

JOHN BROWN'S PLACE IN HISTORY.

In the November number of the *Review* the Rev. David N. Utter moves to reverse the judgment heretofore rendered in favor of John Brown of Osawatonic, alleging that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Theodore Parker, and other radical Abolitionists, the makers of our history and literature, the trusted leaders of the North in the war for the Union, "a company of men and women whose peers did not exist in America," conspired to impose a false verdict upon mankind, which has passed into the encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries, and been accepted as true by the civilized world.

In support of this motion, two averments are made.

First. That on May 24, 1856, in the night time, John Brown slew, or caused to be slain, in cold blood and without provocation, five inoffensive citizens living in the valley of Pottawatomie Creek.

Second. That on August 30, 1856, at the battle of Osawatonic, John Brown ran away to save his life.

Whereupon, David N. Utter demands that instead of being adjudged a hero, patriot, and martyr, John Brown shall hereafter be held and declared to have been a felonious poltroon, an impostor, and an assassin.

The equity of history, if not its justice, requires that every man should be tried by the standard of his own time, in the

light of all the circumstances that surrounded him, and judged by the avowed purposes and final results of his whole career. Tested by this canon, it is difficult to treat this performance of David N. Utter either with patience or respect. The vague and puerile generalizations about hero-worship and the causes of the war; the mild ecclesiastical sneer at New England and the higher law; the justification of slave-stealing; the utter ignorance of the fundamental facts of Kansas history; the approval of the acts of the Missourians in killing Frederick Brown and burning the cabins and stealing the stock of the other sons; the perversion of morals in declaring that the Pottawatomie massacre could be sustained if its results had been good, and so foreseen and foretold; the inconsistency of affirming in one sentence that John Brown was a hero in 1859, and in another that his entire public career is to be utterly condemned—all these produce a sensation of bewilderment, and were it not for the faint flavor of the conventicle that pervades the paper, would create the impression that it was intended as a burlesque, like Archbishop Whately's "Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte," rather than as a serious contribution to modern history. When he concludes by declaring that the principles of John Brown were those of the Russian Nihilists—"First make a clean sweep of the present civilization, and let the future build what it can"—wonder becomes mingled with compassion; for there is probably no other intelligent student of public affairs who does not know that the Russian Nihilists demand nothing of the Czar but a liberal constitutional government. However detestable their methods, they do not aim at anarchy. It is seldom that an author reaches the felicity of being misinformed upon all subjects of which he treats.

John Brown was born at Torrington, Conn., May 9, 1800. He was descended in the sixth generation from Peter Brown, an English carpenter, who signed the compact in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, and died in 1633. When five years old, John Brown was taken to Ohio. His youth was uneventful and obscure. At the age of eighteen he went to Massachusetts with the design of obtaining a collegiate education and entering the ministry; but, being attacked with a disorder of the eyes, was compelled to abandon this purpose and return to Ohio. In early manhood he was a surveyor, and traversed the forests of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Later, he was for ten years engaged in business in Pennsylvania, and subsequently in Ohio as a tanner, a cattle dealer, and speculator in real estate. In 1846 he removed with his family to Springfield, Mass., and dealt in wool as a commission merchant; without success. In 1849 he went to North Elba, New York, where he toiled upon a sterile, rocky farm among the Adirondacks, and where his body now lies mouldering in the grave. As early as 1839 he had formed the great life-purpose, which he never relinquished, for the destruction of African slavery. Thenceforward there was no divergence in his career. He was not distracted by ambition, nor wealth, nor ease, nor fame. He never hesitated. Delay did not baffle nor disconcert him, nor discomfiture render him despondent. His tenacity of purpose was inexorable. Those relations, possessions, and pursuits which to most men are the chief objects of existence—home, friends, fortune, estate, power—to him were the most insignificant incidents. He regarded them as trivial, unimportant, and wholly subsidiary to the accomplishment of the great mission for which he had been sent upon earth. His love of justice was an irresistible

passion, and slavery the accident that summoned all his powers into dauntless and strenuous activity.

