

William Ray and
Sophia; or, The Girl of the
Pine Woods

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A DOUBLE DOSE of bibliographical serendipity has occurred with the discovery of the hitherto-unknown first edition of an early American novel and, simultaneously, the beginning of a trail of clues leading to the identity of the author of that work. Materials are now at hand to provide a more complete history of which the entry under 2479 in Lyle H. Wright's *American Fiction, 1774-1850* (San Marino, 1948) is but the last chapter.

During the summer of 1966, the American Antiquarian Society obtained from Seven Gables Bookshop an uncut and unbound (although sewn, and apparently prepared to be bound) volume with the following title-page:

SOPHIA; |OR, |The Girl of the Pine Woods: |A TALE, |
FOUNDED PRINCIPALLY ON FACT. |[thick rule and thin
rule] |BY WALTER WALPOLE, ESQ. |[thin rule and thick
rule] |To high-strained language making no pretence, |He sticks
to common words, and common sense. |[two rules] |TO WHICH
ARE ADDED, A FEW |SELECT POEMS, |BY WILLIAM
RAY. |[rule] |GENEVA, N.Y. |PRINTED BY H. LEAVEN-
WORTH. |1823.

The collation of the volume is; A⁸ A4² B⁸ C⁸ C4² D⁸ E⁸ E4² G⁸ (this, the only recorded copy, lacks G7 and G8). Although the last complete leaf preserved is G6 (pp. 119-120), small rem-

nants of leaves G7 and G8, which have been torn away, can be observed. G7 must have been used for the conclusion of 'Village Greatness,' which begins on G6^v, but whether there were any further poems in the volume cannot be determined. This copy has a gathering of four blank leaves before the start of the printed gatherings. The verso of the title (A1) is blank. A2 bears a short preface; verso, blank. *Sophia* occupies A3-F7 (pp. [5], 6-150); F7 verso, blank. F8 (verso blank) bears the section-title, 'Select Poems.' G1-G6 contain Ray's poems; 'The Onondaga Indian Chief,' 'Trouble and Consolation. The Man of Years,' 'The Plough Boy,' and the opening of 'Village Greatness.'

William Ray, 1771-1826, was born in Salisbury, Connecticut. After spending some years as a schoolteacher at Dover, Dutchess County, New York, he established a mercantile business which failed in 1792. Offered an editorship in Philadelphia in 1803, he apparently traveled thither, since he later entered the naval service there on the frigate *Philadelphia*, which was destined to be captured by the Barbary pirates. In *The Horrors of Slavery* (1808, see Sabin 68035) and in the autobiographical notices in his volumes of poetry, Ray described his imprisonment in Tripoli. On his return to the United States, he again tried his hand in a mercantile business from 1809 to 1812 and was a druggist at Skaneateles, New York, from 1814 to 1816. He edited the Elizabethtown, New York, *Reveille* in 1812 and the Onondaga Court House *Gazette* in 1816. From 1816 to 1821, he was major militia brigade quartermaster at Onondaga. In 1822 he moved to Geneva, where he set up *The Miscellaneous Register*. He is the author of *Poems, On Various Subjects, Religious, Moral, Sentimental and Humorous* (Auburn, [N.Y.]: Printed by U. F. Doubleday, 1821) and *Poems* (New York: Printed and Published for the Author, 1826). Ray died in 1826.¹

¹For biographical information on Ray, see Evert A. and George L. Duyckinck, *The Cyclopaedia of American Literature from the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1875), 1, 633, and Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer in New York State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 293.

To return to the 1823 *Sophia*. The juxtaposition of the 'Select Poems' by William Ray with *Sophia* by the apparently pseudonymous Walter Walpole, first suggested the hypothesis that the poet was also the author of the tale. Since Ray's 'Select Poems' stand at the end of the newly discovered edition of *Sophia*, an examination of the several poems which are a part of the text of the novel itself against the two volumes of Ray's *Poems* seemed appropriate. This examination revealed that two long poems which form a part of the novel (see pp. 38-40 and 59-60) are openly acknowledged as Ray's by their being included in his *Poems* (1826). The first, 'Dark is the world—my sun gone down—,' was reprinted in the 1826 volume under the title, 'Affliction' on pages 186-188; the second, 'How soon in darkness, light may rise,' as 'Mind' on pages 180-182. The fact that neither of these poems had appeared in the Auburn (1821) edition of the *Poems*, the fact that both are integral parts of the story in which they appear, and the fact that they both were acknowledged as Ray's in the New York (1826) *Poems* together provide strong evidence for attributing *Sophia* to William Ray. It is of incidental interest that Ray was seen to use another alliterative pseudonym, Gravity Greybeard, Esq., in the heading to 'A New Song' (*Poems*, p. 164). Various threads of evidence lead, therefore, toward the verification of the hypothesis that Ray was indeed the author of the tale.

