

# JOHN BROWN : A RETROSPECT.

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**A Letter from John Brown never before in print.**

Now in the possession of Sullivan Forehand, Esq., of Worcester.

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SPRINGFIELD, MASS, 16th APRIL, 1857.

Hon. Eli Thayer,

My Dear Sir

I am advised that one of "U. S. Hounds is on my track"; & I have kept myself hid for a few days to let my track get cold. I have no idea of being taken; & *intend* (if "God will"); to go back with Irons *in* rather than *upon* my hands. Now my Dear Sir let me ask you to have Mr. Allen & Co. send me by Express; one or two sample Navy Sized Revolvers; *as soon as may be*; together with his best cash terms (he warranting them) by the hundred with good moulds, flasks; &c. I wish the sample Pistols sent to John (not Capt) Brown Care of Massasoit House Springfield, Mass. I now enclose Twenty Dollars towards repairs done for me; & Revolvers; the balance *I will send*, as soon as I get the Bill. I have written to have Dr. Howe send *you* by Express a Rifle & Two Pistols; which *with the guns you gave me*; & *fixings*; together with the Rifle given me by *Mr. Allen & Co.* I wish them to pack in a suitable strong Box; *perfectly safe* directing to *F. B* care of Orson M. Oviatt Esq. Cleveland Ohio; *as freight*; to keep dry. For Box, trouble; & packing; I will pay when I get bill. I wish the box very plainly marked; & forwarded to Cleveland; as soon as you receive the articles from Dr. Howe. I got a *fine list* in Boston the other day; & hope Worcester will not be *entirely behind*. I do not mean *you*; or *Mr. Allen & Co.*

Very Respectfully Your Friend

Direct all letters & bills  
to care of Massasoit House  
*Please acknowledge*

} *John Brown*

# JOHN BROWN : A RETROSPECT.

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Nearly two thousand years ago, at the hour of noon, a motley throng of people might have been seen pouring forth from the gates of a far Eastern city and moving towards a hill called Calvary. Amidst soldiers and civilians, both friends and foes, the central figure is that of a man scarcely more than thirty years of age. He has all the attributes, in form and features, of true manliness. A disinterested judge has just declared that he finds nothing amiss in him ; but the rabble cry out, all the more, "crucify him." While ardently loved by a devoted few in that tumultuous crowd, he is, to all the rest, an object of severest scorn, the butt of ribald jest. Wearing his crown of thorns, he is made to bear, till he faints under his burden, the very instrument of his torture. His Roman executioners, giving to him the punishment accorded to thieves and robbers, have imposed upon him the most ignominious fate possible,—death upon the cross.

A century before, Cicero had said : "It is an outrage to bind a Roman citizen ; to scourge him is an atrocious crime ; to put him to death is almost parricide ; but to *crucify* him—what shall I call it?"

The place of crucifixion is reached. The dread tragedy is enacted. The veil of the Temple is rent in twain ; but upon the trembling earth the cross stands firm ; from the consequent darkness it shines forth, resplendent by the halo of its precious burden. The Saviour of men is taken thence to lie in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea ; his disciples and brethren wander away disconsolate ; his tormentors go their many and devious ways ; but the cross remains. It will ever remain ; the object of reproach and derision to the ancients, to the moderns it has become the symbol

of all that is true and good. The scenes of that day, on which the son of man was lifted up have sanctified for all time the instrument on which he suffered ; transformed and radiant, it has become a beacon for all mankind.

Twenty-five years ago to-day, at noon, nearly, another crowd took its course from prison doors to a place of execution. We see a white haired old man escorted to his death by all the military strength that a great state can command. As he leaves his place of confinement he stoops and prints a kiss upon the face of a Negro baby. A black woman cries out to him, passing along, "God bless you, old man ; I wish I could help you, but I cannot." The most ignominious death known to our laws awaits him. Already has the gibbet been erected. The sticks "standant and crossant" are in place, and the hungry rope is "pendant." A forty acre field is filled with those drawn together by this strange scene. Three thousand soldiers with loaded guns stand ready to repel any attempt at rescue. Well shotted cannon turn their open and angry mouths upon this one poor mortal. The bravest man there, he gazes upon the array before him, without a trace of emotion. The eye that shed tears at the sight of human misery is undimmed by what man can do against him. Beyond the cordon of foes he remarks the wonderful beauty of the scenery, the last he is to look upon. He has made his peace with God and has no other favor to ask of his executioners than that they hasten their terrible task. The drop falls and suspended 'twixt Heaven and Earth is the incarnation of the idea that in a few brief months is to bring liberty to an enslaved race. Most appropriately did a Boston clergyman on the following Sunday announce for his opening hymn—

"Servant of God, well done !"

