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J. H. Brown 1968

SECOND VISIT TO THE "HARTFORD WITS"

Without ^{mortuary} ~~death~~ scenes ^{1799 Aetat. 28} ~~mitted~~ though not ^{free from} ~~without~~ ^{pestilence} ~~was one of the~~ ^{was another}

of the ^{whole} busiest of Brown's life; for he had the Monthly Magazine editing to ^{in addition to} do ~~as well as~~ the composition of the second volume of Arthur Mervyn.

all of Edgar Huntly and part of Ormond. ^a The Death of ^{when he should not} ^{have given more to} ^{it clear. ~~have~~}

Cicero may be thrown in for good measure or

He opened the year by writing to his brother, ^{only} an extract of the

letter being given by Dunlap. ¹ ^{is carelessly written, but it} It presents a picture of Brown enjoying

all the domestic comforts that he and Johnson found in their "Bachelor's

Hall". ^{The mystery hidden in it is ~~probably~~ ^{may be} the family inter-}

ference in the Susan Potts attraction - if Brown had spoken ^{He ~~likely~~ ^{likely} Dunlap ~~probably~~ would have suppressed it ~~any way~~ - but} To A(rmitt) Brown.

(45 Pine street,) New York, (Tuesday,) Jan. 1, 1799.

Dear Brother

I have neither wife nor children who look up to me for food, and in spite of all refinements, conjugal and paternal cares can never be fully transferred to one who has neither offspring nor spouse.

However this be, I will not determine. The lessons of fortitude, perhaps, are more easy to be taught than to be practised; but this does not diminish their value. This you will admit, but will probably add that there is only vanity or folly in inculcating a lesson which the character or circumstances of the scholar disable him from learning.

As to me, the surface of my life would be thought, by most observers, tolerably smooth. I rise at eight, am seated by a comfortable fire, breakfast plenteously and in quiet, and with a companion who is a model of all the social and domestic virtues. All personal and household services are performed for me without the trouble of superintendence and direction. The writing occupation is pursued, with every advantageous circumstance of silence, solitude, pure air, cleanliness and warmth.

When my voluntary and variable task is finished, I may go into the society of those from whom I derive most benefit and pleasure. That I am blind to the benefits of this condi-

mitted as
probably
composed
some other
time and at
most merely
revised now.

in an
ugly ^{man}
of mind

Just as
myself
There is no way
of explaining it
so we may settle
down to enjoy
the clouds.

tion must not be supposed. That mere external ease and temporary accommodation are sufficient to afford a reasonable being happiness, must not be imagined. To forbear remembrance of the past, or foresight of the future, or to confine our view to so small a part of our condition as consists in food, raiment and repose, is no argument of wisdom. These incidents have small place in the thoughts of a rational man, but I will not carry you, at present, beyond these, or enter into all these subtilities of sensation and reflection, which, in spite of wealth, would make me sad, and, in spite of poverty, would make me cheerful.

It is time to end this letter. To write it was the first employment of the new year, and will be the sole employment of the kind, that will take place on this day. It is an holy-day, and, as such, it shall be past away. Absurd enough, you will say, to make idleness a medium of amusement or an auxiliary to sanctity.

On this day, all the world is busied in visiting and congratulation and feasting. I believe I shall, in this instance, act, in some degree, like all the world.

Adieu,

C. B. B.

Some time in January, probably toward the latter part of the month, Ormond was published in New York.

The next letter we have shows that his brother James was actively interested in his literary career for at Philadelphia he was assisting in the publication of the first volume of Arthur Mervyn. The letter gives some information of the details of the plague story and is

1
To James Brown.

(45 Pine street,) New York, (Friday,) Feb., 15, 1799.

Dear Brother,

1 Dunlap, Vol. II, p. 97.

I know not why I suffered your last letter to remain so long unanswered. Its hints respecting the catastrophe¹ of Arthur Mervyn, were worthy of particular attention. Had I seen reason to approve of the alteration which you recommend, I should have written more speedily. Arthur is intended as an hero whose virtue, in order to be productive of benefit to others, and felicity to himself, stands in no need of riches. You may remember that he originally appears, in a pennyless² condition. He is afterwards in possession of some thousand dollars. To maintain consistency and congruity, it was necessary that this sum should be lost. You must judge whether the mode of destroying the notes, is not consistent with his previous character, and with probability: to excite and baffle curiosity, without shocking belief, is the end to be contemplated. I have endeavoured to wind up the reader's passions to the highest pitch, and to make the catastrophe, in the highest degree, unexpected and momentous.

