

XI.

THE VICTORY OVER DEATH.

THE sun rose clear and bright on the 2d of December. A haze, that presently veiled it, soon disappeared; and ere the hour appointed for the hero's death, not a cloud was to be seen in the ethereal expanse. The temperature was so exceedingly genial, that, until late in the afternoon, the windows of all the houses were open.

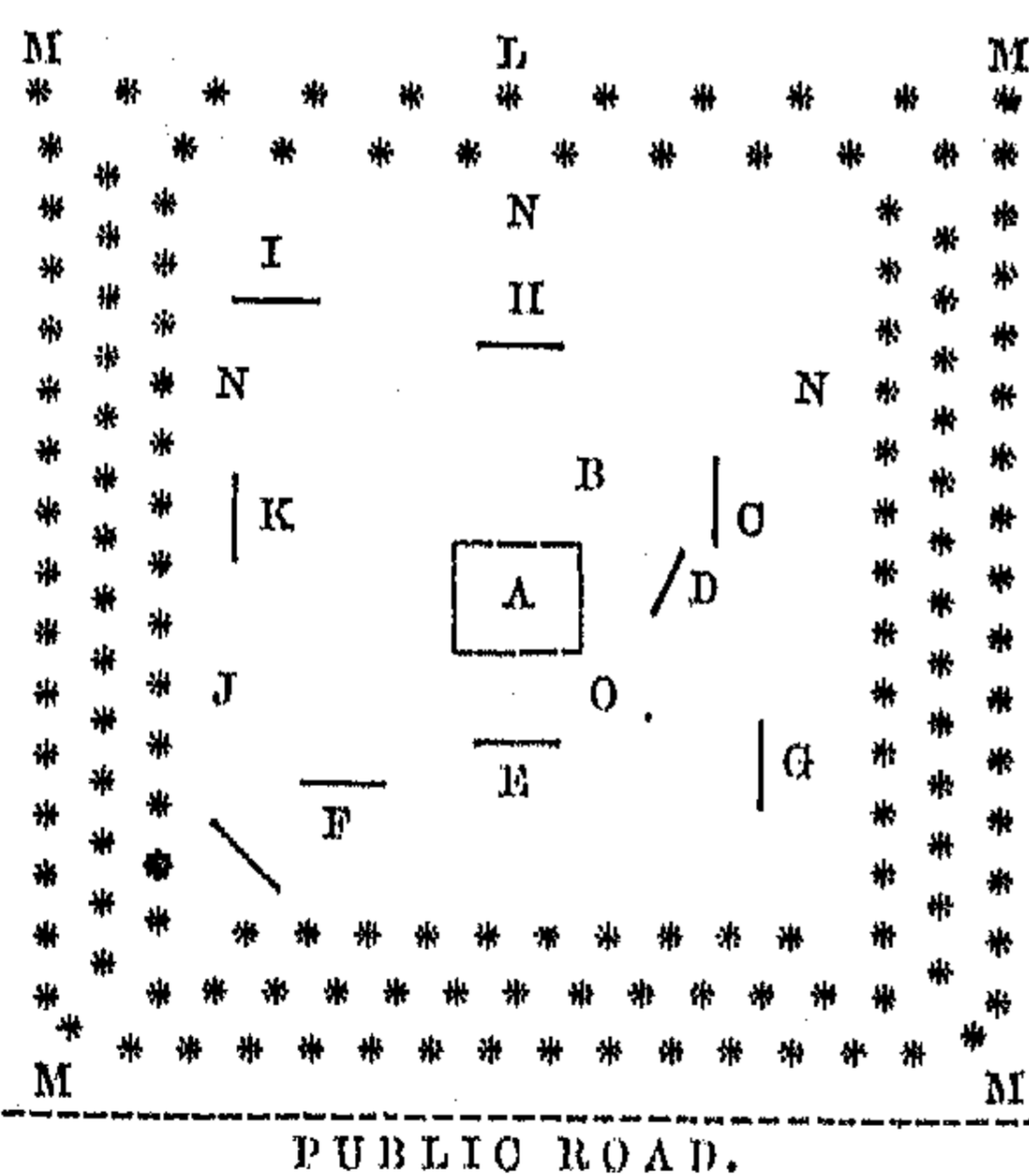
THE SCAFFOLD.

