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Prospectus of Geography

46

1891-1903

## PROSPECTUS OF GEOGRAPHY

1809

When ~~he~~ <sup>was</sup> a child Brown ~~had been~~ fascinated by maps and geographies. When he <sup>Came</sup> grew to ~~man's estate~~ he was unable to pass any favorable opportunity <sup>write</sup> ~~in his novels and romances~~ to <sup>use his knowledge</sup> ~~mention the same~~ <sup>of nations and places.</sup> <sup>1</sup> ~~interest.~~ In the Monthly Magazine, afterwards reprinted in the

<sup>2</sup> Literary Magazine, there was an article On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography, which <sup>him.</sup> we have ascribed <sup>from internal evidence</sup> to Brown.

Therefore it is not surprising to find him planning, <sup>in the last</sup> year of his life, the publication of a geography.

When <sup>it</sup> ~~the work~~ was written we do not know with certainty, but, that ~~magazine article on the subject when reprinted~~ in the Literary Magazine may, <sup>it</sup> ~~by its appearance,~~ fix the date ~~as~~ about December ~~of~~ 1806.

A note <sup>in</sup> ~~to page twenty one of~~ the memoir <sup>of</sup> in the 1827 Boston edition of Wieland speaks of <sup>the geography</sup> ~~this work~~ <sup>not</sup> as never yet having been published.

~~Later,~~ <sup>In</sup> the 1857, Philadelphia editions

~~and followed in the~~ 1887 and 1889 ~~Philadelphia editions~~ the note

1892

Was  
^  
was amended ~~so that it~~ reads thus:

"This able work was entirely completed at his decease, except the part relating to the United States. The full original manuscript is now in the possession of William Linn Brown, Esq., of this city, since perfected in the part relating to the United States, and at some early day will be presented to the public. 1 A gentleman, who was a native of Britain, and perfectly acquainted with the subject, and who had read the manuscript of the account of London contained in this work, declared it to be, beyond comparison, the best history of that city which he had ever seen."

From this ~~note~~ it appears ~~that~~ Brown had finished only the second volume which ~~according to the prospectus~~ was to be the geography of the eastern hemisphere, ~~and from the italics used in~~

<sup>suggest</sup>  
~~this note it would be inferred that~~ the first volume was ~~well~~  
<sup>it was</sup>  
under way but ~~not so much so that it was~~ any easy task for some

<sup>complete</sup>  
indefinite person to ~~perfect~~ it for publication, ~~at least~~ <sup>It appears</sup>  
~~publication was never made through~~ Brown's widow had signed the contract  
with C. and A. Conrad 13 June 1811. xx

~~Here it should be said that it appears that~~ The gentleman who  
<sup>apparently</sup>  
passed so favorable a comment on this work was ~~no less a person~~

~~than~~ the famous English publisher John Murray. In Griswold's

<sup>3</sup>  
Prose Writers of America we read:

"The late John Murray, of London, who once had the Ms. in his possession, was of opinion that if it had been finished and published, the great work of Malte-Brun would never have been translated."

<sup>For the</sup> the Boston ~~Wieland~~ 1827  
1 In ~~place of this whole sentence~~, memoir ~~had written~~ "It has never yet been published."  
<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia, n.d. (1870) p. 110. Griswold learned this from William Linn Brown, ~~Brown's son~~. The statement was repeated in Fort-nightly Review for 1878 by George Barnett Smith. ~~Brown's great-grandson had among his papers, a contract for its publication dated 13 June 1811 between C. & A. Conrad and Brown's widow.~~ (See D.L. xx, Clark: C.B.E. (New York 1923) p. 47.)

In this connection it is ~~rather a~~ remarkable ~~thing~~ that James G. Percival did that <sup>is</sup> ~~fine piece of work of editing and correcting~~ the Boston 1844 edition of <sup>x</sup>Matte-Brun. Whether he had access to Brown's manuscript is not known and though he readily acknowledges indebtedness to others, though he takes up the cudgels for the state of Pennsylvania (I, 603n.), notes an origin of the yellow fever (I, 145n), recalls a case of spontaneous combustion by alcohol (II.50ln) and cites Volney's View in the French edition (II, 167n, 213n) he makes no mention of Brown's work, ~~in that same field of literature.~~

x According to Inerand Supercherie Litteraires, Vol. I, p. 120 and 125 claims Matte Brun stole from many authors.

