

III.

THE MAN.

I DO NOT propose, in the present volume, to minutely trace the life of John Brown from the date of his first marriage in 1821, up to the time of his removal to Massachusetts, in 1846. Although this period embraces twenty-five years, its incidents do not form an essential part of his public career; nor is a knowledge of them requisite to correctly comprehend the illustrious actions of his later age. Every record of this quarter of a century, let it suffice for me to state, exhibits to us the same earnest, pious, and heroic character, which, by its unusual manifestations during the last two months, has thrilled the pulses of sixteen States. The keeper of sheep, the humble farmer and tanner, appears, by the writings he has left behind him, and the testimony of all who knew him, equally as courageous and devout a personage as the Liberator of Kansas, the Invader of Virginia, and the Prisoner of the Jail of Charlestown.

The last chapter, indeed, is a prophecy of what his future life would be, too faithful in its outline, and too minute in its details, to render any record of its fulfil-

ment, in every varying phase of his business career, essential to a just conception of his character. It would be easy and safe enough to pass over these twenty-five years, without looking at a solitary incident of them, and yet to know that he would, and how he would, pour them full to the brim of the living waters of earnest deeds. Given: a stern inflexibility of purpose, and an earnestness of nature so intense that it did not seem to exist, — as wheels that revolve with the velocity of lightning, hardly seem to the looker-on to be moving at all; adding to them an infinite faith in God, and man, and freedom, growing out of a soul of the utmost integrity, self-reliance, modesty, and almost child-like simplicity, transfused with the teachings of Jesus Christ, and inspired by the examples of the Old Testament: putting this rare creation into the walks of lowly life, at the head of a loyal and patriarchal household, and in a nation which, in its eager hunt after gold, too often extinguishes the Holy Lamp placed by the hand of Deity in the human soul; and one can readily foresee how, wherever it shall move, common men at times must stand aghast at it — smiling sometimes in derision — oftener speaking in a pity begotten of involuntary admiration for the poor “monomaniac,” who is so erratic as to follow his Heaven-implanted instincts, “no matter how ridiculous” in the eyes of fools they may be, “or how inconvenient to himself;” and “without the intellect to comprehend the necessities, the nature, and the obligations arising out of civil society.”* To understand John Brown, the

* These phrases are quoted from conservative Republican journals. I spare the editors the misfortune of their names.

first thing needed is, to know what earnest sincerity means: Do you believe in God? Do you believe the Bible? John Brown believed in Jehovah and His Word. Sincerely, for nothing was permitted to stand between the commandments of Jehovah and his obedience to them; sincerely, for while our scribes and pharisees derided him, he translated his belief into earnest deeds, and thereby proved how vain and false were their loud professions. He was the last of the old Puritan type of Christians. Gideon to him, and Joshua, and Moses, were not interesting historic characters merely, — as, judging from their acts, modern Christians regard them but holy examples set before us, by Deity himself, for our imitation and our guidance. Is the Bible true? Yes, say many modern Christians, never doubting their own sincerity, and then denounce any forcible emancipation of God’s enslaved poor. If the Bible is the true Word, it follows that it is right to slay God’s enemies, if it be necessary thus to deliver God’s persecuted people. In John Brown’s eyes, what Joshua did, and Jehovah sanctioned, could not be wrong. And so with every doctrine. Between the command of the Lord of Hosts and implicit obedience to it, he permitted neither Creed nor Platform, Constitution nor Law, to intervene. Did the Fathers of the Republic intend to tolerate slavery? He might admit the historic fact; but still would he obey the divine command — and interfere with slavery. There was in him no deep gulf fixed, as there in most men is, between the Third Heaven of their abstract theories and the Bottomless Pit of their civil actions.

It was thus in every relation of his private life, during this long period of twenty-five years, over which we will now hurriedly pass, in order that we may the sooner come to those gigantic cameras — Harper's Ferry, and the Jail of Charlestown — in which, for forty days, every line and lineament of the old Puritan's noble soul were drawn with the unvarying fidelity of Nature.