On the previous evening, the timber for the scaffold had been removed from "the enclosure of the new Baptist church," to a field about half a mile distant from the jail, which had been fixed on by the General in command, and marked out with white flags on short stakes, to indicate the position the several sentries should occupy. At seven o'clock the carpenters began the work of erecting the scaffold. When finished, it was about six feet high, twelve wide, and fifteen or eighteen in length. A hand rail extended around three sides and down the flight of steps. On the other side, stout uprights, with a cross beam, which was supported by strong braces. In the centre of the cross beam was an iron hook, from which the rope was suspended. The trap beneath was arranged to swing on hinges, attached to the platform so slightly as to break from

it when the cord was cut that upheld the trap. The cord, knotted at the end, passed through a hole in the trap, through another hole in the cross beam, over the corner, and down the upright, to a hook near the ground, to which it was tied. Thus, the weight of a man being placed on it, when the cord near the hook was cut, the trap would fall at once.

THE MILITARY PARADE.

At eight o'clock the troops began to arrive; and at nine the first company took position. Horsemen clothed in scarlet jackets were posted around the field at fifty feet apart, and a double line of sentries was stationed farther in. As each company arrived, it took its allotted position. The following diagram will explain the position of the military forces:



DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD. — A, Scaffold; B, Generals and Staff; C, Virginia Cadets; D, Cadet Howitzers, with cannon pointed at scaffold; E, Richmond Company; F, Winchester Continentals; G, Fauquier Cavalry; H, Company A of Richmond; I, Alexandria Riflemen; K, Riflemen, and part of Capt. Ashby's Cavalry, to keep order in the small crowd. J, Hunter's Guard, at entrance gate, supported by a piece of Artillery under command of Lieut. Green of the United States Marines; L, Woods scoured by the Woodis Rifles, to have the first brush at the enemy, if approaching from Harper's Ferry; M M M M, Pickets of the Fauquier Cavalry; N N N, Two lines of Sentries; O, Petersburg Grays as Body Guard to prisoner in wagon.

The first companies of infantry and cavalry having taken their position, the artillery then arrived, with a huge brass cannon, which was so placed and pointed that, in the event of an attempted rescue, the prisoner might be blown into shreds by the heavy charge of grape shot that lay hidden in it. Other cannon were stationed, with equal care, to sweep the jail and every approach to it. From eight o'clock till ten, the military were in constant motion. The extent of these precautions may be inferred from the fact that lines of pickets and patrols encircled the field of death for fifteen miles, and that over five hundred troops were posted about the scaffold. Nearly three thousand militia soldiers were on the ground. There were not more than four hundred citizens present; for the fears of a servile insurrection, or an anti-slavery invasion, had kept them at home to watch the movements of their slaves.

IN JAIL.

John Brown rose at daybreak, resumed his correspondence with undiminished energy, and continued to write till half past ten o'clock, when the Sheriff, Jailer, and assistants entered, and told him that he must prepare to die.

The Sheriff bade him farewell in his cell. The old man quietly thanked him for his kindness, and spoke of Captain Avis, his jailer, as a brave man. He was then led to the cell of Copeland and Green. This interview is thus reported:

"He told them to stand up like men, and not betray their friends. He then handed them a quarter of a dollar each, saying he had no more use for money, and bade them adieu. He then visited Cook and

Coppoc, who were chained together, and remarked to Cook: 'You have made false statements.'

"Cook asked: 'What do you mean?'

"Brown answered: 'Why, by stating that I sent you to Harper's Ferry.'

"Cook replied: 'Did you not tell me in Pittsburg to come to Harper's Ferry and see if Forbes had made any disclosures?'

"Brown: 'No, sir; you knew I protested against your coming.'

"Cook replied: 'Captain Brown, we remember differently,' at the same time dropping his head.

"Brown then turned to Coppic and said: 'Coppoc, you also made false statements, but I am glad to hear you have contradicted them. Stand up like a man.' He also handed him a quarter. He shook both by the hand, and they parted.