The John the Baptist of salvation to the Negroes, he died a death excelled in sublimity only by that of the Saviour of men. Both died for men ; one, for all mankind, the other willing to risk all that he might open the prison door to those confined, and to strike off the bands of those in bondage.

And here, too, methinks a strange transformation has taken place. The rough, the terrible gallows loses its accustomed significance.

Its old time uses are forgotten. Around it I see millions of men and women pointing to its sole occupant, saying, "He died that we might live." Even the scaffold may become a monument of glory, for from it a hero and a martyr passed to his reward. I forget the base and criminal burdens it has borne, and see only the "lifting up" of the one man who had courage equal to his convictions. His martyrdom came ere he had seen

"The Glory of the Coming of the Lord."

Under the lofty Adirondacks his body was mouldering in the grave when Lincoln proclaimed liberty to the slave,

"But his soul was marching on."

During the twenty-five years intervening since the death of John Brown, the Drama of Life has been played with far more than the usual variation. In no equal space of time since the recording of events began, have more pages of history been turned than during the quarter of a century just closing. Owing to the efforts of Brown and others sympathizing with him, the Institution of Slavery had already received many shocks ; but it was still active and aggressive. For ought man could see to the contrary, it was fated to exist many years yet. It held unchallenged, fifteen of the states in this Union and was making strenuous efforts to fortify itself in the territories of the West. A bishop in the freedom-loving state of Vermont was, twenty-five years ago, finding scripture argument for the maintenance of Negro slavery. Across the Connecticut River, in New Hampshire, the head of her chief educational institution was teaching the young men under his care that slavery was of Divine origin, and, of course, as such must not be disturbed. In New York City, one of her foremost lawyers, Charles O'Connor, announced to his audience that Negro slavery not only was not unjust, "But it is just, wise and beneficent." Though there was disclaimer at this statement, the vast majority of his immense throng of listeners applauded the sentiment to the echo. In our own Commonwealth, a human being had just been rendered back to slavery, and the most distinguished clergyman in Massachusetts had stood

a trial for endeavoring to prevent the everlasting disgrace. In those days between "Fifty and Sixty," "Uncle Tom's Cabin" meant something. Its gifted author had set before every Northern reader a picture on which he could not look without blushing. Nearly all of us, here to-night, can recall the intense interest with which our parents perused the book. I well recall the burning face of my father as he turned page after page, and when, at times, tears coursed down his cheek I wondered what it was all about. He, too, had occasion to know how strong was the bond that Slavery had laid upon the Nation, in the opposition aroused among his own people through his pulpit utterances on the forbidden subject. In those days, the Underground Railroad was in full operation. The Southern Black Man, however deep his degradation, knew the North Star, and towards it he was journeying at the rate of thousands yearly. We of to-day account it among our most precious heritages that our sires and grandsires kept stations on that same road, and many an escaped bondsman looking back from his safe asylum in Canada called them "blessed." Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-nine was in the halcyon days of "Fugitive Slave Law" lovers. If John Wesley considered Slavery the "sum of all villainies," I wonder what terse definition he would have given to this the vilest enactment that ever rested on our Statute Book. Not satisfied with whipping, shooting, hanging, destroying in a thousand ways these unhappy slaves, the aggressive South forced upon a passive North a law whose enormity passes description. Every man at the beck of the Southern kidnapper, by its provisions was obliged to play the part of a Negro catcher. So great was the passiveness of the North that her most eminent orator, instead of decrying the proposition as unworthy of humanity, even lifted up his voice in its defense. Virgil inveighed against the accursed thirst for gold—*auri sacra fames*; but it was not this thirst that made him, oftentimes called the "Godlike," turn against all the traditions of his birth and associations, and speak words which closed to him Faneuil Hall, the Cradle of Liberty, and drew from Whittier the scathing lines of

"Tchabod!"

But his thirst was not appeased, and the South before which he had prostrated himself, turned away from him, spurning his bribe, and made a nomination which terribly disappointed Webster, and on account of which he went down to his grave broken hearted. Imagine if you can the astonishment of the student a hundred years hence, when he reads that the highest judicial tribunal in the land, voiced through its aged though not venerable chief, said in the year of our Lord, 1857, and in the year of American Independence the eighty-first, that three millions of people, at that time represented in Congress through an infamous scheme of apportionment, had no rights that a white man was bound to respect. Two judges of that court, and be it ever remembered to their credit, dissented. Through the worse than Cimmerian darkness that overspread the Supreme Bench of those days, the names of McLean and Curtis shine forth, the only rays of light ; and I may say with the exception of that of Taney, remembered through his unique position, the only names recalled to-day. I doubt whether any present can name three out of the six judges who concurred with their Superior in his opinion. It was the age, *par excellence*, of spread-eagle oratory, when the American Bird soared higher and staid up longer than he ever has since. Hail Columbias and Star Spangled Banners were in order, but the latter waved for the white portion of the people only. A flaunting mockery, our flag justly merited the reproach of other nations that pointed to our enslaved millions and then said : "Call ye that the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave?"