Twenty thousand dollars are a large sum, but remember the belief of their being forged, reduces the value to nothing while their power to do mischief is proportionably increased.

I have purposely left an opening for the publication of a second part or sequel. The destiny of Wallace and of Mr. Hadwin is not mentioned in the present work. I intended that Mr. Hadwin, on returning to his family, should be seized with the fatal disease. That the task of nursing him, while struggling with the malady, and of interring him when dead, should, by the fears of their neighbours, be assigned to his daughters. Wallace, by his unseasonable journey, is thrown into a relapse, and dies upon the road. Mervyn, preparing to leave the city, is accidentally detained, and his fortitude and virtue, subjected to severer trials than any hitherto related.

The character of Wallace is discovered to have been essentially defective. Marriage with this youth is proved to be highly dangerous to the happiness of Susan. To prevent this union, and to ascertain the condition of this family, he speeds, at length, after the removal of various impediments, to Hadwin's residence, where he discovers the catastrophe of Wallace and his uncle, and by his presence and succour, relieves³ the two helpless females from their sorrows and their fears.

- 1 The burning of the money in the last chapter of volume one. Being lied to by Welbeck, Mervyn believed it forged.
- 2 Not literally--he had 75 cents.
- 3 In the second volume Brown adhered to only a part of these plans.
- 4 He learned of Wallace's death by coming to the house where he had died. Wallace had been nursed by an unmarried lady who lived somewhere between the Villars' and Hadwins'.
- 5 By the mistake of the servant he was announced to Susan as Wallace so that she swooned when she saw him, died shortly after and was buried in the orchard by Mervyn.

The first number of the Monthly Magazine was issued in New York about the first of May, though dated for April, so that Brown had on his hands another literary work; not of the usual kind that may be pursued with more or less leisure but one that torments an author like a slave-driver.

About the fifteenth of May he went off on a visit to Philadelphia and during his absence his domestic companion William Johnson wrote a letter to James Kent at Poughkeepsie in which he gives this glimpse¹ of Brown and his work.

"Our opinion of man and things are often influenced by our feelings at the moment, and by the accidental circumstances in which we are placed. My partiality for Mr. B. induced me to impute your judgment² of his writings to the influence of fortuitous incidents, and temporary sensations, rather than to the deliberate exercise of your understanding. On re-perusing your letter however, I do not know but your opinion, might not after all, be deemed highly favorable to the genius of the writer, and that your censure will apply only to the choice of his subject.

I am at present alone. Mr. B. has been absent, for the fortnight past, on a visit to Philadelphia. The first number of his magazine is published. The second number will appear on the first of June.⁴ I have requested Mr. Swords to address six copies to you, -- one for yourself, another Judge Radcliff, and the others for your friends in Poughkeepsie. Should they not be wanted, they can be returned⁵. . . . I am desirous to know your opinion of the first two numbers. . . ."

After this trip to Philadelphia Brown must have returned to New York to furnish the material for several numbers of the

1 In the Kent collection, Library of Congress, dated New York, 29 May.

2 Since the publication of Alcibiades Kent seems to have been adverse to Brown's work.

3 Probably since the 15th. 4 This makes certain the time of issue.

5 Here Johnson speaks of the contents of the magazine.

magazine; for on some indefinite Friday of June ^{with William Johnson} he left for his second visit to the scenes of Connecticut made familiar by his visit of 1793.

From his planning to do little writing save necessary letters we might surmise he had been doing too much and needed a change and rest, but this was, as we shall see, not the real reason. He expected to gather literary material for his periodical. So far as his health was concerned, if we are to believe his own testimony, which there is no cause to doubt, he was in the best of condition for receiving impressions.

¹
We next hear of him by means of his journalizing at Middletown, thus:

"I expected to write but little during my absence from New York; little more at least than letters. To relate all the adventures that shall befall me, and to record all the observations I shall make, will require far more time and cost more labour than my indolence will permit. I have indeed a scheme in view for preserving the impressions which this journey shall make, in a way that may serve a public and private purpose. Connecticut has never been described, and surely merits a description.

I had many reasons for desiring to accompany my friend in this excursion. Some of them I shall not mention, nor weigh in critical scales their propriety. The recreations of the country, the interesting spectacle of New England manners, the review of scenes intimately connected with the existence of E.

¹ Dunlap, Vol. II, p. 47 ff.