"The prisoner was then taken to Stevens's cell, and they kindly interchanged greetings.

"Stevens: 'Good by, Captain; I know you are going to a better land.'

"Brown replied: 'I know I am.' Brown told him to bear up, and not betray his friends, giving him a quarter.

"He did not visit Hazlett, as he has always persisted in denying any knowledge of him."

How touchingly manly, and yet what childlike simplicity! "I know I am" — "he gave them a quarter," are both equally characteristic of the man.

A TRIUMPHAL MARCH.

At eleven o'clock, John Brown came out of jail. An eye witness said of his appearance at this solemn moment: "He seemed to walk out of the Gates of Fame; his countenance was radiant; he walked with the step of a conqueror." Another spectator — every one, in truth, who saw the old man — corroborated this report: On leaving the jail, he wrote, John Brown had on his face an expression of calmness and serenity characteristic of the patriot who is about to die, with a living consciousness that he is laying down his life for the good of his fellow-creatures. His face was even joyous, and a forgiving smile rested upon his lips.

His was the lightest heart, among friend or foe, in the whole of Charlestown that day; and not a word was spoken that was not an intuitive appreciation of his manly courage. Firmly, with elastic step, he moved forward. No flinching of a coward's heart there. He stood in the midst of that organized mob, from whose despotic hearts petty tyranny seemed for the nonce eliminated by the admiration they had on once beholding a MAN; for John Brown was there every inch a man.

As he stepped out of the door, a black woman, with a little child in her arms, stood near his way. The twain were of the despised race for whose emancipation and elevation to the dignity of children of God he was about to lay down his life. His thoughts at that moment none can know except as his acts interpret them. He stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed it affectionately. That mother will be proud of that mark of distinction for her offspring; and some day, when over the ashes of John Brown the temple of Virginia liberty is reared, she may join in the joyful song of praise which on that soil will do justice to his memory. As he passed along, a black woman with a child in her arms, ejaculated, "God bless you, old man; I wish I could help you, but I cannot." He heard her, and, as he looked at her, a tear stood in his eye.

The vehicle which was to convey John Brown to the scaffold was a furniture wagon. On the front seat was the driver, a man named Hawks,* said to be a native

* Reader, is not this symbolical? Think and say and act accordingly.

of Massachusetts, but for many years a resident of Virginia, and by his side was seated Mr. Saddler, the undertaker. In the box was placed the coffin, made of black walnut, enclosed in a poplar box with a flat lid, in which coffin and remains were to be transported to the North. John Brown mounted the wagon, and took his place in the seat with Captain Avis, the jailer, whose admiration of his prisoner is of the profoundest nature. Mr. Saddler, too, was one of John Brown's staunchest friends in his confinement, and pays a noble tribute to his manly qualities.

He mounted the wagon with perfect calmness. It was immediately surrounded with cavalry. This military escort of the warrior of the Lord to the scene of his last earthly victory, consisted of Captain Scott's company of cavalry, one company of Major Loring's battalion of defensibles, Captain Williams's Montpelier Guard, Captain Scott's Petersburg Greys, Company D, Captain Miller, of the Virginia Volunteers, and the Young Guard, Captain Rady; the whole under the command of Colonel T. P. August, assisted by Major Loring — the cavalry at the head and rear of the column.

The wagon was drawn by two white horses. From the time of leaving jail until he mounted the gallows stairs, he wore a smile upon his countenance, and his keen eye took in every detail of the scene. There was no blenching, nor the remotest approach to cowardice nor nervousness. As he was leaving jail, when asked if he thought he could endure his fate, he said, "I can endure almost any thing but parting from friends; that is very hard." On the road to the scaffold, he said, in

reply to an inquiry, "It has been a characteristic of me, from infancy, not to suffer from physical fear. I have suffered a thousand times more from bashfulness than from fear."

"I was very near the old man," writes an eye witness, "and scrutinized him closely. He seemed to take in the whole scene at a glance; and he straightened himself up proudly, as if to set to the soldiers an example of a soldier's courage. The only motion he made, beyond a swaying to and fro of his body, was that same patting of his knees with his hands that we noticed throughout his trial and while in jail. As he came upon an eminence near the gallows, he cast his eye over the beautiful landscape, and followed the windings of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance. He looked up earnestly at the sun, and sky, and all about, and then remarked, 'This is a beautiful country. I have not cast my eyes over it before — that is, while passing through the field.'"