In the autumn of 1854 four sons and a son-in-law of John Brown joined the column of emigrants that marched to Kansas. They were farmers. They were peaceable, God-fearing men. They had no means of subsistence except the labor of their hands. They were unarmed, but they hated slavery, and believed that Kansas should be free. They settled near Pottawatomie Creek, built humble cabins, and began to cultivate the soil. They were harassed, insulted, raided, and plundered by gangs of marauders, and finally notified to leave the Territory under penalty of death. They associated for defense, and, unable longer to continue the unequal contest, in the summer of 1855 they wrote their father to procure and to bring to Kansas arms, to enable them to protect their lives and property. He arrived, after a tedious journey, through Illinois and Iowa, on the 6th of October, 1855.

David N. Utter declares that John Brown was a "disturbing influence in Kansas from the first," and that he went to the Territory "not as a settler, but to fight." He designates him as an extremist and revolutionist who belonged to an insignificant party that was led by newspaper correspondents and stipendiaries, who really had no right to be in the Territory at all. He attempts to convey the impression that, prior to the arrival of John Brown, there were no other "disturbing influences" at work; that although there had been some casual differences of opinion as to the course that should be pursued with regard to the slave code adopted by the "Bogus Legislature" of 1855, a wise and moderate policy of submission prevailed. The days were halcyon. It was like the garden of Eden, where, in pastoral tranquillity, the

Adams and Ives were naming the beasts and cultivating the fig-tree whose foliage was so soon to be unfortunately more important than its fruit. Even the destruction of Lawrence is dismissed with a flippant paragraph as scarcely worthy of notice. "There was no resistance, and nobody was killed except by accident," murmurs the placid historian. He probably considers that the drunken mob of eight hundred border ruffians who had assembled on their own account, as he says, to wipe out the Abolition town, went to the Territory as "settlers," and not, like John Brown, "to fight."

They were not, like John Brown, "a disturbing influence." They went to Kansas "to make homes and build a State," and so, unlike John Brown, their voice was not "for war." Like the gentleman described by Tacitus, they wanted peace.

There was no trouble till John Brown came with his pernicious revolutionary doctrines. "The pillage and the burning were in consequence of his crimes, and for the whole he deserves censure rather than praise," concludes David N. Utter, who calls this process the "reevaluation of our war heroes," and "getting at the exact facts in every case, let them be what they may," for the benefit of the younger generation, who do not love truth more, but need heroes less, than the men of twenty years ago, in the language of this evangelical iconoclast. It may interest the younger generation to hear a brief account of what occurred in the interval between July 2, 1855, and May 21, 1856, over which this revaluer of heroes skips with such airy levity.

The Legislature was elected March 30th by Missourians who entered the Territory in armed bands for that purpose. Nearly eight hundred attended the polls at Lawrence, with pistols, rifles, Bowie-knives, and two cannons, loaded with

musket-balls. Both branches of the Legislature were unanimously Pro-slavery after July 23d. They devised a scheme by which the people were deprived for two years of all control over the executive, legislative, and judicial departments of the Territorial government. They filled all the offices with Pro-slavery men, and adopted an act to punish offenses against slave property which is probably the most infamous statute that ever blackened the code of any civilized people. It affixed the penalty of death to the crime of carrying or assisting slaves out of the Territory with the intent to procure their freedom, and punished the denial of the right to hold slaves with imprisonment at hard labor for two years with ball and chain.

They adjourned August 30th, and the laws were published in October. The Free State party met at Big Springs, September 5th, and adopted, among other resolutions, the following:

"That we will endure and submit to these laws no longer than the best interests of the Territory require, as the least of two evils, and will resist them to a bloody issue as soon as we ascertain that peaceable remedies shall fail and forcible resistance shall furnish any reasonable prospect of success; and that in the meantime we recommend to our friends throughout the Territory the organization and discipline of volunteer companies and the procurement and preparation of arms."