~~² Possibly W.W. Woolsey.~~

H. S. and of my dearest friends among the living, were surely of sufficient weight.

After many delays we set out from New York at ten o'clock on Friday morning. The weather was for the most part clear and serene. I had a vigilant eye for passing objects, roads, dwellings and passengers. My curiosity was awakened by the intention I had formed of describing what I saw. In this respect my mind has undergone a sudden and memorable revolution. Instead of being as I used to be, sluggish, torpid and inattentive, my eye was watchful and my mind busy in arranging and comparing objects.

On Saturday we reached Middletown. It was evening, and a bright sky, a smooth road and healthful state of my frame, allowed me to take in all the pleasure which the circumstances of the time and place were calculated to afford. Never did I receive equal delight from a rural prospect. Yet how much a matter of association and moral sensibility is the sensation flowing from the survey of the grandeur of nature. Had I not had some previous acquaintance with this scene, through the medium of actual observation and books, my sensations would have been widely different and much less lively and exuberant. Had I not anticipated intercourse with those whose society is dear to me, my feelings would have been comparatively mean and insignificant."

There the Dunlap quotation ends but we have found a continuation of it to be given presently.

While at Middletown Brown probably visited Richard Alsop as he had done in 1793.

~~So far as we can find~~ ^{Apparently} there was no immediate use of the observations he made at this time; at least the numbers of the Monthly Magazine issued in his absence and after his return contain

^{of his} nothing ~~that seems to have~~ owed its inspiration to this trip.

Some verses by Alsop in the July number ^{appear to be all he} ~~may have been secured at this time, but we have found no material of Brown's own.~~

1 The superfluous clause suggests he was also thinking of his first wife.

When we come to the Literary Magazine for March 1805¹ we discover an article of three sections indicated as being "from a Traveller's Journal" and the third section entitled Job's Pool is doubtless from the journalizing of Brown at this time just as well as all of that Journal of a traveller. If in these cases we needed any proof other than the internal evidence to prove them Brown's we might turn to Smith's journal of 13 November 1795 where he says:

"The town of Litchfield, the West Mountain, the Lake, the blue and distant ridges of New Milford, the chasm by which they are, in part, exposed to the eye--but I will not trust my untutored pen with a description of the scene. Thy pencil Charles, my friend Charles, to thine doth it belong."

equable degrees, to the margin, which is smooth, unembarrassed by stocks or stones, and covered with white clover, whose blossom is exceeded by few plants in its fragrance and beauty. This embroidery extends to the very skirts of the lake, and ends only where its liquid murmurs and transparent refluece begin.

Its waters abound with perch and other fish, whose sports are seldom or never interrupted by the fisherman. The temperature, as we experienced by bathing in it, was, in the highest degree, mild and salubrious. We lingered here for some time, and returned to Middletown at the close of a delightful day."

As description that speaks for itself and before we continue with the next day we desire to call attention to the detail of the provision of the limes. That Brown had a taste for lemonade will be often seen in the course of our work, notably here and in the Jaunt to Rockaway.

After a note in regard to Brown's pleasure in these picnics Dunlap goes on with the following:

"Yesterday was spent beyond the river. A minute account of this excursion would be useful. Not an incident however trifling but would serve to illustrate manners and gratify the curiosity. There is a method of narration, which would make interesting, the most common and familiar theme.

2 Mrs. J. 1 her sister, and Miss ——— were the females. D. — 2 A. — 3 I. — 1 and myself accompanied them. The fear of bad roads, reptiles and water mars the pleasure of many, in excursions like this. I never met with women so totally exempt from these terrors as were our companions. The river was twice crossed, once after night and in a blustering atmos-

- 1 Not known to us.
- 2 Timothy Dwight.
- 3 Probably Richard Alsop.

phere, in a crazy boat crowded with carriages and horses. The road was in some parts of it precipitous and dangerous, and was traversed during our return in the dark. I was a stranger to the way, had bad eyes, and drove with precipitation; yet Miss ---- my companion in a chaise, betrayed not the slightest apprehension and concern. We ascended a hill which from the abundance of its rattlesnakes, is known by the name of rattle-snake hill; we clambered over rocks and pits, but the name of snake seemed to affect the females as little as that of butterfly."

Who that young lady was who rode in the chaise in the dark with Brown is not to be learned from Dunlap. His ideas of editorial propriety made him as secretive about her as he was of the others. Perhaps the lady was the elusive Miss Potts or Miss Alsop or it may even have been Miss Elizabeth Linn. Whoever she was, there was no Sterne sentimental journey to that ride!

