

Read over 2 October 1924

Revised 24-27 September 1928

Revised 28 February 1934

Revised 26 p.m. January 1943

seems rather dull when read

by me 3 to 6 May 1952

1439-1462

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JANE TALBOT

1801

Jane Talbot, a novel was published pseudonymously by John Conrad  
 \* and Co., of Philadelphia. With two engravings it constituted <sup>was issued independently or as</sup> number  
 four of a series ~~entitled~~ the Select Novels and was the only illustrated first edition published during Brown's life.

Conrad's Select Novels is not generally known but was an interesting collection planned to comprise a wide and worthy field. Whether it ever covered the ~~greater part of the field~~ <sup>doubtful.</sup> is ~~not known~~. The Catalogue of Novels and Romances issued by Conrad with the date of 15 October

<sup>1</sup>  
 1804 explains the series: ~~as follows:~~

"Select Novels, now publishing by subscription, at one dollar per volume, ornamented with engravings by the first artists, and printed on a superfine wove paper... De Valcourt, 3 by Mrs. Bennet; the Nocturnal Visit by Mrs. Roche, author of the Children of the Abbey; Jane Talbot by C.B. Brown; Clermont by Mrs. Roche; Emmeline the Orphan of the Castle, by Charlotte Smith; and Don Quixote, are now finished in a style of elegance hitherto unequalled in this country, and form the thirteen first volumes of the series, which, when completed, will comprise the entire works of Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, DeFoe, M'Kenzie, Goldsmith, Hawkesworth, Swift, Sterne, Miss Burney, Mrs. Ratcliffe, Mrs. Roche, Mrs. Bennet, Holcroft, Moore, Cumberland, Charlotte Smith, and all the most esteemed authors, with every new novel of merit."

- 1 A copy found ~~found~~ <sup>found</sup> in a ~~second volume~~ of Brown's Literary Magazine, Vol. II
- 2 An advertisement in Vol. II of the "second edition" of Edgar Huntly adds "from designs by Barralet." The Don Quixote plates were by Lawson, Tanner and Seymour from drawings by Stothard. The Philadelphia Gazette 2 April 1803 advertised the series with two engravings in each by Barralet.
- 3 ~~The~~ copy examined has nothing to identify it with the series except the heading at the top of the engravings.

~~In this series Jane Talbot has a greater number of typographical~~  
~~errors than <sup>ever had.</sup> any other of Brown's works.~~ The first volume of  
the series was De Valcourt ~~and~~ the second and third comprised The  
Nocturnal Visit <sup>and</sup> ~~With~~ Brown's book <sup>was</sup> the fourth. ~~The first four~~  
~~volumes~~ <sup>5th and 6th volumes</sup> were all published in 1801. The ~~next work in the series~~  
~~was~~ <sup>where</sup> Clermont ~~is two volumes not published until~~ 1802.

<sup>a</sup>  
Jane Talbot has been the bibliographical stumbling-block, ~~for~~  
~~every~~  
~~nine out of ten who have written anything about Brown. There is~~  
no wonder ~~that~~ it has been <sup>so</sup> for Dunlap and Prescott ~~and the~~ <sup>used</sup>  
~~National Portrait Gallery, all of which are~~ <sup>common</sup> the usual reference  
<sup>which</sup> ~~books have helped to~~ perpetuate the error that it was first  
published in England by Brown's brother James in 1804. The mistake  
is ~~probably~~ <sup>its</sup> due to ~~the work~~ having been reprinted there at that date.

John Davis ~~writing~~ <sup>under date</sup> in his Travels of the 23 June ~~gives us a~~  
picture ~~of~~ Brown writing Jane Talbot, as follows:

"At Philadelphia I found Mr. Brown, who felt no remission of his literary diligence, by a change of abode. He was ingatiating himself into the favor of the ladies by writing a new novel, and rivalling Lopez de Vega by the multitude of his works. Mr. Brown introduced me to Mr. Dickins, and Mr. Dickins to Mr. Dennie;...."

The most important detail concerning the composition is that  
it was hastily begun on the day following the publication of Clara  
1 London, 1803, p. 203, or N.Y., 1909, ed., by A.J. Morrison, p. 222.

