

# THE EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN.

## OUR CHARLESTOWN CORRESPONDENCE.

CHARLESTOWN, VA., Dec. 2, 1859.

*Brown's Progress from the Prison to the Grave—His Farewell Visits to the Other Prisoners—Conversation by the Way—His Last Words—His Death—Removal of the Body—Medical Doubts as to Life being Extinct—Appearance After Death—Body Delivered to his Widow—The Residents of Charlestown—Psalm Singing in Jail—Tampering with the Mails, &c., &c.*

### CHARLESTOWN THE MORNING BEFORE THE EXECUTION.

All this beautiful morning, ever since daybreak, the troops have been parading, marching and mounting guard, and the mounted rangers have been galloping up and down the streets as if an invading army were within a few miles distance. Indeed, nothing is wanted to complete the picture of war, except the bringing in of the dead and wounded, of which, remarkably enough, there are yet none. Breakfast is over—some of the troops have prepared that meal at their camp fires in the church yards, and the rest have got it as they could in the cavernaries of this beleaguered town. The hour of eight has arrived, and now the army of occupation is forming in companies. In front and at the eastern side of the jail are two twelve pound brass howitzers, belonging to the Petersburg artillery. Another piece of like calibre is stationed on the road leading to the field of execution. That company, with white feathers in their three cornered hats, and with antiquely cut coats, yellow buff breeches and Hessian boots, is the Winchester Continentals. Notwithstanding that they have been on service for the last six weeks, their uniforms look bright and their arms well polished. The Young Guard, of Richmond, Capt. Rady, are resting on their arms, in the street facing the jail. The Petersburg Greys, Capt. Scott, occupy a position in the Court House yard; and the German Rifles, of Richmond, are drawn up in line in front of the Carter House. Company F, of Richmond, is stationed higher up the street, and a troop of cavalry, mostly in civilians' dress, and armed with a carbine rifle and sword bayonet, are on the south side of the jail. This company, with red shirts, white cross belts, and glazed caps, which is marching up toward the field with two brass howitzers, is the Virginia Cadets, from the Lexington Military Institute. They are all youths, but their soldierly bearing and handsome appearance elicit general admiration. Among them marches old Edmund Ruffin, with white locks streaming behind him. In every direction the scouts, who have now got red shirts, as part of their uniform, are riding in hot haste. Generals and colonels and staff officers enough for the whole French army are displaying their epaulettes and dress swords with immense satisfaction to themselves, and appearing to be very busy. Col. Davis—who had been in command-in-chief before Taliaferro's appointment, and who is now Quartermaster General of the army, rides about in plain clothes, with a Colt's pistol fixed on a carbine stock slung over his shoulder. On all the roads leading to the town pickets are stationed to prevent the approach of country people, and sentries are so placed throughout the village as effectually to check all circulation. All industrial pursuits, except such as are connected with the supply of the army, are suspended, and, in fact, have been for the last six weeks.

### CONFERENCES WITH THE REPORTERS—THEY ARE ADMITTED TO THE GROUND.

With the greatest trouble and difficulty, and the exercise of all the powers of flattery with which at least one member of the press is so richly gifted, Gen. Taliaferro was prevailed on to give the reporters a chance of witnessing the execution. An officer of the General's staff conducted them to the ground, and they were assigned a position to the south of the scaffold and about one hundred and fifty yards from it.

### SCENES ON THE GROUND.

The scaffold stood in the centre of the field. It looked not unlike a stand that might be erected for speakers at a public meeting, except for the rope that dangled from the centre of the crossbeam. A flight of some twelve steps led to the stand. None but troops and the representatives of the press were admitted into the field. The fences were guarded partly by the Fauquier cavalry—a set of fine looking red shirted fellows, splendidly mounted—and partly by some infantry companies. Down in the valley, at a mile's distance, and in the piece of woods that stretches on the east, companies were stationed to guard against a surprise.