We know that all this is so, for we remember it ; but the student of the future must get his knowledge from books, and in the light of progress what will he think of defenseless women being mobbed in a Connecticut town for allowing Negro girls to attend their school? Even now there is no distinction of color in *our* schools, and at the High School in this city, a colored girl has graduated whose foster father was a slave in Danville, Virginia, while the head master of the school was held there a prisoner of war. Side by side they sit in our schools of all grades, and, graduating from our Normal Schools, become teachers in the schools themselves. He will read that Garrison, Phillips, Foster and others, were often in peril

of their lives for preaching liberation of the slaves ; and how like a myth will it seem to *him*, when *we*, in twenty-five years from the death of John Brown, have seen colored men in both branches of the National Legislature, and to-day cannot look upon a lately issued Government Note without reading the name of one\* who was once in bondage. Popular prejudice, the strongest barrier possible, is rapidly yielding ; and the bayonet, the ballot, and the spelling book, have wrought wonders. With all professions open to the colored man, with equal rights before the law, with millions of property accumulated since the war, who shall say that the soul of John Brown is not marching on ?

In the days prior to those of Harper's Ferry Raid, this good City of Worcester, and the County of the same name, had spoken in no uncertain manner as to their appreciation of Slavery and its attendant evils. The first county in the Commonwealth to raise the question of the validity of Slavery in Massachusetts subsequent to the adoption of the Constitution, she well sustained her early acquired reputation in the more troublous times of later years. . In 1839, in this city was tried the famous Holden Slave Case, where a native of Worcester County had brought to her early home from her more recent Southern one, a specimen of human property in the shape of a black girl fourteen years old, by name Anne. By special enactment of Massachusetts no one could be held in bondage thus unless perfectly willing, and certain citizens of Holden, knowing that the treatment which the girl received could not be borne except under duress, secured her person, and bringing her to the Heart of the Commonwealth, made her "Free indeed." For thus acting, these citizens were arrested and indicted, for just what, it seems difficult, at this time, to state ; but they were deemed or called culpable for having, without her consent, taken this girl, Anne, from bondage and actually giving her liberty. More than fifty years ago this, and how like a dream the whole matter seems. Ira Barton was the Justice of the Peace before whom one of the depositions was made. Solomon Strong, the earliest ap-

\* B. K. Bruce of Mississippi, now Register of the Treasury, formerly U. S. Senator.



pointed Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, the Judge who heard the case. Pliny Merrick was the District Attorney who conducted the prosecution, and Charles Allen the Attorney who appeared for the defense. The trial had not advanced a great ways ere Mr. Merrick declared that there was no cause of action, and the jury at once acquitted the defendants. Charles Allen! A host of recollections of the Free Soil and Anti-Slavery days spring into being at the mention of his name. He was the Massachusetts Whig who, in 1848, refused to bow the knee to the Southern Baal, and to his fellow members of the Convention, after the nomination of General Taylor dared to say: "You have put one ounce too much on the strong back of Northern endurance. You have even presumed that the State which led on the first Revolution for Liberty will now desert that cause for the miserable boon of the vice-presidency. Sir, *Massachusetts spurns the bribe*," referring thus to the proposed nomination of Abbott Lawrence. It was a brother of Charles Allen, our late esteemed friend, the Rev. George Allen, who in the same year offered to a meeting in Worcester, the most famous resolution of the whole ante-bellum period. Catching the spirit of his brother's words, he said: "Resolved, That Massachusetts wears no chains and *spurns all bribes*; that Massachusetts goes now, and will ever go, for free soil and free men, for free lips and a free press, for a free land and a free world." This was a good key-note, and when, six years later, in 1854, a slave-catcher came to this same city of Worcester, the citizens proved that they could raise the tune most readily; and the would-be man-stealer was only too happy to march to its measures, out of the city, without his booty, and possessed of a whole skin. Mr. Jenkins, the object of Butman, the kidnapper's cupidity, during these intervening thirty years, has continued to live in this city, a respectable and respected citizen; and has seen his children in the highest schools of the city. One, having graduated from the High School, is now in the Normal School. What a comment this, on the times when, in this *Christian* land, men and women were imprisoned for teaching black people how to read,—the Bible even.