**A SYSTEM  
OF  
GENERAL GEOGRAPHY:**

CONTAINING  
A TOPOGRAPHICAL, STATISTICAL, AND DESCRIPTIVE

*Survey of the Earth.*

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,  
A HISTORY OF THE EARTH  
AS A PLANETARY BODY,  
OF THE  
SOLAR SYSTEM IN GENERAL,  
AND OF  
THE UNIVERSE.

IN TWO VOLUMES:

THE FIRST CONTAINING THE GEOGRAPHY OF AMERICA,  
THE SECOND CONTAINING THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE EASTERN  
HEMISPHERE.

WITH MAPS.

BY CHARLES B. BROWN.

(Illustration to be placed

to face page 1843)

~~Unfortunately the work was never finished by Brown and up to the~~  
<sup>Q</sup> ~~present~~ the manuscript, described as in a beautiful round handwriting,  
 has not been <sup>bound</sup> ~~seen~~ by us. <sup>so for the present be</sup> ~~Meanwhile~~ we have to content <sup>with</sup> ~~us~~ the prospectus  
~~which gives the plan of the work and which Brown issued in 1809.\*~~ There  
 are very few copies known and <sup>2</sup> ~~because~~ of its rarity we reprint it  
~~here in full. it reads:~~

"A System|of|General Geography:|containing|a topo-  
 graphical, statistical, and descriptive|Survey of the  
 earth,|to which is prefixed,|A history of the earth|  
 as a planetary body,|of the|solar system in general,|  
 and of|the universe.|In two volumes:|the first contain-  
 ing the geography of America,|the second containing  
 the geography of the eastern,|hemisphere.|with maps.|  
 by Charles B. Brown.3

#### PROSPECTUS

ONE who proposes to present to the world a new system of geography may reasonably be asked, if the world be not already in possession of a sufficient number of such works. To this it may be answered, that an addition to their number can produce no inconvenience, since the works already extant on this subject, will not be necessarily superceded or excluded from the library or closet by a new publication; and that some positive advantage will arise from multiplying the objects of our choice. The more candidates there are for public favor, the more beneficial is the choice that may be made among them.

~~1 The British Museum copy is dated doubtfully 1809. The Select Reviews and Spirit of Foreign Magazines for January 1809 contained a notice of the prospective work. With a slight unimportant change the notice follows the prospectus.~~

Geographical systems are, in general, collections of miscellaneous knowledge, in which that particular branch of information will predominate, in which the writer is most conversant, or to which he is most addicted. As he thinks himself authorised to consider man under all the various aspects which his political and social condition, his history, language, literature, religion, dress, diet, and customs present him to view; to describe the earth as the receptacle of metals and minerals, of plants, birds, and fishes, as well as of mankind and the works of mankind; and as no human being is greatly or equally qualified to discuss all these subjects, works of this kind will always contain an over-proportion of one of these ingredients, not only in quantity but in value; and as readers are as much diversified in taste and knowledge as writers, one work will gratify the curiosity of some readers, and another work be best adapted to others. Every writer may therefore expect to be useful in a degree or manner different from any of his predecessors, and to receive his due portion of the harvest of popular approbation.

To the success of this claim, however, it is necessary that he should give the world something new. He who merely brings into one string a number of extracts and quotations from voyages and travels, has his merit and his usefulness, since he saves his reader the trouble and expense of examining the originals himself. He who merely repeats or translates the words of former compilers, though a sort of literary felon if he denies or disclaims the theft, may yet claim the intrinsic usefulness of the works he merely republishes. But this species of merit is not sufficient to recommend any work to judicious readers. At any rate, the book is far more meritorious which adds to the heap of existing knowledge. Even if this addition be of no great value in itself, something is gained on the score of its novelty and originality.