### ARRIVAL OF THE GENERAL AND STAFF.

About half-past ten General Taliaferro and staff arrived on the ground. The General wore an undress uniform coat, with a scarlet sash around the waist. The officers of the staff were mostly in full feather. Soon afterwards Captain Ashby's brigade, familiarly known as the "Black Knights," rode into the field.

### ONE OF THE WOUNDED OF THE HARPER'S FERRY FIGHT.

There came also on the ground about the same time a rockaway wagon, containing one of the persons wounded in the fight at Harper's Ferry—Mr. Samuel C. Young—who desired to see Brown's last moments on the scaffold. He drew up his vehicle just behind the Virginia Cadets, who were stationed—one hundred strong—with two howitzers, in front of the gallows, and removing the leather curtain at the back, he gave his whole attention to the progress of the tragedy; a little colored boy, in fustian, standing at the horse's head. Colonel Washington was also present, as aid to the General.

### THE SPECTATORS.

The field was marked out with white signal flags to indicate the position which the troops were to occupy. The flag of Virginia was planted beside the scaffold, and that of the United States at the further corner of the ground. There were but few civilians, certainly not over a hundred, within view; and—be it said to the credit of the Charlestown ladies—not a single member of the gentler sex made her appearance near the ground, nor were any observed at the windows which commanded a view of the place of execution. It was also remarked that there were no colored people among the spectators.

### THE PROCESSION.

At five minutes before eleven the glistening bayonets of the advance guard were seen entering the gate from the direction of the jail. First came a troop of cavalry, six abreast; then a regiment of infantry marching in columns; then a common country wagon, drawn by two mules, and containing the condemned man. Behind it marched the Winchester Continentals, followed by the remainder of the escort in the order assigned it. The wagon stopped on the west side of the gallows. Nothing is seen of Brown from the spot where the reporters stand, until four men are observed walking up the steps. The first is Brown.

### BROWN'S BEARING.

Coolly and bravely, and with as much apparent unconcern as if he were about to address a political meeting, he mounts the scaffold, advances forward, takes off his hat, runs his hand through his bushy gray locks, and then turns round and shakes hands with the Sheriff. Without a moment's delay the rope is placed round his neck, his arms more securely pinioned, his feet tied, and a long white linen cowl drawn over his face. In that attitude, erect as a drill sergeant, motionless as a statue—with not the slightest visible tremor or agitation—not the most insignificant manifestation of fear—he stood for fully twelve minutes, while the troops were taking up their positions in the various parts of the field. His face was toward the south; the sun shone warmly upon him, and the pleasant breeze played about him for the last time.

### THE FINAL MOMENT.

At length the companies were all at their posts; the Sheriff and jailor bade Brown a final good-bye, and descended from the scaffold. I turned my face from the fearful spectacle. Soon a dull falling sound came on the ear, and then some one near me remarked, "There is the last of Old Brown." He was then in the convulsive agonies of death; the few slight muscular twitchings of the hands soon ceased, and it was thought that within four minutes of the drop he had ceased to exist. After being suspended for some twenty minutes, four doctors, Messrs. Mason, Cook, Starry and John A. Straigh, made an examination as to whether any life remained. They found no pulsation or other sign of life. Nearly a score of surgeons attached to the military companies—among them Dr. Graham of the Virginia Military Institute—also made an examination. In thirty-five minutes after the drop fell the body was taken down, placed in a walnut coffin and conveyed back to the prison, attended by the medical staff. The troops defiled out of the field and returned to their quarters in town, and the majesty of the law was vindicated, so far as John Brown was concerned.