Thus encouraged, I turned to the short preface (p.[3]) in the 1823 *Sophia*, which states that the contents of 'the following little volume . . . [were] . . . originally published in the Miscellaneous Register . . .'. An examination of the first volume of this short-lived periodical provides still further evidence in support of the attribution of *Sophia* to William Ray.

In July of 1822, Ray founded *The Miscellaneous Register*, a weekly devoted to the edification of its readers along rather pious lines.² The original masthead includes the statement,

²For *The Miscellaneous Register*, I have used a microfilm of the file of Vol. I in the New-York Historical Society. The complete run is July 20, 1822 to December 13, 1823.

'Geneva, (N.Y.) Published by William Ray.' Volume I, Number 1 is dated July 20, 1822, and the colophon of this issue reads, 'Printed at the Palladium Office, by S. P. Hull.' A careful look at the first few issues leads one to the conclusion that the vast majority of the original material appearing in the *Register* was Ray's own work. Through the fifteenth number, Ray continued to be listed as publisher and Hull as printer. With the sixteenth number, issued on Saturday, November 2, 1822, the fact that Ray was the determining force behind the contents of the periodical is openly admitted. In that issue, the masthead contains the notice, 'William Ray, Editor,' and the colophon indicates a change in printer, 'Geneva, Ontario Co, N.Y. Published by Ray and Leavenworth. H. Leavenworth, Printer.'³ This very issue contains the first installment of what is surely the original appearance of *Sophia*.

From Volume I, Number 16 (November 2, 1822) to Volume I, Number 26 (January 18, 1823), each weekly number of *The Miscellaneous Register* contains a portion of *Sophia*, each of the eleven installments being designated as chapters.⁴ There is no editorial comment in connection with the introduction of *Sophia* to the pages of the *Register*, but the following paragraphs occur in the editorial column for January 18, 1823, the issue containing the last chapter of the tale.

Sophia.—As the story of *Sophia* is now concluded, we request those Editors who have copied it into their papers, without giving credit to the *Miscellaneous Register*, to do us the justice which custom demands, by noticing it at the end, if not before.

The tale is original, and was written by a person in this village, on purpose for the *Miscellaneous Register*. We possess the copy-right, and as the story has excited considerable interest, we contemplate giving it to the public in a neat little volume, revised by the author.

³Information on Hiram Leavenworth (1797-1857) can be found in Hamilton, *The Country Printer*, pp. 112, 182, 195, and 282.

⁴There was no issue of *The Miscellaneous Register* for December 14, 1822. See the explanatory editorial in the issue of December 21.

No attempt has been made to locate any of these 'pirated' periodical reprintings of *Sophia* from the *Register*; it is obvious from Ray's statement that these appearances contain no fresh textual authority and stand as derivative texts. It is interesting to note in passing that this editorial notice implies that the reprinting of original fiction from periodical to periodical was a more or less normal practice, 'custom demanding' simply suitable acknowledgement.

One periodical appearance of *Sophia*, too late in date to be one of the reprintings to which Ray was referring in this January 18th editorial paragraph, is worthy of note.⁵ In the February, 1823 (Vol. II, No. 5) issue of *The American Masonic Register*,⁶ Chapter I of *Sophia* is printed (pp. 188–190), with the acknowledgement, 'From the Miscellaneous Register.' The March issue (II:6) contains on pages 234–237 Chapters II and III, straightforward reprintings of the *Register* text.⁷ With pages 241–244 of that same March issue, there is a sudden break in the standard two-column format of the *Masonic Register*, and *Sophia* and that issue of the journal are abruptly concluded in the space of four pages. Chapters IV–XI of the novel are radically condensed to fit this space. In some places, action and description are summarized by an anonymous editorial hand; in other places, the original text is presented in a drastically cut form. The impending demise of the *Masonic Register* (the March issue was the next to last) invites us to adopt the hypothesis that the editor of that journal, Luther Pratt, was tying up loose ends in anticipation of the end of his journal. In any event and whatever the reasons are that lie behind the truncated text presented in the *Masonic Register*,

⁵I am indebted to Mr. William H. Runge of the University of Virginia's Alderman Library for calling this printing of *Sophia* to my attention and supplying me with xeroxes of the UVa copy.