This convention was followed by another at Topeka on the 19th, to take preliminary steps for the formation of a constitution. Delegates were chosen October 9th, assembled on the 23d, and adjourned November 11th. On the 14th the "Law and Order" party was organized at Leavenworth, and the blood of Free State men began to flow. As early as May these friends of freedom had shaved, tarred and feathered, ridden on a rail, and sold by a negro auctioneer for one dollar, William Phillips, who had ventured to pro-

test against the validity of an election in Leavenworth. In August they subjected Rev. Pardee Butler to great personal indignity at Atchison, and set him adrift down the Missouri on a log raft, because he refused to sign some resolutions adopted at a Pro-slavery meeting held in that town. But these mild remedies were now abandoned. On November 21st Dow was killed. Branson was arrested for taking part in a meeting held to denounce the murder. He was rescued, and the sheriff summoned a *posse*. The Governor called upon all good citizens to aid in Branson's recapture. The excitement was intense. Armed bands crossed the Missouri and hastened to their *rendezvous* at Franklin, under the command of Atchison, a United States senator. The roads were patrolled and wagons robbed. On the 6th of December Barber was shot while traveling homeward. Companies of Free State soldiers marched to the defense of the beleaguered town of Lawrence. Among them were old John Brown and his four sons, equipped for battle. A spectator says:

"They drove up in front of the Free State Hotel, standing in a small lumber-wagon. To each of their persons was strapped a short, heavy broadsword. Each was supplied with fire-arms and revolvers, and poles were standing endwise around the wagon-box with fixed bayonets, pointing upward."

A gaunt, grim, gray, formidable figure! Evidently he was there "not as a settler, but to fight"! But there was no fight. Both sides regarded discretion as the better part of valor. The forces were disbanded, and John Brown and his sons drove their lumber-wagon, with their broadswords, guns, pistols, and pikes to their cabins on the Pottawatomie.

The election under the Topeka constitution was held January 17, 1856. The next morning three Free State men, go-

ing home from Easton, were assailed by a horde of ruffians. Captain R. P. Brown, a member-elect of the Legislature, went to their relief and routed the assailants. The three men, with Captain Brown, continued on their way toward Leavenworth, and were again attacked and overpowered. At night they were all released but Brown, who was dragged out, hacked and gashed with hatchets and knives, thrown into a wagon, exhausted, bleeding, benumbed with cold, and soon expired.

Other murders followed. Governor Shannon said that "the roads were literally strewed with dead bodies." The Missouri River, the chief highway to the territory, was closed, and steamers were searched for ammunition and supplies. In April, Major Buford arrived with large reinforcements from Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. Efforts to arrest Free State men were continued and were resisted. United States troops were sent to Lawrence to aid the civil authorities. A complacent and obsequious grand jury was assembled that found indictments against Governor Robinson, Reeder, and others for high treason, because they had participated in the Free State movement. The Governor fled from the Territory in disguise; Robinson was arrested while *en route* to the East, and brought back under guard for trial. The district court conceived and promulgated the extraordinary doctrine of "constructive treason." Anarchy prevailed, and on the morning of May 21, 1856, a deputy United States marshal, with an immense *posse*, entered Lawrence and arrested a large number of citizens for constructive treason and for bearing arms against the "Government." Later in the day, Sheriff Jones appeared with an armed force and an order of court to destroy as nuisances, two newspaper offices and the Free State Hotel. A demand for the surrender of arms was complied

with; a blood-red banner with a single star and the legend, "South Carolina," was unfurled. The printing offices were destroyed and the material thrown in the river. Four cannon were trained on the hotel, and it was demolished. The day closed with the pillage of stores and houses. The dwelling of Governor Robinson was burned, and night was hideous with the frenzied orgy of the drunken and triumphant marauders. The total value of the property destroyed was about two hundred thousand dollars.

The subjugation of Kansas by the slave power now appeared to be accomplished. The Free State leaders were in prison; the principal towns of the Territory were in the hands of the enemy. This was the result of the "wiser and more moderate policy of submitting," which David N. Utter says had "all along the support of the very best citizens, even the most earnest Abolitionists."