"Yes," was the sad reply of the brave Captain Avis.

"You are a game man, Captain Brown," said Mr. Saddler.

"Yes," he said, "I was so trained up; it was one of the lessons of my mother; but it is hard to part from friends, though newly made."

"You are more cheerful than I am, Captain Brown," responded Mr. Saddler.

"Yes," said the hero, "*I ought to be.*"

THE FIELD OF DEATH.

By this time, the wagon had reached the field of death—the warrior's last battle ground. It is thus described:

"The field contained about forty acres, I should say, part of it in corn stubble, but the greater part in grass. The surface is undulating, and a broad hillock near the public road was selected as the site for the gallows, because it would afford the distant spectators a fair view, and place the prisoner so high that if compelled to fire upon him, the soldiers need not shoot each other or the civilians. The field was bounded on the south by the road, on the north by a pretty bit of woodland, and on the remaining two sides by enclosed fields."

The sun shone with great splendor as the condemned hero's escort came up, and afar off could be seen the bright gleaming muskets and bayonets of his body guard, hedging him in, in close ranks, all about. On the field the several companies glittered with the same sparkle of guns and trappings; and the gay colors of their uniforms, made more intense in the glare, came out into strong relief, with the dead tints of sod and woods. Away off to the east and south, the splendid mass of the Blue Ridge loomed against the sky and shut in the horizon. Over the woods towards the north-east, long, thin stripes of cloud had gradually accumulated, and foreboded the storm that came in due time; while, looking towards the south, the eye took in an undulating fertile country, stretching out to the distant mountains. All nature seemed at peace, and the shadow of the approaching solemnity seemed to have been cast over the soldiers, for there was not a sound to be heard as the column came slowly up the road. There was no band of musicians to heighten the effect of the scene by playing the march of the dead, but with solemn tread the heavy footfalls came as of those of one man. Thus they passed to their station to the easterly side of the scaffold.

As the procession entered the field, the old hero, as

if surprised at the absence of the people, remarked: "I see no citizens here — where are they?"

"The citizens are not allowed to be present — none but the troops," was the reply.

"That ought not to be," said the old man; "citizens should be allowed to be present as well as others."

THE MARTYR CROWNED.

The wagon halted. The troops composing the escort took up their assigned position; but the Petersburg Greys, as the immediate body guard, remained as before, closely hemming the old hero in — as if still as afraid of his sword of Gideon, as the State had proved itself to be of his sword of the Lord, by preventing the people from listening to his last words. They finally opened ranks to let him pass out; when, with the assistance of two men, he descended from the wagon. Mr. Hunter and Mayor Green were standing near by. "Gentlemen, good by," the old man said in an unflinching tone; and then, with firm step and erect form, he calmly walked past jailers, sheriff, and officers, and mounted the scaffold steps. He was the first man that stood on it. As he quietly awaited the necessary arrangements, he surveyed the scenery unmoved, looking principally in the direction of the people in the far distance. "There is no faltering in his step," wrote one who saw him, "but firmly and erect he stands amid the almost breathless lines of soldiery that surround him. With a graceful motion of his pinioned right arm he takes the slouched hat from his head and carelessly casts it upon the platform by his side." "I know," said another witness, "that every one within

view was greatly impressed with the dignity of his bearing. I have since heard men of the South say that his courageous fortitude and insensibility to fear filled them with amazement."

The hour had now come. The officer approached him. To Captain Avis he said: "I have no words to thank you for all your kindness to me."

His elbows and ankles are pinioned, the white cap is drawn over his eyes, the hangman's rope is adjusted around his neck. John Brown is ready to be ushered into the land of the hereafter.

"Captain Brown," said the Sheriff, "you are not standing on the drop. Will you come forward?"

"I can't see, gentlemen," was the old man's answer, unfalteringly spoken, "you must lead me."

The Sheriff led his prisoner forward to the centre of the drop.