Howard. Brown ~~evidently~~ worked on it for about two weeks before he took <sup>a</sup> ~~his~~ July outing up the Hudson and through New England. Partly because it is so different in kind and partly for reasons stated in our study of Clara Howard it is possible ~~and should cause no surprise if~~ ~~some time it becomes demonstrated that~~ Elizabeth Linn, who was quite capable of it, may have had a <sup>1</sup> hand in its composition.

According to Brown's journal given by Dunlap it was July 10 when he talked with the mate of the Hudson river sloop and found some material for Jane Talbot:

"The mate has been telling me his adventures. A very crude and brief tale it was, but acceptable and pleasing to me. A voyage round the globe is a very trivial adventure, now-a-days. This man has been twice to Nootka, <sup>2</sup> thence to Canton, and thence to Europe and home."

~~Upon Brown's return to Philadelphia~~ <sup>the</sup> The mate's voyages were "boiled down" to one in Mrs. Montford's letter (LXVI) in which she tells Jane some of the travels of Henry Colden. Colden ~~himself~~ adds other details ~~to that account~~ in letter LXIX.

Though ~~it is~~ perfected to a greater degree than ~~is~~ usual with the masters of the epistolary novel the plot is for the most part a new combination of the ~~old~~ ideas ~~exhibited~~ in Clarissa Harlowe.

- 1 If she wrote the letters of the female characters she did two-thirds ~~of them~~--49 to 24.
- 2 In Vancouver Island, British Columbia. An Indian tribe ~~named~~ Moahcont lived there.



Like Clara Howard the letters have no complete heading so ~~that~~  
~~it is a nuisance to~~ the reader <sup>to</sup> ~~be~~ compelled to search for  
hints of the author of <sup>in many</sup> ~~each~~ letters. Formerly he practised some  
~~sort of~~ restraint in giving ~~the~~ letters but now he takes the  
greatest liberty, ~~with the material~~ has letters intervene, gives  
letters enclosed the same importance as those in which they are  
enclosed, dates them or not ~~just~~ as the fancy strikes him, gives  
the day of the week or not, signs them with the initials or full  
name or not at all; in fact there is no <sup>rule</sup> ~~rule or reason~~ and too  
many trivial errors to that part ~~of this epistolary novel~~ which  
ought to be mechanically perfected ~~just~~ as in building any struc-  
ture.

Besides those ~~in the mechanical structure~~ there are too many  
other faults in Jane Talbot.

The most obvious and really important is ~~in~~ the marriage of  
Jane to Talbot. In the first place when <sup>her</sup> ~~Jane's~~ name is given  
as Mrs. Talbot we are surprised and shocked and have to puzzle  
to find a name for her brother and father. As if it had no  
importance at all Brown ~~too~~ casually allows the name to come out  
as Risberg. Of course our ideas of her mother are hopelessly

confused by the sentimentality which makes Jane call Mrs. Fielder her mother so ~~that~~ we do not care whether she is her real mother or not, and so far as the story is concerned it does not matter.

When however, we come to examine the work closely we find ~~that~~ there was not time enough between the letters for Jane to be married.

Her marriage would have to be after Frank absconded to France

which was told ~~of~~ in the 6 October letter. Talbot, her husband, is

<sup>mentioned</sup>  
~~spoken of~~ in the 9 and 11 October letters. The narration ~~of the~~  
~~story~~ as it is, lacks the suitable interval <sup>to</sup> ~~for~~ the facts attendant

on the marriage such as Miss Jessup's disappointment and ignoble action; so ~~that~~ it seems evident ~~that~~ Brown wrote <sup>so</sup> ~~so~~ hastily ~~that~~ he did not ~~stay his pen long enough to~~ perfect his plan in such necessary details.

~~The date of~~ Stephen's sailing is another instance, ~~of the lack~~  
~~of definite plan in Brown's structure.~~ In letter XL, dated 28 November, Colden says Stephen is to sail "some day within the ensuing fortnight." That would mean ~~on~~ some day before December 12, but on December 19 Colden writes <sup>and</sup> ~~a letter in which he~~ says he will sail with Stephen in ten days. Jane's letter LVIII ~~also~~ has a

similar error. She says Colden went after my last letter and a twelve month has passed. The earliest he could have gone was December 20 and a twelve month having passed it would be about the 20th. of the next year, instead ~~of that this~~ letter of Jane's is dated October 12th., which would ~~make~~ it correct to ~~have said~~ ten months have passed.