It is not necessary now to discuss the wisdom or unwisdom of the policy of non-resistance which had prevailed to this juncture among the friends of freedom in Kansas. Their situation was difficult and delicate. The National Administration was the ally of their insolent and brutal foes in Missouri and the South. Rival ambitions distracted their councils. Many of the colonists from Indiana, Illinois, and other States along the border, although opposed to slavery, were equally hostile to free negroes, and insisted that they should be excluded from the State. Some favored immediate emancipation; others thought slavery should not be disturbed where it existed. Diplomacy was required to avoid dissension. Passion, violence, and retaliation might have invoked more irreparable disasters, though nothing could have much retarded the crisis which we now see had been long impending.

John Brown regarded the policy as nerveless and emasculated. It became soon apparent that he was in earnest. His impatient criticisms upon the political leaders were caustic and intolerable. He was not a politician, and wanted no office. He had no sympathy with the demand that Kansas should be a free white State. He believed in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

The effect of the destruction of Lawrence was instantaneous. Emboldened by their long immunity, the Pro-slavery leaders openly avowed the policy of extermination, and called upon their followers, in the chastely picturesque language of the Squatter Sovereign newspaper, to "tar and feather, drown, lynch, and hang every white-livered Abolitionist who dares to pollute our soil."

The company to which John Brown and his sons belonged had marched to the relief of Lawrence on the 21st, but, learning of its destruction, had camped in the valley of Ottawa Creek, several miles south. The next day Major Williams, a neighbor and friend of the Browns, rode into camp and told them that trouble was anticipated on the Pottawatomie. 'Squire Morse had been notified to leave the Territory within three days. John Grant, Mr. Winer, and several others in the neighborhood had received similar notices from George Wilson, the probate judge of the county. Judge Hanway, of Lane, who lived near, and whose death occurred recently, says the conspiracy was formed to "drive out, burn, and kill; and that Pottawatomie Creek was to be cleared of every man, woman, and child who was for Kansas being a free State."

Among the most active and resolute of these "Law and Order" partisans were] the Doyles, father and sons; the brothers William and Henry Sherman, Allen Wilkinson, and

George Wilson. Wilkinson, a native of Tennessee, was postmaster and had been a member of the "Bogus Legislature." He was a violent ruffian, and his widow remarked to Dr. Gilpatrick, the first person who called on the morning after his death, that she had often urged him to be more quiet and moderate in his language, but that he would not heed her advice. When the news of the fall of Lawrence arrived, Henry Sherman raised a red flag over his cabin, and announced that the war had begun. Henry was an amiable person. In a previous judicial proceeding he declared, under oath, that he "would rather kill that old man who wore spectacles and lived on the hill than to kill a rattlesnake." The object of his animadversion was the Rev. David Baldwin, long afterward resident at Garnett, in an adjoining county.

The story of the death of these men has been circumstantially told by James Townsley, who accompanied the expedition, and, barring some tawdry rhetoric, is fairly repeated by David N. Utter; but he omits to add what Townsley says in his statement on the 3d of August, 1882, as to the effect of the killing. His words are:

"I became and am satisfied that it resulted in good to the Free State cause, and was especially beneficial to the Free State settlers on Pottawatomie Creek. The Pro-slavery men were dreadfully terrified, and large numbers of them left the Territory. It was afterward said that one Free State man could scare a company of them."

Judge Hanway, before quoted, says:

"I did not know of a settler of '56 but what regarded it as amongst the most fortunate events in the history of Kansas. It saved the lives of the Free State men on the Creek, and those who did the act were looked upon as deliverers."

One of the most eminent of the Free State leaders, who is still living, writes:

"He was the only man who comprehended the situation, and saw the absolute necessity for some such blow, and had the nerve to strike it."

Another prominent actor writes:

"I wish to say right here about the Pottawatomie Creek massacre, which has been the theme of so much magazine literature, that at the time it occurred it was approved by myself and hundreds of others, including the most prominent of the leaders among the Free State men.