⁶The full title of the *Masonic Register* reads: *The American Masonic Register, and Ladies' & Gentlemen's Magazine: On Subjects Masonic, Literary, Political, Geographical, Agricultural, Religious, and Moral. Original and Selected*. Edited by Luther Pratt. The complete run is Vol. I, No. 1 (September, 1820) to Vol. II, No. 7 (June, 1823).

⁷The possibility also exists that the *Masonic Register* picked up *Sophia* from one of the periodicals which had in turn taken it from *The Miscellaneous Register*.

the warning is here issued that the text of *Sophia* presented there is highly unreliable and far from being an adequate version of Ray's novel.

In the January 18th editorial in *The Miscellaneous Register* given above, Ray had stated his intention to re-issue *Sophia*, 'giving it to the public in a neat little volume, revised by the author.' In the issue of the *Register* for June 28, 1823, the following advertisement appeared:

SOPHIA; or, The Girl of the Pine Woods, An Original Tale. Is now in the Press of Ray & Leavenworth, Geneva, N.Y., and will be published and for sale at the Register Office, on the fourth of July next.—Price 3s.

The three subsequent issues of the *Register*, those for July 5, 12, and 19, all contain the following notice:

Just published, and for sale at this office; *Sophia*; or, The Girl of the Pine Woods. An Original Tale.

The newly discovered 1823 *Sophia*, which has been acquired by AAS, is the first edition of the tale, the edition first contemplated at the time the serial publication in the *Register* was completed in January, first announced for publication on June 28th, and officially published on July 4, 1823.

The physical description of the 1823 *Sophia* has been given above, but the results of an examination of the text of this little volume are still to be reported. The crucial matter in this respect is the nature and extent of the authorial revisions promised in the January editorial. The most obvious difference between the two texts lies in the presence of short passages of poetry, obviously original and especially written for this novel, at the beginning of each chapter. With one notable exception (see below), none of this poetry had appeared in the *Register* version. I am not referring here to the poetry which appears internally, as a part of the running text of the novel, more especially not to the two poems which serve as the

strongest evidence for attributing the novel to Ray. These poems appear in both texts. The one exception to the rule that the poetical chapter headings are new is the four-stanza poem, 'That good from evil oft may spring,' which had appeared at the end of Chapter X in the January 11th installment of the *Register* text. In the separate printing, this poem is moved up to the head of Chapter X and serves as the poetical selection for the heading of that chapter. Apart from the addition of the epigraphic poems introducing each chapter, there are no signs that the announced revision was accomplished. Spot collation of sample passages in the two texts reveals no evidence of authorial revision. The usual grabbag of changed spellings, typographical slips, and so on occur, but these changes are not indicative of revision, only of the normal process of resetting. The most significant of these changes is the reparagraphing of some dialogue, notably that at the very opening of the novel, which had been run together in the periodical version. The newly discovered first edition, therefore, contains new poetical chapter headings and some tinkering with the accidentals of the text, but depends directly on *The Miscellaneous Register* for its primary textual authority.

A note after Lyle Wright's entry 2479 reports the existence of an 1834 edition of *Sophia*. A transcription of the title-page of this edition follows:

SOPHIA, |OR THE |GIRL OF THE PINE WOODS; |AND
THE |GOLDEN EAGLE. |[rule] |PATERSON, N.J. |PUB-
LISHED BY DAVID BURNETT. |[short rule] |1834.

The volume collates: $\pi 1$ [A]⁸ B-F⁸. $\pi 1$ is a woodcut frontispiece facing the title-page; this woodcut illustrates the opening scene of the novel. A1 is the title-page; verso, blank. The text of *Sophia* appears on A2-E1^v (pp. [3], 4-66). E2 is a section title for *The Golden Eagle*; verso, blank. The text of *The Golden Eagle* appears on E3-F7^v (pp. [69], 70-94). F8 (pp. [95], 96) bears a fifty-one-line poem, 'The American Eagle.'

An examination of the text of this 1834 *Sophia* reveals the interesting fact that this text derives from *The Miscellaneous Register* (possibly, of course, by way of an intermediate periodical printing) and not from the 1823 first edition. Like *The Miscellaneous Register* text and unlike the 1823 separate, there are no poetical chapter headings in the 1834 edition. The dialogue at the opening of the tale is run together into one long paragraph in the 1834 text, unlike the distinctive paragraphing in the 1823 separate, but like the *Register* text. The poem, 'That good from evil oft may spring,' occurs at the end of Chapter X as it did in the *Register* text, not at the start of that chapter as in the separate. The Paterson, N.J., 1834 text, therefore, stands in a collateral, not derivative, relationship to the 1823 separate. Both derive independently from the original periodical text. I have not discovered anything about the other tale in this volume, *The Golden Eagle*, nor about the poem, 'The American Eagle.' *The Golden Eagle* which appears here is not to be confused with the Sylvanus Cobb work of the same title (see Wright, I, 556-557). Copies of the Paterson, N.J., 1834 edition of *Sophia* are to be found at Princeton, Yale, and the University of Virginia.⁸