There is entirely too much importance given to the so-called lack of religion in Colden, and the case against him is very much weakened by letter XXXIV <sup>when</sup> ~~in which~~ it comes out that all the religion ~~that~~ Jane had she owed to ~~just~~ the man who is supposed not to have had any.

The charge of Jane's counterfeiting a handwriting in letter XV spoils the effect of Miss Jessup's actual crime. This is not only new but was not even suspected any more than certain other details such as Mrs. Fielder's appearance at New York of which we were not told and which remains almost entirely hidden until the end.

Other details ~~which~~ should be noticed, ~~are as follows~~. In letter XIX Molly is to be sent home to her mother and Tom retained as a servant, but later, for no reason at all, Molly is the one kept and Tom is sent off; in letter XXVII Colden says he was offered

of Clara Howard, Brown had turned from romance to the novel, in the modern sense of those words. Jane Talbot is designated as a novel and it certainly is one. However some critics have found it interesting for ~~just~~ the details which we would condemn, ~~it~~ excusing it ~~on the ground of what they call~~ <sup>for</sup> its modernness. ~~But~~ When marriage and betrothal have no restraining influence on ~~a persons~~ conduct we prefer to consider the presentation of such a social condition as, at least, questionable art.

Undoubtedly the blame for the vices of the pupils can be laid at the door of the school of realism, so ~~that~~ the state of morals ~~as~~ ~~presented~~ in Jane Talbot similar to that of Clara Howard, has entirely too frank an expression concerning matters usually ~~in good company~~ only when necessary whispered sub rosa and never exchanged freely between persons of opposite sexes.

Jane's character is probably as good an example as one could cite for illustrating ~~what we would consider~~ the sickly sentimentality of the novels of Brown's day. In letter IX we find her complaining of the "coldness" of appropriately named Colden. She wishes for more "fervor" in his attentions to her. Just what she meant ~~by these expressions~~ is perhaps not of ~~any~~ importance and it is only too probable ~~that~~ the meanings of the words in the



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lover's vocabulary have changed since Brown's day, but when we later in letter XXXI come upon an actual instance of Jane's ideas of lover's actions toward each other, in the changing of the cuff into a kiss we cannot consider her anything but sentimentally "soft".

Mrs. Shelley's comment on Jane Talbot has probably been the origin of most of the adverse criticisms by other writers and while the work is undoubtedly of no great merit still such a wholesale condemnation of it is entirely superficial if not unjust.

According to Dowden in his Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1814 Mrs. Shelley made an entry in her journal, to this effect:

"Read "Jane Talbot"; very stupid book; some letters so-so; but the old woman in it is so abominable, the young woman so weak, and the young man (the only sensible one in the whole) the author of course contrives to bring to idiocy at the end."

The criticism of Colden in the last phrase is entirely wrong as can be very easily seen by simply reading the book. Although he speaks of himself as an insane philosopher still Colden is far less inclined to idiocy at the end than he was earlier in the work when he took for his life philosophy Godwin's Political Justice.

Possibly Mrs. Shelley had confused the character with Edward Hartley of Clara Howard or Clithero of Edgar Huntly or Wieland of Wieland.

Otherwise it is in its connection with Godwin that one must find

the necessity for taking Mrs. Shelley's criticism with the proverbial grain-of-salt. Colden as pictured in the work is a disciple of <sup>Godwin's</sup> ~~her father's~~ philosophy and one of the greatest arguments against him was that discipleship. In the character Brown gives a ~~very~~ heartless picture and trenchant criticism of the teachings of Mrs. Shelley's father; in fact ~~his criticisms are of the character~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~that~~ could not have helped but severely wound <sup>her.</sup> ~~Godwin's sensitive daughter~~. No wonder she disliked the book!

Why she found Mrs. Fielder abominable is not ~~quite~~ clear: her comment is not sufficiently definite to give us <sup>a</sup> ~~any~~ reason for it. The reader who takes up Jane Talbot with no brief for Godwin in his mind ~~and who is not even distantly related to Godwin,~~ will not like Mrs. Fielder primarily because she is in the way of the lovers, but it is hard to believe ~~that~~ any sensible person, except Mrs. Shelley, will see other than justice in her opposing the marriage of Jane and Colden. Mrs. Fielder was only doing what was perfectly right under the circumstances in forbidding the marriage. For ~~just~~ that reason Mrs. Fielder is one of the best characters in the story and as the proud, thoughtful mother she is a very good character. Unfortunately for Mrs. Shelley she was the most virulent opponent of the Godwinian philosopher!