THE FAMILY RECORD.

John Brown was married to his first wife, Dianthe Lusk, June 21, 1820, at Hudson, in Ohio. In order to make no interruptions in the narrative, or confusion of dates, I subjoin here the family record as it stood at John Brown's death.

By his first wife, John Brown had seven children :

JOHN BROWN, junior, July 25, 1821, at Hudson, Ohio; married Wealthy C. Hotchkiss, July, 1847. He now lives in Ashtabula County, Ohio; now fully recovered from his once dangerous malady.

JASON BROWN, January 19, 1823, Hudson, Ohio; married Ellen Sherboudy, July, 1847.

OWEN BROWN, November 4, 1824, Hudson, Ohio; he escaped from Harper's Ferry.

FREDERICK BROWN, (1st,) January 9, 1827, Richmond, Pennsylvania; died March 31, 1831.

RUTH BROWN, February 18, 1829, Richmond, Pennsylvania; married Henry Thompson, September 26, 1850.

FREDERICK BROWN, (2d,) December 21, 1830, Richmond, Pennsylvania; murdered at Osawatimie by Rev. Martin White, August 30, 1856.

AN INFANT SON, born August 7, 1832, was buried with his mother three days after his birth.

By his second wife, Mary A. Day, to whom he was married at Meadville, Pennsylvania, (while he was living at Richmond, in Crawford County,) he had thirteen children :

SARAH BROWN, born May 11, 1834, at Richmond, Pennsylvania; died September 23, 1843.

WATSON BROWN, October 7, 1835, Franklin, Ohio; married Isabella M. Thompson, September, 1856; wounded at Harper's Ferry, October 17, while bearing a flag of truce; died October 19, 1859.

SALMON BROWN, October 2, 1836, Hudson, Ohio; married Abbie C. Hinekley, October 15, 1856; lives at North Elba.

CHARLES BROWN, November 3, 1837, Hudson, Ohio; died September 11, 1843.

OLIVER BROWN, March 9, 1839, Franklin, Ohio; married Martha E. Brewster, April 17, 1858; killed at Harper's Ferry, October 17, 1859.

PETER BROWN, December 7, 1840, Hudson, Ohio; died September 22, 1843.

AUSTIN BROWN, September 14, 1842, Richfield, Ohio; died September 27, 1843.

ANNE BROWN, December 23, 1843, Richfield, Ohio.

AMELIA BROWN, June 22, 1845, Akron, Ohio; died October 30, 1846.

SARAH BROWN, (2d,) September 11, 1846, Akron, Ohio.

ELLEN BROWN, (1st,) May 20, 1848, Springfield, Massachusetts; died April 30, 1849.

INFANT SON, April 26, 1852, Akron, Ohio; died May 17, aged 21 days.

ELLEN BROWN, (2d,) September 25, 1854, Akron, Ohio.

Thus, eight children now survive; four by each wife.

THE YOUNG TANNER.

From his twenty-first to his twenty-sixth year, John Brown was engaged in the tanning business, and as a farmer, in Ohio.

In 1826, he went to Richmond, Richland township, Crawford County, Pennsylvania, where he carried on the old business till 1835. One of his apprentices at this period informs us that he was characterized for singular probity of life, and by his strong and "eccentric" benevolent impulses. He would refuse to sell leather until the last drop of moisture had been dried from it, "*lest he should sell his customers water, and reap the gain.*"

"He is said to have caused a man to be arrested, or rearrested, for some small offence, not easily substantiated to a jury, or who had already passed a preliminary examination without effect, although he had sustained no personal injury, but simply because he thought the crime should be punished; and his benevolence induced him to supply the wants of the offender out of his private means, and to provide for the family until the trial."*

That stern old English senso of justice; that grand Puritan spirit of inflexible integrity — how beautifully do they bloom out, thus early, in the life of this illustrious man! Evidently, in honor of this bright trait, history will place John Brown, in her American Pantheon, not among Virginia's culprits, but as high, at least, as Virginia's greatest chief, whose best sayings and achievements that young man, just, was afterwards to be slaughtered by Washington's native State, for attempting to carry out to their legitimate results.