### BROWN'S PROGRESS FROM THE PRISON TO THE GRAVE.

Nothing seemed capable of subduing Brown's courage. The approach of death had no visible effect upon him. He supped heartily on Thursday night and eat a good breakfast on Friday morning. When the time came for proceeding to execution he paid visits to the other prisoners. He told Green and Copeland, the two colored men, that he hoped they would repent the lies they had told in regard to his having paid them to join him, and then said, "If you have to die, die game." In his interview with Cook, he said that he (Cook) had deceived him by misrepresentations (alluding to the fact that Cook had assured him the slaves would rally to his support), and had made false statements (in his confession), and that he should not, for the sake of "saving his own bacon," betray his friends. Said he to him, "You stated that I told you to come to Harper's Ferry, when the fact was that I cautioned you at Cleveland against coming." Cook replied:—"Well, sir, there is a difference of opinion between us as to that; perhaps our memories are at fault." To that Brown rejoined:—"Sir, your memory is very treacherous." Finally, he advised him to repent his sins and to die game. He shook hands with all, and gave a quarter of a dollar to all save Cook, saying that he had no longer any use for money.

### THE END TO THE PLACE OF EXECUTION.

These interviews over, the condemned man was led to the front door of the prison and placed in a furniture cart, to be driven to the place of execution. His coffin was in the cart with him. He wore a gray woollen undershirt and a colored shirt, without any collar. No neckerchief or ribbon fastened it at the throat. His clothes were those which he had always worn in prison. They consisted of grayish cassinet pantaloons, black cassinet vest, black coat and soft felt hat. He wore white woollen socks and a pair of carpet slippers. The vehicle was driven by Mr. Sadder, cabinet maker, of Charlestown. In it were Brown, Mr. John Avis, the jailor, Mr. Sterry, also of Charlestown, and a gentleman from New York. Mr. J. W. Campbell, the sheriff, followed in a buggy. Four of the jail guard marched behind, armed with Colt's rifles. The Petersburg Greys, Capt. Joseph Scott, acted as a flanking escort. Col. Gibson was specially detailed to command the escort. There was a considerable crowd on the street as the procession moved forward, but no offensive remark was offered to the condemned; and whenever the latter caught the eye of any of the officers he invariably bowed to him.

### CONVERSATION BY THE WAY.

On the way up to the field of execution, Mr. Sadder, who was driving, remarked to Brown, "Why, Captain, you are cooler now than I am." Brown replied, "That may be so." Said Sadder again, "You are game to the last, Captain." To that remark Brown replied that he

"never in his life knew what personal fear was." "Courage," said he, "is a constitutional quality; you cannot train a man to be brave. The hardest thing to be borne," he said, "was parting with friends." Here remarked again, as the vehicle drove into the field, "I see that all but the military are excluded from the ground," and as he gazed around on the landscape he observed, "What a beautiful country this is about here! This is the first opportunity I have had of viewing it." He even made inquiries as to the several residences that attracted his attention.

### HIS LAST WORDS.

On reaching the scaffold Brown, whose arms had been pinioned at the elbows before he left the jail, was assisted out of the wagon by Mr. Avis and the jail guard. He turned around to Messrs. Sadder and Sterry, and said, in a brisk, pleasant manner, "Good bye, gentlemen." He then ascended the steps firmly and with perfect composure. The Sheriff came up to place the rope round his neck. He stooped his head so as to assist the operation. His neck and breast were open, and were remarked as being white almost as a child's. Then the white linen cowl was drawn over his face. The Sheriff and the jailor shook hands with him and bade him good-bye. Before leaving, he was asked by the Sheriff to stand on the drop. "But I cannot see where it is," said Brown; "you must be kind enough to lead me to it." The Sheriff led him to the fatal position, and suggested that Brown might take something into his hand to be dropped whenever he was ready. "Oh, no," said he; "but I hope I will not be kept waiting unnecessarily long." These were his last words. They were eminently characteristic of the man and of his unflinching courage.

### HIS DEATH.

But he was kept waiting very unnecessarily long—kept waiting until all the companies had marched and counter-marched to the positions assigned to them respectively. And then, instead of a preconcerted signal, the officer of the day shouted to the Sheriff twice—so that the prisoner could hear him—"All right, Mr. Campbell. All right, Mr. Campbell." Before the lapse of another moment, and at exactly twenty-five minutes past eleven, the drop rope was cut by the Sheriff, the irisp fell, and John Brown was hanging between heaven and earth. The fall was not nearly great enough—it was hardly a foot. Some slight muscular action, and a spasmodic clenching of the hands were all the signs of life that the dying man gave, and yet it was supposed that four or five minutes must have passed before life was extinct.