"It was one of the stern, merciless necessities of the times. The night it was done I was but a few miles away on guard, to protect from destruction the homes of Free State men and their families, who had been notified by these men and their allies to leave within a limited time or forfeit their lives and property. The women and children dared not sleep in the houses, and were hid away in the thickets. Something had to be done, and the avenger appeared, and the doomed men perished—they who had doomed others."

It was the "blood-and-iron" prescription of Bismarck. The Pro-slavery butchers of Kansas and their Missouri confederates learned that it was no longer safe to kill. They discovered, at last, that nothing is so unprofitable as injustice. They started from their guilty dream to find before them, silent and tardy, but inexorable and relentless, with uplifted blade, the awful apparition of vengeance and retribution.

When John Brown, Jr., learned of the massacre, we were informed that he resigned his command and went home, where he was soon after arrested. So great was his abhorrence of his father's crime that he became insane, and during his ravings denounced his father as an atrocious criminal and unmitigated coward. These statements are made upon the testimony of G. W. Brown, in the *Herald of Freedom* in 1859. The witness may be competent, but he is not disinterested. He sustains the same relation to the anti-slavery men of '56 that Judas Iscariot did to the disciples, and is as well qualified to write their history as Judas Iscariot would be to revise the New Testament. John Brown, Jr., instead of being "ar-

rested," was captured by Captain Pate, manacled with ox-chains, and driven under a hot sun till he became delirious from heat, fatigue, and hunger. He wrote many letters to his father while in captivity. The following extracts from one, dated September 8, 1856, will show the relations that existed between them, and the opinion he entertained of his father:

"Dear Father and Brother:

* * * * * Having before heard of Frederick's death, and that you were missing, my anxiety on your account has been most intense. Though my dear brother I shall never see again here, yet I thank God you and Jason still live. Poor Frederick has perished in a good cause, the success of which cause I trust will yet bring joy to millions. * * * *

"I can, I have no doubt, succeed in making my escape to you from here. * * * * I am anxious to see you both, in order to perfect some plan of escape, in case it should appear best. Come up if you consistently can. The battle of Osawatomie is considered here as the great fight so far, and, considering the enemy's loss, it is certainly a great victory for us—certainly a very dear burning of the town for them. * * * *
 Everyone I hear speaking of you are loud in your praise. The Missourians in this region show signs of great fear. * * * *

"Hoping to see you soon, I am, as ever,

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE SON AND BROTHER."

The effect of the transaction upon Kansas, according to David N. Utter, was "only evil," and upon the career of John Brown was "pervasive, decisive, overwhelming," whatever that may mean. He could not live in Kansas, continues the veracious chronicler, nor anywhere else safely, so he disguised himself by cutting off his beard and fled to New England, where he won the confidence of some of her greatest and noblest men; after which he hovered on the border of two States, waiting for a signal from some unknown person to come over to Kansas and massacre a constitutional convention. There were so many in those days that one could have been killed without being missed; but for some reason the plot

failed, and after awhile he ventured into Kansas again, made a raid into Missouri, captured some slaves, and escorted them to Canada.

This reaches the true dignity of history. As a matter of fact, John Brown did live many months in Kansas after the Pottawatomie slaughter. He participated in the battles at Franklin, Battle Mound, Sugar Creek, Osawatomie, and Black Jack. He was present at the siege of Lawrence in September, and soon after went East for funds and arms. He lay ill several weeks in Iowa, but reached Chicago in November. Early in 1857 he reached Boston, and appeared in "disguise" before the Legislature, asking an appropriation of ten thousand dollars to defend Northern men in Kansas. Later in the season he returned to the Territory, where he remained with brief intervals of absence until January, 1859, organizing his forces for the final crusade against slavery, in accordance with plans long entertained and definitely embodied in his "Provisional Constitution," framed at Chatham, Canada West, in May, 1858.