"Shall I give you a handkerchief," asked the Sheriff, "and let you drop it as a signal?"

"No; I am ready at any time; but do not keep me needlessly waiting."

This was the last of John Brown's requests of Virginia; and this, like all the others, was refused. When he pleaded for delay during the progress of his trial, the State refused it, and hurried him to his doom; and now, when he asked, standing on the gallows, blindfolded, and with the rope that was to strangle him around his neck, for no unnecessary delay, the demoniacal spirit of slavery again turned a deaf ear to his request. Instead of permitting the execution to be at once consummated, the proceedings were checked by the

martial order—"Not ready yet;" and the hideous mockery of a vast military display began. For ten minutes at least, under the orders of the commanding officer, the troops trod heavily over the ground, hither and thither, now advancing towards the gallows, now turning about in sham defiance of an imaginary enemy.

Each moment to every humane man seemed an hour, and some of the people, unable to restrain an expression of their sense of the outrage, murmured—*Shame! Shame!*

At last the order was given, and the rope was severed with a hatchet. As the trap fell, its hinges gave a wailing sort of scream, that could be heard at every point on the fields.*

John Brown is slowly strangling—for the shortness of the rope prevents a speedy death.

"There was but one spasmodic effort of the hands to clutch at the neck, but for nearly five minutes the limbs jerked and quivered. He seemed to retain an extraordinary hold upon life. One who has seen numbers of men hung before, told me he had never seen so hard a struggle. After the body had dangled in mid air for twenty minutes, it was examined by the surgeons for signs of life. First the Charlestown physicians went up and made their examination, and after them the military surgeons, the prisoner being executed by the civil power, and with military assistance as well. To see them lifting up the arms, now powerless, that

* "Was this symbolic," asks an able writer, "of the wail of grief that went up at the moment from thousands of friends to the cause of emancipation throughout the land? In the dead stillness of the hour it went to my heart like the wail for the departed that may be heard in some highland glen."

once were so strong, and placing their ears to the breast of the corpse, holding it steady by passing an arm around it, was revolting in the extreme. And so the body dangled and swung by its neck, turning to this side or that when moved by the surgeons, and swinging pendulum like, from the force of the south wind that was blowing, until, after thirty-eight minutes from the time of swinging off, it was ordered to be cut down, the authorities being quite satisfied that their dreaded enemy was dead. The body was lifted upon the scaffold, and fell into a heap. It was then put into the black walnut coffin, the body guard closed in about the wagon, the cavalry led the van, and the mournful procession moved off."

There was another procession at that moment — unseen by the Virginians: a procession of earth's holiest martyrs before the Throne of God: and from among them came a voice, which said:

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world. . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The soul of John Brown stood at the right hand of the Eternal. He had fought the good fight, and now wore the crown of victory.

In the prison of Charlestown a plaintive wail was heard. Sustained by no religious convictions, one prisoner was in great agony of mind. The scaffold from which the stainless soul of John Brown leaped from

earth into the bosom of the God of the oppressed, was only half a mile behind the jail in which his body had been confined. "From the windows of his cell Cook had an unobstructed view of the whole proceedings. He watched his old Captain until the trap fell and his body swung into mid air, when he turned away and gave vent to his feelings."

With his sword and his voice John Brown had demonstrated the unutterable villany of slavery. His corpse was destined to continue the lesson. The surgeons pronounced the old man dead; they declared that his spinal column had been ruptured; they said that the countenance was now purple and distorted; they knew that the cord had cut a finger's depth into the neck of the strangled corpse.

Yet, as the animal heat still remained in the body, it was not permitted to be taken away until it should cool. Even this precaution against an earthly resurrection did not satisfy the hearts corrupted by slavery.

"I heard it suggested by a Captain," writes a witness of unquestioned veracity, "that a good dose of arsenic should be administered to the corpse to make sure work; and many others wished that at least the head might be cut off and retained by them, since the body was to be embalmed, and, on gorgeous catafalques, carried in procession through Northern cities. This bloodthirstiness is on a par," the writer adds, "with that of the students at the Winchester Medical College, who have skinned the body of one of Brown's sons, separated the nervous and muscular and venous

406 The Victory over Death.

systems, dried and varnished, and have the whole hung up as a nice anatomical illustration. Some of the students wished to stuff the skin; others to make it into game pouches."

