September letter had evidently not been received when Dunlap wrote to Smith the letter received by him on the 16th. in which he promised "a long letter!!!"
2 The brackets are Brown's. 3 Dated from the end of the letter.
4 This is the first letter we have that uses the name in opening. Usually it was "my dear friend".

Brown's trip to Woodbury was probably ~~related~~ to ~~his~~ collection of materials for the biographical memoir of Wilkins. About this time, according to the Literary Magazine, he was ~~also~~ reading over the letters relating to Wilkins; the important part of which we have ~~already~~ noticed in our account of the year 1788.

This ~~period~~ time of Brown's life seems to have been formative. Now that he had gone through the climacteric and had had all the training that argument and brooding ~~and questioning~~ could give he turned to the reading of a lot of books and began to reconstruct his theories according to the practical affairs of life.

~~At this time he not only~~ Besides read widely, probably including the law, ~~but~~ he ~~was~~ also ~~giving~~ gave more attention to the control of his pen, experimenting in two forms of story-telling, which he calls the epistolary and the narrative, and deciding to use the latter, and actually ~~doing~~ did so.

~~What is given of~~ The religious discussion in that letter recalls the comparison he had made of Christ and Grandison, and as in that other case he here makes obvious slips and exposes his superficial knowledge, ~~of the religion he asperses~~. It is a fair example of an attempt to solve religious doubts by the pen, ~~and it is clear~~

~~that Brown was doing too much of his thinking with a pen working in his hand~~. It displays ~~shows~~ too much theological discussion, ~~and too little of the real merits of the Bible and its teachings~~. On the whole it smacks of the kind of argument put forth by Tom Paine--though we have nothing to prove he had read the Age of Reason. Anything Brown wrote here could have been derived from Godwin if it needed any inspiration. It has the limping frailty of answering arguments by a bald statement that so-and-so is the fact. It does not convince and it does not merit any ~~such superlatively overwhelming~~ rejoinder, ~~as the Bishop of Landaff gave to Paine~~.

Leaving all theological discussion aside the matter is important for us in other things. It is perfectly clear he soon learned the salutary lesson that discussion in correspondence is generally fruitless, indeed if we ~~try to~~ read between the lines we cannot resist the impression that he was tiring of this ~~sort of~~ correspondence with Bringhurst. Another point most important biographically is that the letter has no whining appeals to friendship and no high-strung, wrought-up exclamations, the lack of which shows he was settling down to the work of his life. ~~The absence of complaint~~ It is not only healthy but it promises some accomplishment in a literary way.

What all the talk about Stella is, is not ~~so~~ clear, ~~as we would wish it.~~ Of course it is not difficult to surmise. With a group of young men of marriageable age and ~~with~~ various temperaments it seems the lady called Stella[x] was attractive to if not the ~~bone~~ cause of ~~contention~~ rivalry between them. That Brown and Paxson thought highly of her will appear, ~~especially~~ as we go on. Bringhurst had ~~given~~ expressed some ~~thing in~~ criticism of her character but that Paxson had married her in spite of or in ignorance of what Bringhurst and Brown knew seems to be indicated in the next letter which was received 3 November and had been sent by mail. It is

(addressed Joseph Bringhurst,Junr.Merchant Wilmington, Delaware. Ppost.)

(Friday) 30 Octob.1795.1

Dear friend

I shall not I fear be able to finish and dispatch this today as you so anxiously desire. It is already near two:so you must wait a day or two longer. You put a severe construction upon both parts of my letter. I meant not to impute to you bigotry or more than a very common and natural degree of zeal for the truth;yet certainly a Zeal that,in its effects,is somewhat censurable. I far more sincerely condemn and more anxiously lament my own incapacity of bearing with complacency the heat and impetuousity of others in debate

You talk,Joseph,of engagements mental and personal. Of what color are the former? Do you mean somewhat different from commercial? or professional? If you do,tell me what they are.