I doubt whether the people of Worcester were the very strictest interpreters of the law in the days when the life of John Brown was

in the balance. Of the technicalities of his offence it is not ours to judge. The people of the North who had made haste to rid themselves of slavery, had viewed for years the aggressive unrest of the South. While civilized countries other than ours had forever abolished the wretched system, our country, led by its Southern minority, had again and again done its best to bolster and uphold it. The war with Mexico, the annexation of Texas, the Fugitive Slave Law, and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, were only successive sops thrown to the insatiable monster. The repeal of the Compromise opened the Territory of Kansas to both Slavery and Anti-Slavery, and henceforth Massachusetts speaks with no uncertain voice. John Brown and Charles Sumner simultaneously spring into renown and immortality. Both of Bay State antecedents, their history is largely hers. One on the plains of Kansas fights for what he believes to be the right. His own blood and that of his sons flow in behalf of oppressed humanity. Border ruffians are driven back and a Free State Constitution adopted. Sumner, from his place in the United States Senate, boldly proclaims his sentiments on "The Crime against Kansas," and by an illustrious scion of the Southern aristocracy is stricken down in a manner which "even thieves and cut-throats would despise." The contest was on,—any pause thereafter was only a temporary lull. In the language of New York's most distinguished Senator, it was "Irrepressible." John Brown had repeatedly led parties of slaves from Missouri to Kansas, and made of them free men. He contemplated other and grander strokes against the peculiar institution. In his singleness of purpose, he saw not the power of the Government intervening, and perhaps, in his intensity, it would have made no difference if he had. Certain, however, is the statement, that the one grand idea over-towering all others in his mind, was that of liberty for the slaves ; and for that idea men of his own and subsequent days have done him reverence.

Why review the scenes of those hours of attack and fierce defense at Harper's Ferry? Poorly informed, indeed, must be that American man or woman, boy or girl, who has not repeatedly read the events of those less than twenty-four hours of condensed history. They furnish the prelude to every account of the War of the Re-

bellion. No matter how vivid the scenes of later days, somewhere in the background we get these earlier details over again. The blow once struck, and there arose from Maine to Texas cries ranging through all the variations of surprise, exultation, and fiercest denunciation. I am speaking as a Northern man to Northern people, and it is natural that we should look upon the acts of John Brown with quite different feelings from those held by the people who saw in them the uprooting of all the traditions and customs of their society. For the present, however, I will confine myself to the opinions of those who from the north side of Mason and Dixon's Line, heard the "clash of resounding arms." There were many men who had in various ways assisted Brown in his work without knowing just what his plans were. It sufficed for them to know that he was to harry the Institution, leaving to him the perfecting and executing of details. The telegraphic dispatches on that Monday morning of October 17th, carried consternation into other homes than those of the South. It seemed reasonable to the Government that men who had contributed in any way to the support of John Brown must have been privy to his plans. However much we may pride ourselves now that such and such men assisted the movement, then the barest suspicion of complicity made many households look to their hearths. Some, whose names had been mingled with his, sought refuge in Canada, as Dr. S. G. Howe, Frederick Douglass and F. B. Sanborn. Gerrit Smith of New York, worn out by previous hard work, was by this final burden reduced to a condition necessitating his removal to the Utica Asylum. Now that the affair is all over and past, it seems very strange that men like those mentioned before, who were known to be intimate with the Revolutionist, were not made to suffer at the hands of the law. The only explanation that occurs to me is that public opinion, while it might not stay the hand of the executioner in Virginia, most resolutely opposed his crossing the line. "The New York Democratic Vigilance Association" issued a manifesto breathing forth threatenings against all those implicated in the matter, but it came to nothing. Every movement of the trial was followed with the closest interest, and Massachusetts sent down a man to assist in the defense who became, in after years, one of her

most famous sons. It is certain that the experience of these weeks at Harper's Ferry gave John A. Andrew the prompting to the extraordinary zeal with which he entered upon the duties of his gubernatorial office less than two years afterward. The whole trial seems farcical ; but we must admit that a show of fairness was had, and, considering the ferocity with which the old man was attacked when down in the Engine House, the only wonder is that he was granted a trial at all. Through all the trying hours of that ordeal how like a hero did he deport himself ! Grand in his assaults on the citadel of slavery, he became grander still as he calmly met his enemies, and told them of his purposes. Never boastful, he assumes nothing, but at the end, when asked to say why sentence of death should not be imposed upon him, he said : "The Court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the Law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things 'whatsoever I would that men should do unto me I should do even so to them.' I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country, whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel and unjust enactments—I submit ; so let it be done." Even if we grant that he was technically wrong we must accord to him the meed of perfect sincerity. Whatever his failings he had not that of lying. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." John Brown fulfilled the highest interpretation of this Scriptural maxim. The edict once published, and all over the North there was a feeling of the deepest sympathy. There was nothing that could be done. People must wait and meditate. Just enough more than a month to bring the execution on Friday was accorded the condemned man, for it was on Monday the 31st of October that the trial was ended, and the sentence was pronounced the following day.