The writer who now offers himself to public notice feels the ardour of his undertaking in the most lively manner. That he shall perform his task, with the skill it deserves, he may be forgiven for doubting; but he finds no difficulty in assuring the public, that what they will receive from his pen will be entirely his own. Facts, indeed, compose the substratum of every system, and in the importance and genuineness of its facts much of the value of a work like the present will consist; but in the selection of these facts, in the connection in which they are placed, and the observations to which they have given rise, the public will find the result of deeper inquiries and more elaborate reflection in the work now offered them, than in any hitherto published on the same subject. The vanity which arrogates this praise is in reality much smaller than most readers may at first imagine. Systems of geography have hitherto been little more than medleys



of chronological abstracts, historical epitomes, samples of language, lists of great cities and great men, and meagre details of forms of government. Their usefulness is not small, even with all their imperfections; but whatever benefit arises from skill to select materials, taste to embellish them, and judgment to draw instruction from them, has hitherto, in general, been flagrantly wanting.

From this sentence it is just, however, to except a writer of our own country. Dr. Morse, whose labours have supplied an indispensable demand of American curiosity. He has fulfilled the first and most reasonable expectation of his countrymen, in giving them that knowledge of their country which they would seek in vain in any foreign publication. This end he has accomplished with diligence, candour, and judgment, highly honorable to his name.

With respect to a still later compiler on this subject, Pinkerton, the same praise is by no means due to him. He is, however, far superior to his British predecessors, inasmuch as he omits a score of trifling and ridiculous details, with which their volumes are burthened. The chasm, occasioned by these omissions, he has chiefly filled by sketches of mineralogy, botany, and zoology, which are highly interesting to a numerous class of readers, and which are liable to no objection but that of occupying the place of subjects interesting and instructive to a class of readers still more numerous.

The views of the writer who now claims the public attention can scarcely be expected to coincide exactly with those of any of his predecessors. What merit they possess will best be seen by an impartial explanation of them.

Geography is commonly and vaguely defined to be "a description of the earth." The points of view in which the earth we inhabit presents itself to our observation are extremely various. If it be viewed collectively, as a great mass of matter, having certain motions, and obtaining light and heat, dryness and moisture, in portions and degrees, arising from these motions, and from its local relation to other distant masses of matter, we may be said to describe the earth, and therefore to discuss a necessary branch at least of geography. Geography will likewise confer her name upon our labours, if we consider the earth as composed of solid inert masses, of different colours, densities, gravities, and chemical properties. In like manner, if we describe the various ranks of organized beings, from man to moss, we describe the earth, and may therefore be considered as geographers. If we view the surface of the earth, as divided horizontally into land and water, and vertically into hill, valley, and plain, and exhibit the respective dimensions of length, breadth, and height of all the great features of land and water, we are geographers. If we consider man in his social, political,

or physical condition, and the surface and products of the earth in relation to the works and subsistence of men; as divided among nations; as checkered by cities, villages, and fields; as ploughed, or pastured, or resigned to the reign of nature, we are still geographers. Thus the objects and views peculiar to each of the arts and sciences, inasmuch as they are branches of a description of the earth, may be comprehended under the appellation of geography, and accordingly all writers of general geography have thought it incumbent upon them to introduce discussions and statements, which, on other occasions, are the province of the astronomer, the historian, the political economist, the lawyer, the botanist, the zoologist, the chemist, the philologist, the orator, and the moralist. These statements are necessarily brief, in proportion as the scene described is large and the book small; and though these subjects may be touched with great force and usefulness, as well as with much brevity, yet, in general, from the limited faculties of individuals, these surveys are unsatisfactory and superficial. One branch of the subject may be skillfully handled, while the rest, being foreign to the compiler's favourite pursuits, are neglected. Thus, in Mr. Pinkerton's book, while we have copious botanical details, every other branch of the subject, and especially that connected with statistical science and political economy, is executed in the most inaccurate and negligent manner.<sup>1</sup>