A great part of your anxiety is superfluous: You know the tenor of my predictions,when this unfortunate affair between Stella and you first occured. I dreaded the effect of the imputations which you were about to fix upon her. I estimated highly her sensibility to reputation,and if Timothy participated in the knowledge of those circumstances,I dreaded the influence of that knowledge upon his happiness,because that imaginary good,when withdrawn from his wife,must deeply affect him: You may readily imagine that "Stella" can never be unhappy alone while she has an husband or a friend to partake of her griefs:but the evil which you dread exists not. Inviolable and stronger than ever, if possible, is the love between them. Time must be allowed to judge

1 Dated from the end of the letter.

x The Souvenir, Philadelphia 8 August 1827 records the death of Ruth, the wife of Paxson, as having occured 29 July. Her maiden name ~~She was~~ Ruth Johnson

of the ultimate effects of late occurences. To our limited sagacity the apparently evil may finally operate to our eventual benefit;but,Joseph,suffer these causes to operate in silence. Oblivion to the past is the word. Inviolable silence upon these topics appears to be indispensable.

By my Oracle I thought you would discover without more ado Godwin's Enquiry.1 I cannot find the book you mentioned. There are two of Lowman's works in the library:one on the Hebrew ritual,2 in which the equity and wisdom of the Hebrew Institutions are asserted:and the other on the Revelation of St.John.3 Both works, perhaps,are worthy of your Curiosity. I intend to dip slightly into each to discover their general tendency and purport. You may suppose the end contemplated in the former of these to be sufficiently arduous in my opinion.

You do not mention Laura;or your own operations with respect to her,nor indeed any article of your present situations,in which a thousand things must occur capable of interesting one who values your happiness as much as

C.B.Brown.4

1 Better known as Political Justice. Hitherto the date when Brown became acquainted with Godwin's work was not definitely known.
2 Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews. The study of a commonwealth we shall find had a peculiar appeal for Brown.
3 Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St.John. The application of some of this Revelation,as explained by Lowman,may have had a personal echo in Brown's heart and some of the details may have been transferred into his Wieland.
4 Originally C.B.B. but added to.

While busy with Sky Walk it is not to be wondered at that Brown was silent for a long time. During the interval Smith wrote him the following letter, which we take from the copy in Volume II of his diary.

To Charles Brockden Brown.

The earnest desire which I feel to hear from you, would have prompted me to give you earlier notice of my return to New York, had not a variety of pressing concerns occupied all my time, till now.

I reached this city, about ten days since, after an absence of a little more than three weeks, and after a journey and visit pleasant beyond my expectations. The lateness of the season made me apprehensive of that disagreeable weather, which usually prevails at the close of autumn; but all my anticipations of gratification, from my excursion, were heightened, by the additional charm of an unclouded sky and a mild temperature.

You are not ignorant of the delight which all hearts of sensible mould are conscious of, when they revisit the scenes

"where once their careless childhood stray'd,
a stranger yet to pain."— 1

even if the visitation is made under circumstances of sorrow and want; you know likewise how greatly this delight is increased, when all things proceed prosperously; when tranquillity and plenty surround the dwellings of our friends, and when they meet us in vigorous health, and augmented felicity. Fortunately, my friend, a happiness so pure had been prepared for me.—I will not ask you to forgive me, for dwelling on this subject; for I am sure that to you, as well as to me, it can not fail of being grateful. You must be pleased, for I am pleased; you must be rejoiced, for you know the value of these friends; you can not be insensible to it, for they are acquainted with and esteem you. You were, often, the object of their solicitude and inquiries, and the subject (of) our mutual congratulation and discourse.

Shall I tell you, my friend, that I sometimes indulged the hope of hearing from you, while I was at Lichfield? A thousand circumstances, I know, might have prevented your writing. I recalled this, and was not disappointed by your silence. But I am now in this city; the communication is so direct;— it is long, very long, since you wrote to me;—can I doubt of your seizing the 2 first leisure to dilate on all those numerous topics of discussion, which my previous letters must have presented to you?

Farewell

E.H.Smith.