Dunlap follows by a commentary which reads:

"After mentioning a visit to Job's pool, the company's dining in a meadow, the perils and fatigues of clambering a mountain, and the extensive view of Connecticut and its beautiful river¹ of the same name "with its turns and dales" enjoyed from the top, Charles concludes his account of the day with the following characteristic reflections."

from which it would appear that the two other sections to be

found in the Literary Magazine entitled Higby's Mountain and Powder Hill are the continuation, in spite of the fact that they were published by Brown in an order different from Dunlap's suggestions.

1 In the Weekly Magazine, Vol. III, p. 340-1 there is an account of the cataract in the Connecticut river unsigned that may be, but bears no internal evidence to prove it, Brown's.

2 Vol. III, p. 205 ff.

"HIGBY'S MOUNTAIN.

On Wednesday, Mr. D---- and myself on horseback, and my friend¹ and A--- in a chaise, visited two lofty points in the neighborhood of this city (Middletown), called Higby's Mountain and Powder hill. The first is ascended by a winding and craggy road, leading through a forest of shrub-oaks and cedars. The opposite side is a steep and rugged cliff, the height of which it is difficult to ascertain. This cliff, whose descent is, in many places, perpendicular, forms a kind of wall, from the foot of which there stretches a scene of magnificent extent, and delicious variety.

The prospect was obscured by woods, till we reached the verge. The farther we advanced, the declivity became more steep and rugged. It is usual to leave carriages and horses at the bottom, and ascend on foot. Unwillingness to leave our horses at a distance made us persist in pushing them forward, till we brought them within sixty or eighty yards of the precipice, over rocks and steeps, which a calm view would have deemed wholly impracticable.

We traversed this brink for some time, choosing different stations to diversify the view. I feel an elevation and expansion of soul on these occasions, difficult to be described. These emotions were heightened, in

the present instance, by their novelty. Scenery so ample and stupendous, I never before beheld. A plain, broken up into luxuriant undulations, chequered by sunshine and shade, divided into regular enclosures of grove, corn-field, and meadow, and forming a circle, whose diameter was hardly less than forty miles, was diffused before us. The cliff on which we stood formed part of the circumference of this circle. The Sound and the shadowy ridges of Long Island formed another part. The remainder was shut out by a smooth and gradually swelling ridge, covered with wood, which advanced into the midst of the circle, and then sinking suddenly to the level of the adjacent spaces, left an abrupt knoll, which we conjectured to be ten miles distant.

Nothing is more deceitful than the common estimate of heights. That which we occupied appeared the greater by being so abrupt, and by contrast with that wide spread and billowy surface which it bounded. The fields appeared like the plots of a garden. In one of them, immediately beneath us, were kine grazing, which my companions, for a time, mistook for sheep. Viewed from so high a pinnacle, their outlines were indistinct, and peculiarities of shape and motion were not to be distinguished.

1 Later spoken of as W----, probably = Woolsey or Williams.

My friends dared not to approach the verge. Dizziness and a disposition to spring forward seized them when they caught a glance at the abyss. I gave them much disquiet, and brought upon me the reproach of fool-hardiness and temerity, by venturing to sit upon the utmost brink, and look steadfastly on the gloomy and profound dell, in which the cliff terminated. I took pleasure in following with my eye the rocks which they rolled down the precipice, and which carried down with them the stony fragments which they encountered in their passage, and bounded over rocks and chasms with a noise that had in it no small portion of sublimity.

Satiated with this amusement, we at length prepared to return. This was more difficult than the ascent had been. It cost us much trouble to find a practicable path for our horses. D—— and I, taking the way which we had already traversed, arrived, after much stumbling and sliding, at more *footable* spaces. A—— and W——, who had charge of the chaise-horse, made their way, with extreme difficulty, and some injury to the poor animal whom they conducted, over a more dangerous track.

We carried refreshments along with us; and stopping at a farm at the mountain's foot, enjoyed the luxury of coolness, and shade, and pleasant viands. Lemonade and cold ham formed an agreeable repast, in the midst of new made hay, and beneath an apple-tree, in an orchard, whence the neighbouring mountain could be advantageously seen.

POWDER HILL.

After our refreshment, much of the day being unconsumed, we proceeded, over a pleasant road, to *Powder hill*. I had much talk with D—— as we trotted side by side.

We found colonel Lyman, a farmer who lives near the hill, busy in his hay field. He led us to an excellent spring, where we once more regaled ourselves on lemonade, and leaving our horses in the meadow, ascended the hill. Like the former, this hill consists of a gradual ascent on one side, and a towering precipice upon the other. The cliff was not so high, nor the landscape so extensive, as the former, but it was an enchanting scene. The atmosphere was, in a high degree, serene and luminous, and the sun promised to set with uncommon splendour. The cliff looked towards the west, and the harbour of Newhaven and the Sound were distinctly visible. I was willing to sit here till the sun

had disappeared, but my friends did not concur.