CHANGES OF RESIDENCE.

In 1835, he removed to Franklin Mills, Portago County, Ohio, where, until 1841, he was engaged in the tanning trade, and speculated in real estate. He made several unfortunate investments, and lost a considerable amount of money.

In March, 1839, he started from Ohio for Connecticut, with a drove of cattle. He returned in July of the same year, and brought back with him a few sheep, his first purchases in that business, in which he afterwards was so largely interested.

* This incident is related by a citizen of Warren, Pennsylvania, who knew him well, and regarded him at that time as an exemplary and highly Christian man.

In 1840, he went to Hudson, Ohio, and engaged in the wool business with Captain Oviatt, of Richfield; to which, in 1842, John Brown removed, and remained two years, when he entered into a partnership with Colonel Perkins. During his residence in Richfield, he lost four children, all of them within eleven days; and three were carried out together and interred in the same grave. "From boyhood," writes Mr. Oviatt, "I have known him through manhood; and through life he has been distinguished for his truthfulness and integrity; he has ever been esteemed, by those who have known him, as a very conscientious man."

It was in 1839 that he conceived the idea of becoming a Liberator of the Southern slaves. He had seen, during the twenty-five years that had elapsed since he became an Abolitionist, every right of human nature, and of the Northern States, ruthlessly trodden under the feet of the tyrannical Slave Power. He saw it blighting and blasting the manhood of the nation; and he listened to "the voice of the poor that cried." He heard Lafayette loudly praised; but he saw no helper of the bondman. He saw the people building the sepulchres of the fathers of '76, but lynching and murdering the prophets that were sent unto them. He believed that:

"Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

But the slaves, scattered; closely watched; prevented from assembling to conspire; without arms; apparently overpowered; at the mercy of every traitor; knowing the white man only as their foe; seeing, every where and always, that (as the Haytian proverb pithily ex-

presses it,) "*Zie blanc, bouille negues*" — the eyes of the whites burn up the negroes — in order to arise and strike a blow for liberty, needed a positive sign that they had friends among the dominant race, who sympathized with them, believed in their right to freedom, and were ready to aid them in their attempt to obtain it. John Brown determined to let them know that they had friends, and prepared himself to lead them to liberty. From the moment that he formed this resolution, he engaged in no commercial speculations, which he could not, without loss to his friends and family, wind up in fourteen days. He waited patiently. "LEARN TO WAIT: I have waited twenty years," he often said to the young men of principle and talent, who loved and flocked around him when in Kansas.

In 1844, John Brown removed to Akron, Ohio; in 1846, he went to Springfield, Massachusetts; where, in the following year, his family joined him.

A few life notes now are all that can be given here.

JOHN BROWN'S FAVORITE BOOKS, TEXTS, AND HYMNS.

"My dear father's favorite books, of an historical character," writes a daughter, "were Rollin's Ancient History, Josephus's Works, Napoleon and his Marshals, and the Life of Oliver Cromwell. Of religious books: Baxter's Saints' Rest, (in speaking of this work, at one time, he said he could not see how any person could read it through carefully without becoming a Christian,) the Pilgrim's Progress, Henry on Mockness; but above all others, the BIBLE was his favorite volume, and he had such a perfect knowledge of it, that when any person was reading it, he would correct the least mistake. His favorite passages were these, as nearly as I can remember:

"Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.

"Whoso stoppeth his ear at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

"He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth his bread to the poor.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.

"Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker, and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.

"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman walketh in vain.

"I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love."

"The last chapter of Ecclesiasticus was a favorite one, and on Fast days and Thanksgivings he used very often to read the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah.