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so much in vogue", a student of Godwin's Political Justice: all of which seems to suggest that ~~perhaps~~ Brown may have been somewhat portraying his own character especially in so far as Colden's attitude toward religion was concerned. However, so far as we know, Brown did not have any soul and body-racking conflict before he settled his religious belief. He appears to have been firmly grounded by the Quaker faith and not weakened by ~~the bigotry of being bound to~~ only one denomination. Another detail connected with Colden is his melancholy in LI and the fact that he ran away when disappointed in love. His soliloquy in XXVIII concerning his want for something to wile away the heavy hours; in the same letter the bad effect on his health of too much writing; his confession that he is unable to labor for his bread; and in XXIII his attention to the fact that he is dependent on money, which suggests he was an artist and might have added ~~that~~ he was more dependent on money than the man who devotes all his energies to acquiring it for the simple reason that to be independent of it one must have sufficient to meet all necessary requirements for it; in LI his view of suicide or fate much saner than we have previously found in all of Brown's work; his Quakerisms of thee and thou and the claim that he meant no gloomy ideas" in letter XXVII recalls

Brown's letter to his brother James in which he speaks of intending to change the tone of his stories to something less "out of nature": all of these <sup>may</sup> ~~seem to~~ unite Colden's character with Brown himself. But Jane can also be <sup>as strongly</sup> ~~so~~ connected. Her very name <sup>1</sup> may have come from Brown's sister at Princeton. In letter I there is a passage about conjugal affection which <sup>may</sup> ~~appears to~~ be autobiographic of <sup>his early</sup> ~~Brown's~~ marriage of ~~1804~~. In letter XXIV there is a confession of Jane's wherein she speaks of her pleasure in dissecting her own heart which echoes Brown's habit.

Some of Jane's letters are dated from the Banks of Delaware, a place which Brown loved and from which he wrote one of his letters. Jane's hopes for a farm there, not for farming but as a bucolic residence, we have found in others ~~of~~ Brown's works. (Letter LXI pictures Jane, with maps and charts ~~seem to~~ <sup>in</sup> follow Colden's voyage, as having studied geography, ~~for its own sake~~ as mentioning New York and Tobago and imagining Frederic crossing the mountains of Bohemia, and <sup>as</sup> ~~recounting~~ Miss Betterton's <sup>2</sup> ~~expressing~~ surprise at her study of Cook's voyages: all of which are <sup>they could be</sup> ~~to be taken to be~~ more a part of Brown's life than of Jane's. When we <sup>shall</sup> ~~consider~~ the year 1809 we find a remarkable result of <sup>intense</sup> ~~all~~ his love for geography.

1 David Lee Clark: C.B.E. (New York 1923) p.10 says she was christened Jane Elizabeth. / gives a chart of Cook's voyages as the last of 45 maps  
2 Carey's 1796 general atlas may be the one used ~~here~~ for curiously it



In Wieland, having written a story of the highest aims, religious bigotry, Brown in his last formal appearance before the public as a prose fiction writer gave his readers a story of the other extreme wherein religious discussion enters merely as an incidental detail. ~~to the plot.~~

Jane Talbot is probably the sort of a book to amuse youth in its sentimental stage though hardly to be recommended for its display and discussion of the relations of the sexes. Perhaps by it the younger generation of our day would learn to its surprise that some of its rodomontade may not be new.

As a step in the life work of Brown Jane Talbot was closely related to Clara Howard both in time of publication and in <sup>its</sup> ~~the~~ character ~~of~~ ~~the work.~~ There is in it no farewell to his readers and nothing to suggest ~~that~~ he was conscious it was to be the last of his stories to be issued by him in book form. While it is absurd to think Brown had exhausted his materials for fiction it is undoubted that the year 1801 saw him making his last appearance as a novelist. Henceforth we <sup>shall</sup> find him a professional man of letters, applying his genius to works which appeal to a different kind of reader than the "ladies" Davis found him laboring for in Jane Talbot.