During this month follow the letters, the sermons, the speeches, the editorials, the thinking, that were the immediate results of the attack. Never had the subject of Negro Slavery been so thoroughly ventilated. The liberation of the Slave was coming, and that speedily through the agency of Brown, but not in the way he had intended. While audiences throughout the North, and South, too, were roused to fever heat through the presentations, in different lights it is true, of this cause, the prime mover in the matter was making his final preparations for departure. Preparations, I say, not in the sense that we ordinarily give the word, for of his own future he had no doubt, but in that of care for the families of his stricken followers. To Mrs. Lydia Maria Child he writes asking her assistance in behalf of his daughters-in-law, whose husbands, his sons, fell by his side, three daughters, his wife, Mrs. Thompson whose husband fell at Harper's Ferry, and a son unable to wholly care for himself. To a Quaker lady of Newport, R. I., he sends asking her to write and to comfort the sad hearts at North Elba, Essex County, N. Y. To his wife " ' Finally, my beloved, be of good comfort.' May all your names be 'written on the Lamb's book of life—may you all have the purifying and sustaining influence of the Christian religion is the earnest prayer of your affectionate husband and father, John Brown. P. S. I cannot remember a night so dark as to have hindered the coming day, nor a storm so furious or dreadful as to prevent the return of warm sunshine and a cloudless sky. But, beloved ones, do remember that this is not your rest; that in this world you have no abiding place or continuing city. To God and his infinite mercy I always commend you. J. B."

And thus he wrote to his half-brother, to his old schoolmaster, to his son Jason, and to many others. Every word is expressive of the deepest anxiety for the welfare of his loved ones, and a calm trust in the God of all as to the righteousness of his cause. Such words and such behavior do not comport with the "black heart" which a large part of the nation was then ascribing to him. It is true, he told a clergyman of a Southern church who attempted to draw an argument in defence of Slavery, that he did not know the A B Cs of Christianity since he was entirely ignorant of the meaning of the word, "I, of course, respect you as a gentleman,

but it is as a *heathen* gentleman." I can, myself, appreciate to some extent what must have been the feelings of the prisoner at the religious ministrations offered him ; for I well remember with what a skeptical air I heard the prayer and the words of a Rebel clergyman who visited the prison in which I was confined in 1865. I knew he was daily praying God to bring defeat to my comrades in arms, to increase the number of prisoners, in fine, for the triumph of the Confederate cause. He undertook a pretty serious task, that of talking entertainingly in a general way to a company of Federal prisoners. Had he come to kneel by the side of a dying man, and to point the way to eternal life, it had been different ; but for doctrinal policies what cared we? We had empty stomachs, and till they were filled all creeds were alike illusory. Preaching to hungry men was not a success, and he came but seldom—indeed I remember only once. Dead men were carried out daily, but they went unattended by religious rites. I recall now the thought, if God heard his prayer and answered it, of what avail was mine ; but I was certain that mine was the one listened to, and that being the case, of what avail was his opinion on the state of the country any way? During these weeks the condemned man is visited by large numbers of people, both friends and foes ; but before no one does he for a moment weaken in his constant declaration of the correctness of his cause. Some of the verbal shot that his proslavery interlocutors received were as hot as those which he fired from his musket into their midst on that terrible Monday—for instance, he told Col. Smith, of the Virginia Military Institute, that he would as soon be escorted to his death by blacklegs or robbers as by slave-holding ministers. Socrates, awaiting the death which slowly creeps from his extremities to his heart converses not more quietly and resignedly to those about him than does this decided old man of Harper's Ferry. One, a Stoic, discourses on Death and Immortality ; and dying, desires his followers to offer a cock to Æsculapius. The other, a Christian, ceases not to converse concerning the wrongs of an oppressed race, and of his deep anxiety for the slaves ; and his last written words were : "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now

think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done." [December 2nd, 1859.]

Our retrospect would be incomplete did we not recall the events happening in this very City of Worcester, twenty-five years ago to-day. Never were the pulsations of the "Heart of the Commonwealth" more in accord with the heart beats of humanity than on that second of December, 1859. Whatever the thoughts and words of truckling people in other places, here the tolling bell spoke unmistakably to all who heard, the sorrow of those who mourned the death of the Great Liberator. The *Spy* of December 3d devotes two columns to an account of the observances in this city. From this description I learn that from ten o'clock, A. M. till noon, and again, from seven to seven and one-half o'clock, P. M., the bells of the Old South, the Central, the Union, and the Third Baptist churches were tolled. During the tolling of the bells in the forenoon, the engines at Merrifield's buildings, and at the card manufactory of T. K. Earle & Co., were stopped, while their places of business were closed, bearing appropriate symbols of regret and mourning. The colored people generally closed their places of employment, and engaged in appropriate religious exercises in Zion's Church in the afternoon. Earlier than had been advertised Mechanics Hall was thronged to its utmost capacity, in the vast audience there being as many women as men. Three sides of the walls bore placards on which were the words :

"Whether on the scaffold high,  
Or in the battle's van,  
The fittest place where man can die  
Is where he dies for man."