### REMOVAL OF THE BODY.

The body was hanging some thirty-seven minutes before the surgeons came forward to finish their examination. On their pronouncing that the man was dead, instructions were given to the Jailer to lower the body, which was thereupon done. The rope was not cut. The body was then placed in the walnut coffin, which was in readiness for it, lifted into the furniture wagon and driven back to the jail. There was no plate upon the coffin, no name or date inscribed upon it; but upon the outer shell, within which it was to be placed, was the address of "John Brown, Esq."

### MEDICAL DOUBTS AS TO LIFE BEING EXTINGUISHED.

The body was taken to the jail, as I have said, and there it was subjected to a further surgical examination. Strangely enough, the doctors were not satisfied that the man was really dead, and so they adjourned, to meet again at three o'clock. They thought that life might be restored by the application of the galvanic battery.

### APPEARANCE AFTER DEATH.

The neck was not broken. The throat was marked by the rope, but the skin was not abraded. The face was not black, as is usual after hanging; it resembled more that of a man who had died of congestion of the brain. The eyes were not offensively protruded, nor were there any discharges from the mouth or nose. The eyes were, however, largely dilated, and the mouth could not be closed. In fact, John Brown seemed to be as peculiar in death as he was in life.

### BODY DELIVERED TO THE WIDOW.

The doctors were satisfied at their third examination that the man was really dead, and they gave their certificate accordingly. The body was sent down in the evening by special train from Charlestown to Harper's Ferry, where it was delivered to John Brown's widow, to be conveyed North for interment.

### PERMIT FOR BROWN'S BODY.

To ANDREW E. KENNEDY, Esq.—  
Sir—I wish you to be so good as to take fourteen men with you, selected from among citizens who may volunteer to go with you. I will make no demand of troops for this purpose. You will then proceed to Harper's Ferry, and protect from violence the body of John Brown, which will be sent by the same train with you, and deliver the body to the wife of John Brown, or her authorized agent, at Harper's Ferry.  
WM. E. TALIAFERRO.

### THE RESIDENTS OF CHARLESTOWN.

The execution was conducted with the strictest good order, and without any exhibition of bad taste on the part of the citizens of Charlestown. The presence of the military only gave it greater solemnity and significance. No liquors were permitted to be sold in the town throughout the day. Mr. Campbell, the Sheriff, and Mr. Avis, the jailor, performed their repulsive duties in as delicate a manner as possible. While Brown was waiting in that terrible suspense to permit the troops to take up their positions, Mr. Campbell occasionally came and drew aside the flap of the cowl to allow him fresh air, and in many other ways showed him attention and respect.

The people of Charlestown are not to be held responsible for all the absurd, offensive and high-handed measures of the military authorities. If I were to judge of the people at large by the proprietors of the Carter House—the only residents with whom I had any intercourse—I should be inclined to speak highly of their courtesy and good sense. It is hoped, however, that, now that the Brown tragedy is ended, the larger portion of the troops will be withdrawn, and the execution of the laws be left in the hands of the civil authorities.

### PSALM SINGING IN JAIL.

I understand that on Wednesday night last Brown and Stevens joined together in singing hymn, and were commended on their vocal powers by one of the jail guard—a compliment which they pleasantly acknowledged.

### TAMPERING WITH THE MAILS.

It appears that the military authorities not only held possession of the telegraph, but also interfered with the mails. Letters directed to certain of the New York papers were not forwarded; and I am informed by a gentleman of the highest credit that he placed in the New York Post Office, about a fortnight ago, a package of twenty-five HERALDS, containing Brown's comments on Beecher's sermon, directed to a party in Charlestown, and that it has not yet come to hand.