The artifices of description would give as much dignity and splendour to these scenes, as if they had occurred in the bosom of the Alps. All mountains and mountainous excursions agree in essential particulars. The difference is unimportant, and would not be discovered in the hands of an eloquent describer."¹

Then by returning to Dunlap we have the close of the day as follows:

"This day was full of incidents, and productive of much fatigue, yet I remember it with powerful and pleasurable emotion. To what cause is this to be ascribed? Does it flow from its social circumstances?

What a wretched possession is solitude. Intelligence and sympathy beaming from eye to eye, constitute all the happiness of man. Nature owes all her charms to her alliance with images flowing from society."

Thus with all too short an extract from the journal of Brown Dunlap leaves the Connecticut trip incomplete. The 16 July 1801 extract from Brown's diary shows that during this trip he was also in Hartford and the time of the year was the same--July.

2

The next assistance we have is a letter which shows our author back in his Pine street home in New York, and the city again subjected to an epidemic of yellow fever. It is

To James Brown.

(45 Pine street,) New York, (Friday,) July 26, 1799.

Dear Brother,

1 In Brown's publication the account of Job's Pool here follows.
2 Dunlap, Vol. II, p. 95 ff.

I am not sure that the present disposition of my thoughts and feelings is the most favourable for writing to you ; I have no momentous intelligence ; no tidings of personal, domestic or professional revolutions to communicate, yet this appears to be at present the most easy and agreeable employment, and whether I have much or little to say, to hear from me will doubtless give you pleasure.

The heat here has lately been excessive, and I have suffered much exhaustion of my strength on this account. My alacrity of spirits and mental vigour have partaken of this kind of decay. I have had much pen work to perform, and much still remains to be performed, and though I have applied myself to my tasks with diligence, it has not been with all the desirable cheerfulness. I am likewise influenced by the general dejection and inquietude which at this moment overspreads the city, in consequence of the indubitable re-appearance of pestilence among us.

Several cases, adjacent to each other, and near the quay in which Pine street terminates, whose symptoms are undoubted, have appeared within the last three days. The nature of this disease is plain, and my medical friend Miller assures me that our destiny, for this summer, is fixed. He believes that business will be at an end in the course of two or three weeks, and that in that time, it will behove those to consult their safety by flight, who are able to do it.

My sensations, in this state of things are so different from my sensations last summer, that I look back with astonishment. I do not wonder that I then remained in the city, but that my mind retained its tranquility in the midst of perils the most imminent ; that I could muse and write cheerfully² in spite of the groans of the dying and the rumbling of hearses, and in spite of a thousand tokens of indisposition in my own frame, is now almost incredible. I perceive that this tranquility and courage is utterly beyond my reach at present. I rejoice that there will be no domestic or social ties making me desert the city with reluctance. Those friends who then were as hardy as myself are already alarmed, and all those whose safety is particularly dear to me, will vanish from this scene as well as myself.

You may expect to be minutely and speedily acquainted with the state of things among us, and of my situation and views.

I ought long since to have written to the C.'s³ and P.'s.⁴ Remember me affectionately to them. You may shew them this letter when you meet with them.

1 Dr. Edward Miller..

2 He was preparing Wieland.

3 Probably T.C.Cope and his wife. Compare 1 September 1800 letter to Robert Proud.

4 Probably the Timothy Paxsons.

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performance, that by reason of its connection with Washington

was certain to be remembered, what would otherwise have been allowed

to go the way of ^{most} ~~all~~ ^{not} prologues was given to the public. ~~not~~ because

its author thought it to have any merit as poetry, ~~but as being~~

~~the best tribute of which he was capable.~~

There is no doubt that Brown's opinion of Washington¹ was a high one and the monody is ~~a~~ ^X good ~~one~~ in so far as it has real sorrow in it. That he added upwards of thirty lines and revised it for publication in the newspapers and again for publication in the Monthly Magazine was an unusual thing for Brown to do.

As we have seen the public was not entirely pleased with the public recital ~~of it~~ but there is ample cause to believe that the slur cast on it by Candidus² as being "frigid and inanimate" was dictated by something less admirable than justice.

monthly magazine

1 See the article on the monument, Vol. III, p. 473.

2 Monthly Magazine, Vol. III, p. 179. Candidus was probably Noah Webster.