At half-past seven o'clock Hon. W. W. Rice called the meeting to order, saying : "There is no true man that does not feel his bosom swell with indignation and grief, and pray that God will watch over this land with his especial care. For Virginia has, to-day, executed a man, who, by the judgment of this community, is guilty of no moral crime ; but for his fidelity to the principles which his own soul told him were truths and duty. And we are met to hear the words of our best and most eloquent men, and to tender our aid

and sympathy to the family—that family in whose veins flows the blood of the martyr, Brown.” In closing, Mr. Rice, who had been heard with repeated applause, read the following list of officers :

PRESIDENT : Dea. Ichabod Washburn ; VICE-PRESIDENTS : Hon. John Milton Earle, Hon. Peter C. Bacon, Hon. George F. Hoar, Hon. W. W. Rice, Hon. Lemuel Williams, Albert Tolman, William T. Merrifield, George M. Rice, Hon. Austin L. Rogers, Edward Earle, John D. Baldwin, George W. Russell, Abram Firth, Joseph P. Hale, Dr. S. Rogers, William R. Hooper, Benjamin Goddard, Joseph Pratt; Harrison Bliss, Thomas Tucker, Rev. Horace James, Rev. Merrill Richardson, Rev. Ebenezer Cutler, Rev. R. R. Shippen, Rev. J. H. Twombly, Rev. George Allen, Rev. T. W. Higginson, Rev. Peter Ross, Rev. William H. Sanford, Rev. Samuel Souther, Dr. Joseph Sargent, Dr. William Workman, Dr. O. Martin, Dr. T. H. Gage, Marcus Barrett, Warren Williams, Thomas L. Nelson, Hartley Williams, Edwin Draper, S. A. Porter, Jonathan Day ; SECRETARIES : Charles E. Stevens, D. A. Goddard, Joseph H. Walker.

Deacon Washburn, in taking the chair, called on the Rev. Mr. Richardson to open the further exercises with prayer, after which he read the following letter inclosing twenty dollars :

WORCESTER, DEC. 2, 1859.

Dear Sir: I shall not be able to unite with you as I had hoped and expected, in your meeting of sympathy and charity. The noble and heroic old man who loved the cause that we love, and who has been faithful unto death to the principles as he understood them, of the religion which we profess, has bequeathed to the friends of liberty the charge of comforting the desolate old age of his widow, and providing for the education of his fatherless children. The charge is too sacred to be declined.

Permit me to enclose, which would be of more value than anything I could say at present, a slight contribution toward this object.

Yours respectfully, G. F. HOAR.

The speeches that followed were of a particularly eloquent nature. Why should this be otherwise? Never had men a grander theme nor more sympathetic listeners. The Rev. Mr. Shippen, among other glowing passages, said : “John Brown felt as Crom-



well felt that he was commissioned by God to fight against the wrong. Believing in that eternal judgment based upon the law more lasting than the temporary statutes of to-day, he acted in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, as he in his conscience understood it." Hon. D. F. Parker was glad to honor John Brown because he dared, upon slave soil, to strike the blow he did. "Whenever wrong exists, it is our duty to wage war against it, with peaceful remedies if possible, if not, then with such as our grand-sires used in settling accounts with their oppressors."

The Rev. Mr. Richardson was particularly apt—I may say, grandly prophetic. Thus: "Never at the beginning of great periods in history was insurrection so successful as that. It has made it apparent that slavery can and must be abolished; it has set every press and every tongue in the land to agitating the subject of slavery, and has made the pillars of that institution to rock and reel. It has diminished the value of slave stock. Two hundred million dollars, says a Southern paper, John Brown destroyed that Sunday night, and has led how many families to look for a speedy and certain method of getting rid of the perilous property. That man whom we wrong in calling crazy, was groping for the pillars of the slave institution, and he has been successful." Then came Rev. T. W. Higginson who had known much of Brown's plans, and to whom the prisoner had written only a short time before his execution. "How little, one year ago to-day, we expected to hear such words from men who have been deemed conservative; words so heroic, so absolute in defense of principle; and I have wished the pen to record the thoughts which lie behind the faces we all meet; the anxious, the determined, the desperate faces, the varied faces that meet us. . . . John Brown is now beyond our reach; but the oppressed for whom he died still live. Methinks I hear his voice speaking to you in the words of that Scripture which he loved, 'Inasmuch as ye did it to these little ones ye did it unto me.'"

The collection that was taken up for the family amounted to \$145.88. Afterward Homer B. Sprague, Principal of the High School, spoke, as did Mrs. Abby K. Foster, both in an eloquent and forcible manner. At half-past ten o'clock the meeting adjourned, the large audience remaining to the end.