A description of the surface of the earth, first, physically, as divided into land and water, hill, plain, and valley, with the influence of local circumstances on the climate and soil; secondly, politically, as divided among tribes and nations, seems to come more strictly under the proper definition of geography than any other view of the subject. This, therefore, is an essential part of a geographical work, but has generally been more cursorily and inaccurately treated than any other. It is capable of being established with many pleasing and useful illustrations. It is the ground work of all knowledge that deserves the name of geographical, and, therefore, on the double account of its utility and novelty, the present work will pay particular regard to this subject.<sup>2</sup>

When the surface of the earth is delineated as fully as the materials in our possession admit, we may make excursions, in almost any direction, over the world and nature. In these excursions, however, the present writer will confine his views entirely to that relation in which soils, minerals, plants, and the lower animals bear

<sup>1</sup> End of page 4.

<sup>2</sup> Brown's note reads: "Of topographical description, the best model with which I am acquainted is the 'England Delineated,' by Dr. Aikin. Of statistical description, the best specimens are to be found in Sir John Sinclair's 'Statistical Account of Scotland.' From the last of these sources I have endeavoured to imbibe the true geographical spirit, though I hope it will be breathed in a style somewhat more attractive and popular, and accompanied with a taste rather more philosophical, than animates most of the pieces in that collection." End of page 4.

to the wellbeing and subsistence of men. With respect to mankind immediately, his inquiries will almost entirely resolve themselves into what may be called statistical. The population of every nation, as far as the best authorities go, will be ascertained; the variation in its population at different periods; the distribution of the people into classes and professions, their religious institutions; their general accommodations as to diet, clothing, and habitations; in the last of which will be considered the number, size, distribution, internal economy, and accommodation of their towns and cities; their modes of government, education, and agriculture; and, in fine, all those particulars, which fix the station of any people among civilized nations, will be drawn into such concise, comprehensive, and instructive views, as the judgment and industry of the writer put into his power.

Every reader must be aware that the merit of such a work will wholly lie in the skill with which it is executed. The writer, therefore, can say nothing which would avail to produce in his readers a favourable opinion of his qualifications for this work. He cannot appeal to former productions, because he has published nothing of which the plan is similar to that of his present undertaking. There is one claim to attention, however, which he may safely urge. There is no branch of knowledge in which the progress of new discoveries is more rapid and important than in geography. Every day new regions are explored; countries hitherto familiar to us are traversed by more candid and sagacious observers; the errors of former travellers are detected; new views are opened to us. The lapse of a single year is sufficient to make the most important additions to our knowledge, and to render existing geographical works in some measure obsolete.

This fact, true at all times, was never so remarkably true as at the present era. Human curiosity was never before more active, more sagacious, directed by wiser maxims, and to more valuable objects. That curtain which conceals half of the world from the other half is continually lifted higher and higher, and wider as well as more accurate views are continually breaking in upon us. This is true even of Europe, which is traversed by a constant succession of book-making travellers, more and more exact and enlightened. It is more remarkably true of Africa and Asia, but the truth is still more memorable in relation to America. That veil which political jealousy has for centuries drawn over the southern portion of our continent has been nearly rent away in the present age, and the passing year has produced so much curious and authentic information, as alone to render indispensable a new geographical work. With respect to North America, the daily and rapid progress of this portion of the world, in population and riches, continually calls for new pictures. No

writer can hope to keep pace with this progress, and the most perfect work will be essentially defective by the lapse of a very few years. Our cultivation extends, our towns enlarge, our political institutions and divisions vary and multiply from year to year, and the latest compilation will thus have no small title to regard and authority, merely because it is the latest.

Every geographical writer justly regards the description of his own country as of chief importance, and devotes to this subject a larger proportion of his work, than its importance, when viewed abstractly and in relation to the extent and population of other states, may seem to justify. This circumstance, together with the innacuracy of their information respecting America, has lessened the value of every European publication. Every American work of this kind has paid due attention to this circumstance, and given more ample details respecting 1 our own than other states, for the same reason which induces the French or English compiler to enlarge beyond its relative proportion his account of his own country. We shall not fail to imitate so laudable an example, and shall therefore devote one volume, or the greater part of it, to America in general, and particularly to the United States.