Such is the spirit of Southern Slavery!

"The body once in its coffin and on its way back to the jail," wrote a correspondent, "the field was quickly deserted, the cannon, limbered up again, rumbled away, and the companies of infantry and troops of cavalry in solid column marched away. The body had not left the field before the carpenters began to take the scaffold to pieces, that it might be stored up against the 16th instant, when it will be used to hang Cook and Coppie together. A separate gallows will be built for the two negroes."

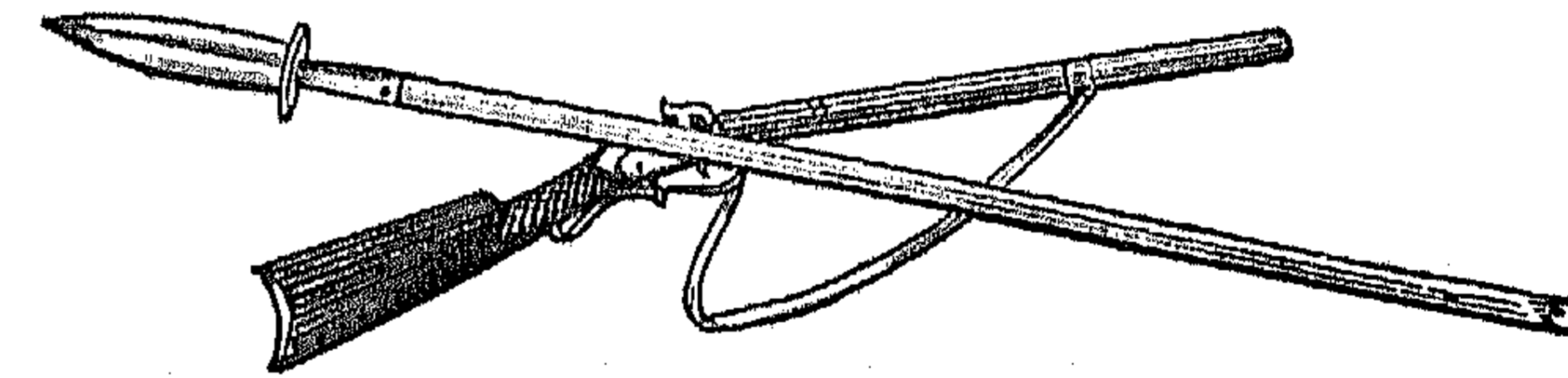
"The night after the execution has set in dark and stormy. The south wind has brought up a violent storm."

The body of John Brown was delivered to his widow at Harper's Ferry, and by her it was carried to North Elba, where it now lies at rest on the bosom of the majestic mountain region that he loved when living. It was interred as only dead heroes should be buried. There was no vast assemblage of "the so-called great;" no pompous parade; no gorgeous processions; but loyal worth and noble genius stood at the grave of departed heroism; for his friends and his family wept as the Heaven-inspired soul of Wendell Phillips pronounced the eulogium of John Brown,—the latest and our greatest martyr to the teachings of the Bible and the American Idea.

The Victory over Death. 407

As the coffin was lowered into the grave, a clergy man, with prophetic voice, repeated these words of the Apostle Paul:

"I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me; and not to me only, but unto all that love his appearing."



SAMSON AGONISTES.

DECEMBER 2, 1859.

YOU bound and made your sport of him, Philistia!

You fet your sons at him to flout and jeer;
You loaded down his limbs with heavy fetters;
Your mildest mercy was a smiling sneer.

One man, among a thousand who defied him,

One man from whom his awful strength had fled—
You brought him out to lash him with your vengeance;
Ten thousand curses on one hoary head!

You think his eyes are closed and blind forever,

Because you feared them to this mortal day;
You draw a longer breath of exultation,
Because your conqueror's power is torn away.

Oh fools! his arms are round your temple pillars:

Oh blind! his strength divine begins to wake,
Hark! the great roof-tree trembles from its centre—
Hark! how the rafters bend, and swerve, and shake!