Milford, Millbury and Fitchburg, in this County, in a similar manner took notice of the sad event. In the Legislature, then in session, there was a movement made in both houses to secure an adjournment. Though defeated, the motion drew out pretty generally the sentiments of the members. Many of these voting against adjournment, admired the martyr; but objected to leaving the business of the day, saying that Brown himself would counsel continued attention to proper legislative duties.

From the vantage ground of twenty-five years after, it is interesting to read what leading exponents of public opinion said then. From the South there came but one cry. It was to be expected. Nothing else could have been tolerated. From the North there was a diversity of language.

The *New York Tribune* of December 3d said, and I can believe that Greeley himself wrote the words: "John Brown, dead, will live in millions of hearts, will be discussed around the homely hearth of Toil, and dreamed of on the couch of Poverty. . . . Yes, John Brown, dead, is verily a power like Samson in the falling temple of Dagon, like Ziska, dead, with his skin stretched over a drum head still routing the foe he bravely fought while living." The *New York Herald* of the same date, voicing the sentiment of those who actively or passively upheld slavery, alludes to the Hero as "Old John Brown, the culprit, hanged for murder," etc., and states that the South was correct. The *Boston Courier* wishes Governor Banks to ask the Legislature to make an appropriation of \$40,000 to assist Virginia in paying the bills incident to the Trial. If I am not mistaken, it was this same Courier's editor, one Homer by name, who, some years before, had placarded the city to excite a riot against Thompson, the English Emancipationist, and who had been largely instrumental in fostering trouble for Garrison and Phillips.

If we only knew that we were prophesying at the time! Little did the Tribune writer think that his allusion to Ziska would prove almost literally true. In two years from the death of John Brown the Twelfth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, the Fletcher Webster Regiment, marched down the streets of Boston to the words:

"John Brown's body lies a moldering in the grave,"

and like magic the whole Union Army took it up, nay more, those who stood behind the army, young and old. Men and women sung it from Maine to California. No one knows who wrote it—it was unwritten. It was the popular idea, inspired by God, given vocal expression. There was nothing to learn about it. Everybody knew it before he heard it. Once raised the tune was chanted till the war was over, and its mission accomplished. It closed not then; for to-day, after our lapse of a quarter of a century, it is the tune of all others that fires the Nation's heart. Ziska's drum head is immortal. Early in the War a large prize was offered for competition, to those who would try to write a National Hymn. True, we had "America," but it was sung to the tune of "God save the King or Queen." "The Star Spangled Banner," but it ran so high that few attempted it. "Red, White and Blue," and "Hail Columbia"; but they were not adapted to the popular demands. A National Hymn was demanded, and a committee of meritorious gentlemen gravely sat down to decide on the merits of more than five bushels of poems. Twelve hundred poetasters had sent in their lucubrations, over three hundred of these sending music also, and what came of it? Nothing, of course. Lowell can write an ode that will make our cheeks tingle. Bayard Taylor has written them that exalted us with pride; but neither of these men, nor any other, could sit down and in repose—in cold blood as it were—write a National Hymn. What was wanted was another Marseillaise, something which all could readily grasp and hold, something that no man or woman could help singing, no matter whether they had ever sung before or not. Roget de Lisle, amid the terrible scenes of the French Revolution, and stung almost to madness by the terrible events about him, in a single night gave expression to a hymn that, in power, has been approached by only one other, that of "John Brown's Body." Are there not points of resemblance? Both stir the soul in the chorus. The "*Aux armes, Aux armes,*" of the Frenchman's song is reproduced in our "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!" No man will take either hymn off by himself to learn it. They are in his mind already; but he is never con-

scious of them till the proper moment draws them forth. Our National Hymn has no parentage. I have heard men thrillingly relate the fever of patriotism into which the singing of its words threw them, as a regiment would file along the streets of our great cities during the war. There is not much to it in point of words. Such hymns need few words.

“John Brown’s body lies a mouldering in the grave.”

“He has gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord.”

“We will hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree.”

There they are, the three stanzas ; but they have been sung more times, especially the first one, than any equal number of words ever put to music in America. Put in one sum the times the name of Lincoln, the Martyred President, and Grant, the Peerless General have been uttered, and it would not make a hundredth part the number that represents the utterance of John Brown’s name in this song. Some one will say it cannot be a National Hymn unless sung by all parts of our people. Millions of people in the South, true of dusky faces, sung it, and how they sung it. It is more than sentiment, it is life to them ; and I am sanguine enough to believe that the time will come when those who wore the gray in our Great Contest will so far have seen the error of their position as to join with us of the other side in singing

“Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,”

over the fact that the soul of John Brown is marching on.