Wednesday Dec.2,1795.
Cedar St. No.13, New York.

1 Gray: On a Distant Prospect of Eton College stanza II, ll.3-4. My not their.
2 Changed from your.

question of morality;which,in truth,was what I expected--
But,I am straying from the purpose of this letter,which is,
to inform you that,if "the fates,and destinies,the sisters
three,and such odd things"--do not determine otherwise, I
shall leave this city of N.York,next Wednesday,and be with
you on the evening of the Thursday following. I shall come
alone--i.e.,unaccompanied by any of our particular friends;
and,as you rightly conjectured,on the business of the Manu-
mission Society.1 Both Johnson and Dunlap are on the Dele-
gation;but neither of them can attend.
My love to Joseph,his and yours
Farewell
Friday Dec.25 1795 E.H.Smith
Cedar St,No.13,N.York.

Smith had for the first time been selected as one of the New York delegates to the Abolition convention. On Tuesday the 29th. the ~~ex-citement over his~~ excited ~~increased~~ expectation of going to Philadelphia ~~lead~~ him ~~to~~ so that he did not correctly recall the day he was to reach there and make the following entry in his diary:

"On Friday evening (I) hope to embrace Joseph and Charles."

~~The next day~~ As planned he started off

Wednesday 30 December:"Between the Ferry and Newark I met El.Smith,Jr.who was returning from Baltimore and Philadelphia and who gave me a letter from C.B.B. in which I am kindly solicited to take up my residence with him while I remain in Philadelphia.

1 The Minutes of the Proceedings of these conventions were printed by Zachariah Poulson,junior,one of the Brown circle.

Rebecca Biddle was at this time a neighbor and friend of Rebecca Gratz the beautiful Jewess who was in turn a friend of Dolly Payne. As selections made among all the Philadelphia belles Brown showed excellent judgment when he spent his evening in their company.

On the back of the letter given is the remains of a short undecipherable message. What we have been able to make out of it reads:

> "Accept the amites(?) of M.Hinou(?) and present my love to the agreeable family ----- --illenium -----."

There seems to have been some innocent and honorable rivalry among Brown and his friends and the allusion to his long epistle to Laura and the usual request of the rejected lover for its return is interesting. In the case of an earlier love we have seen that he addressed a similarly long poetical attempt to some Estrina. Just what the epistle here referred to was is not certain but what may be a fragment of it,if it really was long,may be found in Brown's Literary Magazine.[1]

1 Vol.I,p.110.

It is signed W, contains the same ideas as addressed to Estrina though put in better verse, and reads:

TO LAURA OFFENDED

Three days had passed with lingering steps away,
While I to narrow verge confined,
To body's pain and solitude a prey,
And sad unrest of mind.

The fourth serene and painless rose,
I hie me to thy door;
It opens, but thy altered aspect shows
An open heart no more.

A stranger I, thou hail'd'st me Friend no more;
Nor welcome sweet bestowed:
No questions that the absent past explore,
In tender accents flow'd.

A brow, alas! severely bent, was thine;
Reluctant was thy hand;
Thy eyes, that so serenely us'd to shine,
Their sternest glance command.

To tedious exile from thy converse, I ,
By sickly blasts consigned,
A respite from the long-drawn, lonely sigh,
At some time hoped to find.

Ah, Laura, wilt thou snatch that hope away?
And lost must I believe thee?
Not merely take from life its dearest stay
Of life itself bereave me.

The verse is of importance for it is the same, abab, as the four poems two of which appeared in the Weekly Magazine[1] and two in the Literary Magazine[2], all signed Laura, and which it seems were written by Deborah Ferris.

That Brown failed to win Deborah Ferris is clear and when his suit was hopeless he did not do as he had dome long before, mope

1 Vol.I, p.125 and p.189.

2 Vol.VII, p.159 and p.399.

away his time,but turned his attention to Stella and Rebecca Biddle. That he was serious does not seem clear;experience had made him wise enough to find safety in numbers.