"When he would come home at night, tired out with labor, he would, before going to bed, ask some of the family to read chapters, (as was his usual course night and morning,) and would most always say, Read one of David's Psalms.

"His favorite hymns (Watts's) were these — I give the first lines only:

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow."

"Sweet is Thy work, my God, my King."

"I'll praise my Maker with my breath."

"O, happy is the man who hears."

"Why should we start, and fear to die."

"With songs and honors sounding loud."

"Ah, lovely appearance of death."

He was a great admirer of Oliver Cromwell. Of

colored heroes, Nat Turner and Cinques stood first in his esteem. "How often," writes a daughter, "have I heard him speak in admiration of Cinques' character and management in carrying his points with so little bloodshed!" Of American writings, he chiefly admired the sayings of Franklin, and the Farewell Address of Washington.

I do not see how any one could draw the character of John Brown better than by referring the reader to his favorite books. The Bible, first and above all other volumes, inspired every action of his life. He searched it continually to find there the words of eternal life. Nay, years hence, Christendom will recognize in John Brown a translation of the Old Testament, not into English words, but American flesh and blood.

As a father he was tenderly austere; as a husband devotedly faithful and kind.

He brought up his family as the Hebrew patriarchs reared their children. The law of God was their earliest and most constant study; unbounded and willing obedience to it, their first and chief lesson. They bended their knees every morning and evening at God's altar; daily read the sacred volume, and sung psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs. Grace before and after meat sanctified their board. The patriarchal principle of filial reverence was in this family a distinguishing trait. Self-sacrifice was their idea of earthly life.

"The Puritan idea," — here it was out-lived; nowhere else was the grandest thing brought over in the Mayflower so sacredly preserved. Other descendants of the passengers in that classic ship have chairs,

and tables, and other material evidences of her voyage to America; but this great family had the Idea that she personifies, not pompously displayed in parlors or museums, but modestly, unconsciously, in their daily lives.

The sayings of Franklin, as will be seen in another chapter, were exhibited in daily life in the household of John Brown. And the Declaration of Independence — we will see how it was incarnated when we find the old man and his sons in Kansas and Virginia.

"One of his favorite verses was," says a daughter,

"Count that day lost whose low-descending sun
 Views from thy hand no worthy action done."

Here, although in advance of the time, two incidents may be related, which show how the ideas of the Bible interpenetrated his whole being.

"I asked him," says a child, "how he felt when he left the eleven slaves, taken from Missouri, safe in Canada? His answer was, "'Lord, permit now thy servant to die in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.'" I could not brook the idea that any ill should befall them, or they be taken back to slavery. The arm of Jehovah protected us.'"

The next anecdote, related since the old man's captivity, by a distinguished citizen of Pennsylvania, is no less characteristic:

"He has elements of character, which, under circumstances favorable to their proper development and right direction, would have made him one of the great men of the world. Napoleon himself had no more blind and trusting confidence in his own destiny and resources; his iron will and unbending purpose were equal to that of any man, living or dead; his religious enthusiasm and sense of duty (exaggerated and false though it was) were yet earnest and sincere, and not excelled by that of Oliver Cromwell or any of his followers; while no

danger could for a moment alarm or disturb him. Though doubtless his whole nature was subject to, and almost constantly, for the last three or four years, pervaded by the deepest excitement, his exterior was always calm and cool. His manner, though conveying the idea of a stern and self-sustaining man, was yet gentle and courteous, and marked by frequent and decided manifestations of kindness; and it can probably be said of him, with truth, that, amid all his provocations, he never perpetrated an act of wanton or unnecessary cruelty. He was scrupulously honest, moral, and temperate, and never gave utterance to a boast. Upon one occasion, when one of the ex-Governors of Kansas said to him that he was a marked man, and that the Missourians were determined, sooner or later, to take his scalp, the old man straightened himself up, with a glance of enthusiasm and defiance in his gray eye, 'Sir,' said he, *'the angel of the Lord will camp round about me.'*"

His self-sacrificing spirit, his devotion to the American idea, — in its spirit "which giveth life," not in its letter "which is death," — may be clearly seen in a single sentence from one of his family :

"On leaving us the first time that he went to Kansas, he said, 'If it is so painful for us to part, with the hope of meeting again, how dreadful must be the separation for life of hundreds of poor slaves!'"