What think ye of John Brown? Have the widely separated opinions of twenty-five years ago approached, or are they even more divergent? Of course, the active thinkers and workers of that day have joined the great majority. A younger and later generation has the conduct of affairs. In the main, those who hated him then hate him now. Those who thought him a martyr then are sure of it now. Perhaps we are still too near the events that made him famous to properly weigh and criticise the evidence ; but what we write now, with what has been written, must be the source of future

conclusions. As to the South, it is far too early to expect other than the most rancorous feeling towards him. More than many of us are willing to admit, we are the creatures of our surroundings, men, thinking and acting as we have been reared. John Brown put himself in direct opposition to all that made the South distinctive ; and, however much I may blame the section for its continued hold on Slavery, I cannot think it strange that the inhabitants looked upon the Liberator with feelings quite the reverse from ours. For those, however, of equal privileges with ourselves, of substantially the same rearing, I have not the same measure of charity. In 1880 one G. W. Brown, M. D., of Rockford, Illinois, formerly the editor of a paper in Kansas, gave himself the trouble to write a pamphlet in which he spares no effort to calumniate the Old Hero. I quote a notice of it from the *Boston Journal* :

“The writer, Dr. G. W. Brown, in slipshod and often ungrammatical English assails the memory of Old John Brown, charges him with active participation in various bloody crimes, and abuses his biographers and eulogists. Dr. Brown writes as an eye-witness of many of the things which he describes ; but of his credibility we have no means of judging save so far as the bitterness of his tone casts suspicion on his veracity.”

Happily we are able to tell just what Brown himself thought of his detractor, and of the paper that he conducted ; for in July, 1858, writing to F. B. Sanborn, he says : “I believe all honest, sensible Free State men in Kansas consider George Washington Brown’s *Herald of Freedom* one of the most mischievous, traitorous publications in the whole country.”

“A murderous fanatic and midnight assassin” is what the *Louisville Journal* calls him. Just what the same paper calls Mr. Phillip Thompson, Member of Congress from Kentucky, I cannot state ; but from the generally warped nature of its judgment I am not disposed to set much store by its opinion of him of Harper’s Ferry.

“Without doubt he suffered the just recompense of his deeds,” says one who twenty-five years ago was loud and eloquent in his denunciation of the “taking off.” This man has since sat in Congress with hosts of Rebel brigadiers, has shaken by the hand

Chalmers of Fort Pillow infamy, has listened to the reconstructed ex-Vice-President of the Confederacy on the floor of the House of Representatives. (There is something wrong here, and I leave it to the lawyers to decide where. Brown had no malice against individuals, hence to have hung him for murder was wrong. If he suffered death for treason against the United States, then what a gigantic wrong has been done in admitting to the highest offices those who likewise were treasonable. For myself, I am ready to affirm that if the present status of affairs is right, there was most grievous wrong done Brown. The larger and more extended the treason only adds so much more to the crime. Perhaps had the "reconstruction" following his foray been associated with more ballots, or in other words, had conciliation been necessary to the proper maintenance of a particular party, perhaps, I say, he had been not only pardoned but elected to Congress. X

Fate has assigned to John Brown one of the highest niches in the Temple of Fame. Thinking only of the name that must be his through all time, I would not have the Past undone; but tonight, after so many days, it is not amiss to ask ourselves "what might have been?" Granting that the death struggle between Slavery and Freedom was to come in 1861, what a part in it must this grand old man have borne! With his terrible earnestness and indomitable will, with his ability to weld as it were, to himself all those who came under his influence, what an avenger he would have been on the tracks of such *chivalrous* Southerners as Quantrell of Lawrence-burning notoriety, and those who at Fort Pillow and at Plymouth, N. C., carved out for themselves eternal infamy. I cannot think of him as a general commander; but as a leader of scouts, as the head of a band to hang on the skirts of an enemy, he had been invaluable. All this, however was not to be. He was to do his part; but it was as a hastener rather than a participant in the struggle. To please the Southern Herodias his head lay gory in the charger before the contest which he had preached began.

The contest came. We fought and won. The prime cause of all our woes exists only as a page, a dark page of history; but on the margin of that page, and on those of every subsequent page,

methinks an unseen hand writes in indelible characters the part sustained by that unconquerable leader.

To this day there are those who have halted and hesitated as to the Right in the War of the Rebellion. To me the question no more admits of doubt than does the distinction between daylight and darkness. In fact we were in darkness, and God said "Let there be light," and immediately the darkness and gloom of oppression disappeared. Shall I, then, hesitatingly say "*God* knows which was right"? I will say it, but with a different inflection; for not only does He know, but I know, every one who has seen the wonderful change since the contest, knows that God smiled on our cause. With this deep conviction, then, in our hearts is it not meet that we should keep ever green the memory of the man who more than any other, appreciated the exigencies of the hour, who first fell in his devotion to the cause? In these twenty-five years his spirit has been joined by those of Sumner, Greeley, Garrison, Giddings, Phillips, Foster and the many, many thousands who toiled for the wronged of whatever color. Truth, though for a time crushed to earth, has risen again. Freedom reigns indeed in the land of John Brown.

"His soul is marching on."