It is usual to introduce works of this kind by a treatise on astronomy, in which the processes and operations for determining the figure, dimensions, and motions of the globe of earth, and for explaining the appearances in the heavens, are unfolded, with the proper accompaniments of tables and diagrams. The sciences of geometry and algebra, in their application to these objects, form the basis of these treatises. Essays of this kind are reducible, like most other modes of learning, within the terms of a description of the earth, and their presence, therefore, is not wholly incongruous with the common topics of a system of geography. If a writer confine his work to moderate limits, however, it will be necessary to sacrifice some of these branches for the sake of the stock. The history and condition of human society are themes sufficiently important and extensive to demand much larger space than is commonly allowed them on such occasions. We shall therefore bring all preliminary matter of this sort within a narrow compass, and shall partly or entirely omit what is strictly technical or geometrical.

There is, nevertheless, a point of view in which the globe of earth considered as a member of a system, and the universe at large, has never been satisfactorily exhibited. All due attention has hitherto been paid to the means by which the real state of this globe, relatively to other globes, and of the other globes themselves, has been ascertained; but the results of these discoveries or processes, the facts which compose the history of the heavenly bodies, have never been explained and illustrated, in a popular and instructive manner. These facts

are generally reduced to the fewest possible heads, and arranged in meagre, uninviting tables, while all those illustrations, analogies, and inferences which tend to enlarge, enforce, and vivify our conceptions of the universe, are omitted. 1 This chasm deserves at length to be filled, and we have endeavoured, in this work, to exhibit the discoveries of modern astronomers, divested of all technical forms, and, as much as possible, of all technical language. 2 We have endeavoured to familiarize to the imagination, as well as to explain to the judgment, all the important facts in the history of the earth, as a planetary body, and of the other heavenly bodies. By full details and copious illustrations, we have endeavoured to put into the power, even of the unlearned, a great number of facts recently discovered, and which still lay hid under a heap of geometry or algebra, in the works of learned societies or in foreign languages.

We have entered largely into the structure of the universe, its duration, distribution, and revolutions, and have followed to their practical conclusions all those lights afforded by the discoveries of Herschell and the calculations of La Place. Views of this kind, if regulated by sound knowledge, are qualified to enlarge and sublime the understanding more than any other, and to render them familiar requires very copious details and liberal illustrations. In this respect, the work now proposed to the public may at least claim the praise of absolute novelty, and the author would fain persuade himself, that what is new in his performance is like(-)wise in a high degree interesting and important.

Among those preliminary views which are properly admitted into works of this nature, we have bestowed the greatest attention on those circumstances which influence the numbers and social happiness of mankind. Under this head, the new views respecting this subject, which have been given to the world by Malthus, Colquhoun, and other late writers, have been carefully abstracted, and given with such modifications as truth and reason require.

It is usual to insert, in geographical works, a series of maps, which are properly considered as necessary illustrations of every written description of the earth. We have considered this branch of our work of so much importance, and the want of a complete series of maps as so urgent, that it is designed to follow the

1 Brown's note reads: "This is the case in more than twenty works on physical astronomy, from Pemberton to Bonnycastle, though intended for popular use, with which the writer is acquainted. It is remarkable that the earliest expositors of Newton's system are more copious, perspicuous, and intelligible than the latest." ~~End of page 7.~~

2 End of page 7.

publication of the present work with that of a complete and copious atlas, on an ample scale. A series of maps, on a large folio size, will be given with all the expedition which the arduous nature of such a work will allow. In order to render them more useful, and to make the present publication as complete as possible, the maps will be accompanied with sheets of letter press, one or more to each map, according to the importance of the subject and the abundance of materials, in which all topographical, political, and statistical facts, connected with the subject of the maps, and reducible to a tabular or graphical form, will be inserted. This plan has never yet been executed in the English language,<sup>2</sup> and it is presumed will be deemed of particular advantage in the instruction of youth, as well as a valuable addition to every library. Meanwhile, that the present work may not be defective on this head, even taken separately from the atlas, we design to insert four or five maps, of a suitable size, and exhibiting the larger geographical divisions of the earth. These will be drawn and executed with the utmost care, and by the best artists.