He inspired every one of his family with this heroic Christianity. His sons were all young fathers; John Browns, junior, every one. His son-in-law, also, was touched with the holy fire from the altar of the old man's soul.

"When William Thompson,"* writes a sister-in-law, "talked of going to Harper's Ferry, his wife begged of him not to go, telling him that she was afraid he would be murdered: he said, 'O Mary, you do not think of any thing but self! What is my life in comparison to thousands of poor slaves in bondage?'"

* He whom the "party of Virginia gentlemen" murdered in cold blood.

For John Brown's habits a few words will suffice. He was a very early riser, and a very hard worker. His dress was extremely plain; never in the fashion, and never made of fine cloth. But he was always scrupulously clean and tidy in his personal appearance. When first I saw him in his camp at Kansas, although his clothing was patched and old, and he was almost barefooted, he was as tidy, both in person and dress, as any gentleman of Boston. He was noted for his orderly and systematic business habits. His account books and correspondence (which have been sacredly preserved) are models of systematic arrangement. Even to the day of his death, he regularly filed his letters, writing the name of the correspondent, and the word "Answered," or "Not time to read," or "No answer needed," on every one of them. His food was always plain and simple. He never used tobacco in any form, or wine or spirits on any pretence whatever. When at home, he drank milk, or water only. It was not till within a few years before his death, that he ever tasted tea or coffee. He relinquished this habit only from the desire to give no trouble to others; for he found that in travelling, it sometimes annoyed good people to see their guests drink water instead of tea. He never ate cheese or butter. "When a little boy, ten years of age, he was sent of an errand, where a lady gave him a piece of bread and butter. He was so bashful, that he did not dare to tell her he never ate butter; and as soon as he got out of the house, he ran as fast as he could for a long distance, and then threw the gift out of sight"

Mr. Doolittle, of Ohio, Mr. Weeks and Mr. Hallock, of Connecticut, were his favorite pastors. Although a rigid Puritan, he loved Theodore Parker. "I am free to say," he once told me, "that I do not agree with Mr. Parker in religious matters; I think he is mistaken in most of his views; but I like him, sir; he is a good man."

"Captain Brown," writes a friend, "was extremely fond of music. I once saw him sit listening with the most rapt attention to Schubert's Serenade, played by a mutual friend, and, when the music ceased, tears were in the old man's eyes. He was indeed most tender-hearted — fond of children and pet creatures, and always enlisted on the weaker side. The last time I saw him in Boston, he had been greatly annoyed by overhearing in the street some rude language addressed to a black girl, who, he said, would never have been insulted if she had been white. To him might well be applied the words of the old Scotch ballad:

"O Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

Of the different members of John Brown's family I cannot write now; but, on another occasion, I shall try to do justice to the old hero as a father. I think, from what I know of him, that John Brown by his wife's chair and the cradle of his children, was even a greater man than John Brown at Osawatomic, and on the scaffold of Charlestown.

Mrs. Brown, the present widow, was a fit mate for her husband. Is it necessary to say more? If it be, I cannot write it. His first wife's character he himself drawn, and the reader has seen the portrait.