In December, 1858, a negro from Missouri came to his cabin on the Osage, and informed him that he was about to be sold, with his family, and begged for aid to escape. John Brown immediately organized two companies, invaded Missouri, liberated eleven slaves, and returned with the supplies necessary for their support. The Governor of the State offered three thousand dollars reward for the arrest of John Brown, which the President of the United States supplemented with an offer of two hundred and fifty more. John Brown retorted by a printed proclamation, offering two dollars and fifty cents for the delivery of James Buchanan to him in camp. He moved slowly northward with his four families of emigrants, colonized

them near Windsor in Canada in March, 1859, and returned to Kansas no more.

His subsequent career belongs to the history of the Nation. Out of the portentous and menacing cloud of anti-slavery sentiment that had long brooded with sullen discontent, a baleful meteor above the North, he sprang like a terrific thunderbolt, whose lurid glare illuminated the continent with its devastating flame, and whose reverberations among the splintered crags of Harper's Ferry were repeated on a thousand battle-fields from Gettysburg to the Gulf. From the instant that shot was fired the discussion and debate of centuries was at an end. He who was not for slavery was against it. The North became vertebrated, and the age of cartilage and compromise was at an end. The Nation seized the standard of universal emancipation which dropped from his dying hand on the scaffold at Charlestown, and bore it in triumph to Appomattox.

He died as he had lived, a Puritan of the Puritans. There was no perturbation in his serene and steadfast soul. Few productions in literature are more remarkable than his letters written in prison, while he was under sentence of death. He said:

"I can trust God with both the time and the manner of my death, believing, as I now do, that for me at this time to seal my testimony for God and humanity with my blood will do vastly more toward advancing the cause I have earnestly endeavored to promote than all I have done in my life before."

"As I believe most firmly that God reigns, I cannot believe that anything I have done, suffered, or may yet suffer will be lost to the cause of God or humanity; and before I began my work at Harper's Ferry I felt assured that, in the worst event, it would certainly pay."

"I am quite cheerful. I do not feel myself in the least degraded by my imprisonment, my chains, or the near prospect of the gallows. Men cannot imprison, chain, nor hang the soul! * * * I am endeavoring to get ready for another field of action, where no defeat befalls the truly brave."

"It is a great comfort to feel assured that I am permitted to die for a cause, and not merely to pay the debt of Nature, which all must. I feel myself to be most unworthy of so great distinction."

"I feel just as content to die for God's eternal truth, and for suffering humanity, on the scaffold as in any other way."

"I think I cannot now better serve the cause I love so much than to die for it; and in my death I may do more than in my life."

"I do not believe I shall deny my Lord and Master Jesus Christ, and I should if I denied my principles against slavery."

What immortal and dauntless courage breathes in this procession of stately sentences; what fortitude; what patience; what faith; what radiant and eternal hope! No pagan philosopher, no Hebrew prophet, no Christian martyr, ever spoke in loftier and more heroic strains than this "coward and murderer," who declared from the near brink of an ignominious grave that there was no acquisition so splendid as moral purity; no inheritance so desirable as personal liberty; nothing on this earth nor in the world to come so valuable as the soul, whatever the hue of its habitation; no impulse so noble as an unconquerable purpose to love truth, and an invincible determination to obey God.

Carlyle says that when any great change in human society is to be wrought, God raises up men to whom that change is made to appear as the one thing needful and absolutely indispensable. Scholars, orators, poets, philanthropists play their parts, but the crisis comes at last through some one who is stigmatized as a fanatic by his contemporaries, and whom the supporters of the systems he assails crucify between thieves or gibbet as a felon. The man who is not afraid to die for an idea is its most potential and convincing advocate.

Already the great intellectual leaders of the movement for the abolition of slavery are dead. The student of the future

will exhume their orations, arguments, and state papers as a part of the subterranean history of the epoch. The antiquarian will dig up their remains from the alluvial drift of the period, and construe their relations to the great events in which they were actors; but the three men of this era who will loom forever against the remotest horizon of time, as the Pyramids above the voiceless deserts, or mountain peaks over the subordinate plains, are Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and Old John Brown of Osawatomie.