#### CONDITIONS.

I. The work will be printed on fine royal wove paper, with a new type, cast for the purpose, in two volumes octavo, of at least six hundred pages each, and will be accompanied with five maps.

II. The price to subscribers will be seven dollars fifty cents, neatly bound and lettered; to non-subscribers the price will be advanced to nine dollars.

III. Those persons who procure ten copies, and become accountable for the payment, shall be entitled to an eleventh gratis.

Subscriptions received by C. and A. Conrad and Co., Philadelphia; Conrad, Lucas, and Co., Baltimore; Somervell and Conrad, Petersburg; Bonsal, Conrad, and Co., Norfolk; and by William G. Oliver.

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		3

As a plan for so great a work as a general geography ~~this one~~  
~~of~~ Brown's is noteworthy. Had his promises been fulfilled ~~the geo-~~ <sup>x</sup>

1 End of page 8.

2 Brown's note which precedes the conditions reads: "A very great work of this kind, by Le Sage, entitled, Atlas Historique, Chronologique, Geographique, &c., has lately appeared at Paris. The details of this work form a very suitable model for the undertaking mentioned in the text, though they require much correction in relation to every country but France."

3 End of page 9. Page 10 is blank.

~~graphy among all its competitors~~ could not have failed to have attracted <sup>||</sup> attention. It was to be no common compilation but an original work, ~~of remarkable breadth. Brown was not afraid to challenge comparison with the giants.~~

His equipment for ~~such a work~~ <sup>it</sup> was all the public could desire. He had had more than the usual training by his twenty-six years of love for the subject. His interest in population and its importance to geography especially in the United States ~~has been already~~ <sup>was</sup> shown by the article which with an introduction signed with his full initials, he sent to the Weekly Magazine. <sup>1</sup> Another side ~~of the subject~~ he was particularly fitted to accomplish was in the accounts of soil and climate such as he had studied for his translation of Volney. The astronomical side which he promises to treat fully is a surprise for hitherto we have not found any instances of an extended use of the subject. His love for maps was to be given full scope in a third volume devoted to them as well

<sup>to</sup> as ~~giving~~ <sup>g</sup> the usual number in the other volumes.  
<sup>h</sup>



The sources ~~designated~~ comprise one of the most admirable details of the plan. He was going to the best models for the best details of structure. Surely no one could do better. The real spirit of geography he says he had found in Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland a monumental work of no less than twenty-one volumes published at Edinburgh 1791-99.

Brown's ambition here was on the highest plane and it is probable ~~that~~ he would have attained ~~by far~~ the greater part of it. His life long love for miscellaneous knowledge was <sup>also</sup> to have here found its natural outlet. He was not to follow the general practise <sup>and</sup> ~~of the commoner sort~~ his claim to excellence was based on a long familiarity with all sides of the subject, ~~and there was~~ Probably no one of his day ~~who~~ was better fitted to judge the value of the materials he <sup>would</sup> ~~was to~~ use. ~~In that detail the work is~~ <sup>claim</sup> new in Brown's literary life, he never before having made such pretensions, ~~claims~~. That Murray found one part excellent is after all not to be wondered at, and with a study of this prospectus suggests to us the loss we have suffered in the disappearance of the manuscript, ~~and the probable failure of its publication.~~



Whatever became of ~~the manuscript~~<sup>it</sup> we do not know. The statement about its being perfected means ~~that~~ it had been attempted by Paul Allen<sup>1</sup> employed by Brown's widow. Probably Allen never did it; but whether he did or not it mysteriously disappeared. Perhaps it was found by some one interested in works of this character and perhaps it was revised and published as the work of some other person. Such things, reprehensible though they may be, are not unknown in literary annals. Some day some one versed in the subject may turn his attention to ~~all~~ the geographices published after 1827 and by the process of eliminating those actually known arrive at the discovery of Brown's lost work. The prospectus will then be of ~~in~~valuable assistance in identification.

1 See D.L.Clark: C.B.B. (New York 1923) p.47.