I have a few testimonials of John Brown's character during this long period, from men who knew him well. Mr. Baldwin, of Ohio, who has known him from 1814, "considered him a man of rigid integrity and of ardent temperament." Mr. George Leech, who knew him from early boyhood, says that he "always appeared strictly conscientious and honest, but of strong impulses and strong religious feelings." Mr. William S. O. Otis writes, "I became acquainted with John Brown about the year 1836; soon after my removal to Akron, he became a client of mine; subsequently a resident of the township in which the town of Akron is situated; and, during a portion of the latter time, a member of a Bible class taught by me. In these relations which I sustained to Mr. Brown, I had a good opportunity to become acquainted with his mental, moral, and religious character. I always regarded him as a man of more than ordinary mental capacity, of very ardent and excitable temperament, of unblemished moral character; a kind neighbor, a good Christian, deeply imbued with religious feelings and sympathies. In a business point of view, his ardent and excitable temperament led him into pecuniary difficulties; but I never knew his integrity questioned by any person whatever."

Since the foregoing chapter was stereotyped, I have found among the North Elba manuscripts the following "Phrenological Description of John Brown, as given by O. S. Fowler." It is dated New York, February 27, 1847:

JOHN BROWN PHRENOLOGICALLY DESCRIBED.

"You have a brain of good size, and a physical organization of much more than ordinary strength to sustain it. I should judge that you were from a long-lived ancestry, and that you yourself have inherited such a constitution as would enable you, under ordinary circumstances, to live to a good old age. Your mind did not mature

as early as the majority of persons, but it is of the kind that is continually expanding and improving, and will continue to augment in power to a more advanced age than that of most persons. You are very active, both physically and mentally — are positive in your likes and dislikes, 'go the whole figure or nothing,' and want others to do the same. Your first ideas and impressions are your best; and, as a general thing, you will find them a more safe guide than your after deliberations. You have the faculty to take in all the various conditions of a thing at once, and hence the reason for the correctness of your first impressions. You are quick and clear in your perceptions, have good judgment of the quality and value of property, are a great observer, and want to see. You are more known for your practical off-hand talent than for depth and profundity of comprehension — have a discriminating mind, are quick to draw inferences, and are quite disposed to criticize. You reason more by analogy than from abstract principles, and are more practical than theoretical. You have a remarkable memory of faces and places, but poor of names and dates. You can measure well by your eye, and are annoyed if you see any thing out of proportion, or not exactly plumb — have an excellent memory of shape, outline, and size of whatever you see — are a systematic, methodical man; like to have a place for things, and things in their places. Your ability to reckon figures mentally is naturally good — you have a great deal of mechanical ingenuity, are just the man to set others at work, to make bargains, and do up the out-door business. You have a pretty good opinion of yourself — would rather lead than be led — have great sense of honor, and would scorn to do any thing mean or disgraceful. In making up your mind you are careful and judicious, but are firm as the hills when once decided. You might be persuaded, but to drive you would be impossible. You like to have your own way, and to think and act for yourself — are quite independent and dignified, yet candid, open, and plain; say just what you think, and most heartily despise hypocrisy and artificiality; yet you value the good opinion of others, though you would not stoop to gain applause. You are quite cautious and prudent, and generally look out for breakers ahead, and realize quite as much as you expect. It would be an advantage to you if you had a little more hope, and would allow yourself to look more on the bright side of things. As a religious man, you would be more inclined to deal justly and love mercy than to pay much regard to forms and ceremonies. You have not enough devotional feeling, nor of what we term spirituality of mind, to give harmony and balance to the moral sentiments. They should be cultivated. You believe what can be incontestably proved, and nothing else. You like to do business on a large scale, and can make money better than save it — you want it for its uses, in one form or another, rather than for its own sake. Your ability to read the characters of others is excellent, but you have little tact in adapting yourself to them. You are too blunt and free-spoken — you often find that your motives are not understood, and that you give offence when you do not intend to. When you criticize, you are apt to do it in such a plain, pointed manner that it does not produce so good an effect as it would if you should do it in a more bland and affable way. You have strong domestic feelings, are very fond of children, home, and friends; you may be irritable, but are not contentious. You do not like to plod over one subject for a length of time; but, on the contrary, like variety and change. Your thoughts and feelings are more rapid and lasting. In your character and actions you are more original than imitative, and have more taste for the useful than the beautiful and ornamental."