A third, 1838, edition, that listed by Wright as entry 2479, is the final printing of *Sophia* known to me. A transcription of the title-page of this edition follows:

SOPHIA |OR THE |GIRL OF THE PINE WOODS. |[short rule]
|TO WHICH IS ADDED |LAFITTE, |OR |THE BARRA-
TARIAN CHIEF: |AN AMERICAN TALE. |[short thick rule
and thin rule] |DANSVILLE, N. Y. |PUBLISHED BY A. STE-
VENS. |[short rule] |1838.

The volume⁹ collates: [1-2]¹⁶ [3-9]⁸. [1]₁ is the title; verso, blank. The text of *Sophia* occupies [1]₂-[3]₄ (pp. [3] 4-72).

⁸I have worked from xeroxes of the Princeton copy (Ex3600.001.866s).

⁹The collation given here is inferred from microfilm of the Huntington copy (HEH 186829). The volume contains an eccentric set of signatures: Leaves 2-8 of the first gathering are signed 2-8; leaves 1-8 of the second gathering are signed 9-16; the first leaves of gatherings 3-9 are signed 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23 respectively.

[3]₆ is a section-title for *Lafitte*; verso, blank. The text of *Lafitte* occupies [3]₆-[9]₇ (pp. [75] 76-174). [9]₈ is a blank. Oddly enough, the text of the 1838 *Sophia* is also found to derive from that in *The Miscellaneous Register*. All three of the characteristics found to link the 1834 Paterson edition with the original periodical appearance are also present in the 1838 Dansville edition. No evidence has been found to link the 1838 text with a specific periodical version or, the other possibility, the 1834 text.¹⁰ *Lafitte, or, The Barratarian Chief*, the tale accompanying *Sophia* in the 1838 edition, has its own complex history. Originally appearing in the Auburn, New York, *Free Press*, it had at least one periodical reprinting (1825), and Wright records five other book editions between 1826 and 1834 in addition to the 1838 version. It has even been suggested that William Ray just may be the author of *Lafitte*, but that is another story.¹¹ Copies of the 1838 *Sophia* are to be found at the American Antiquarian Society, Harvard, Huntington, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.

The history of the transmission of the text of *Sophia* strikes this writer as being most unusual. Given various periodical serializations in 1822-23, a separate edition of 1823, and subsequent editions in 1834 and 1838, one immediately expects that the 1834 and 1838 texts will derive from the 1823 separate. In fact, however, neither the 1834 nor the 1838 version includes the 1823 separate in its ancestry. What are the implications of the strange family tree of the *Sophia* text? First, if the 1823 separate had included significant authorial revision (and the January, 1823, editorial notice in *The Miscellaneous Register* implied that it would), that revised text would now exist only in the single recorded copy of the 1823 separate. Second, the verse which appears at the beginning of the various

¹⁰A complete collation of all of the various texts might produce an array of variants which could pinpoint the source of the 1838 text. Such a collation has not been performed.

¹¹Mr. Marcus A. McCorison first suggested this hunch to me, based on the fact that *Lafitte* apparently first appeared in an Auburn newspaper.

chapters of the 1823 separate edition is, in fact, preserved only through the single recorded copy of that edition. If the ideal text of a literary work is to be a conflation of the accidentals of that printing which is closest in its accidentals to the author's manuscript, with the substantive changes, additions, and/or deletions which were incorporated by the author in later printings, the ideal text of *Sophia* will consist of *The Miscellaneous Register* text with the addition of the verse which appears at the beginning of each chapter in the 1823 separate. This poetical material which has come to light with the discovery of the 1823 separate is a part of the author's final intentions for the text of *Sophia* and must be included in any thoroughgoing consideration of the novel.

When the American Antiquarian Society acquired the modest 'neat little volume' which is the 1823 *Sophia*, it not only obtained the only recorded copy of the true first edition of *Sophia; or, The Girl of the Pine Woods* and the first clue which led to attributing that novel to William Ray, but also the volume which prompted this examination of the history of the novel. If *Sophia* is at all characteristic of its fellows, early American fiction is still a bibliographical iceberg—a vast majority of the extant evidence is still below the surface.

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