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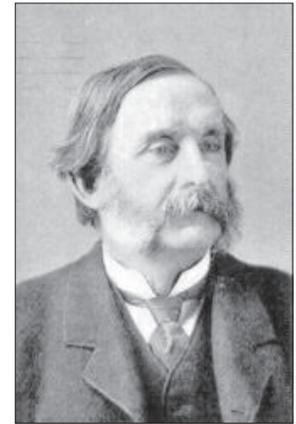
THE FUGITIVE SLAVE EPOCH

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“I canna think the preacher himself wad be heading the mob, tho’ the time has been they have been as forward in a bruilzie as their neighbors.” — SCOTT’S *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.

NOTHING did more to strengthen my antislavery zeal, about 1848, than the frequent intercourse with Whittier and his household, made possible by their nearness to Newburyport. It was but a short walk or drive of a few miles from my residence to his home; or, better still, it implied a sail or row up the beautiful river, passing beneath the suspension bridge at Deer Island, to where the woods called “The Laurels” spread themselves on one side, and the twin villages of Salisbury and Amesbury on the other. There was something delightful in the position of the poet among the village people: he was their pride and their joy, yet he lived as simply as any one, was careful and abstemious, reticent rather than exuberant in manner, and met them wholly on matter-of-fact ground. He could sit on a barrel and discuss the affairs of the day with the people who came to the “store,” but he did not read them his verses. I was once expressing regrets for his ill health, in talking with one of the leading citizens of Amesbury, and found that my companion could not agree with me; he thought that Whittier’s ill health had helped him in the end, for it had “kept him from engaging in business,” and had led him to writing poetry, which had given him reputation outside of the town. That poetry was anything but a second choice, perhaps a necessary evil, did not seem to have occurred to my informant. Had he himself lost his health and been unable to sell groceries, who knows but he too might have taken up with the Muses? It suggested the Edinburgh citizen who thought that Sir Walter Scott might have been “sic a respectable mon” had he stuck to his original trade of law advocate.

To me, who sought Whittier for his poetry as well as his politics, nothing could have been



more delightful than his plain abode with its exquisite Quaker neatness. His placid mother, rejoicing in her two gifted children, presided with few words at the hospitable board whose tablecloth and napkins rivaled her soul in whiteness; and with her was the brilliant “Lizzie,” so absolutely the reverse, or complement, of her brother that they seemed between them to make one soul. She was as plain in feature as he was handsome, except that she had a pair of great luminous dark eyes, always flashing with fun or soft with emotion, and often changing with lightning rapidity from one expression to another; her nose was large and aquiline, while his was almost Grecian, and she had odd motions of the head, so that her glances seemed shot at you, like sudden javelins, from each side of a prominent outwork. Her complexion was sallow, not rich brunette like his; and whereas he spoke seldom and with some difficulty, her gay raillery was unceasing, and was enjoyed by him as much as by anybody, so that he really appeared to have transferred to her the expression of his own opinions. The lively utterances thus came with double force upon the auditor, and he could not fail to go out strengthened and stimulated. Sometimes the Whittiers had guests; and “Lizzie” delighted to tell how their mother was once met at the door by two plump maidens who announced that they had come from Ohio mainly to see her son. She explained that he was in Boston. No matter; they would come in and await his return. But he might be away a week. No matter; they would willingly wait that time for such a pleasure. So in they came. They proved to be Alice and Phcebe Cary, whose earlier poems, which had already preceded them, were filled with dirges and despair;

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but they were the merriest of house-mates, and as the poet luckily returned next day, they stayed as long as they pleased, and were welcome.

The invigorating influence of the Whittier household supplied the tonic needed in those trying days. The Fugitive Slave Law had just passed, and a year or two after Garrison had proudly showed a row of escaped negroes sitting on the platform of an anti-slavery convention, and had defied the whole South to reclaim them, these very men were fleeing to Canada for their lives. When the storm first broke, on February 15, 1851, in the arrest of Shadrach, Boston had a considerable colored population, which handled his rescue with such unexpected skill and daring that it almost seemed as if Garrison were right; yet it took but a few days for their whole force to be scattered to the winds. The exact story of the Shadrach rescue has never been written. The account which appears most probable is that on the day of the arraignment of the alleged fugitive, the fact was noted in a newspaper by a colored man of great energy and character, employed by a firm in Boston and utterly unconnected with the Abolitionists. He asked leave of absence, and strolled into the Court-House. Many colored men were at the door and had been excluded; but he, being known and trusted, was admitted, and the others, making a rush, followed in behind him with a hubbub of joking and laughter. There were but a few constables on duty, and it suddenly struck this leader, as he and his followers passed near the man under arrest, that they might as well keep on and pass out at the opposite door, taking among them the man under arrest, who was not handcuffed. After a moment's beckoning the prisoner saw his opportunity, fell in with the jubilant procession, and amid continued uproar was got outside the Court-House, when the crowd scattered in all directions.

It was an exploit which, as has been well said, would hardly have furnished a press item had it been the case of a pickpocket, yet was treated at Washington as if it had shaken the nation. Daniel Webster called it “a case of treason;” President Fillmore issued a special procla-

mation; and Henry Clay gave notice of a bill to lend added strength to the Fugitive Slave Law, so as to settle the question “whether the government of white men is to be yielded to a government of blacks.” More curious even than this was the development of antislavery ethics that followed. The late Richard H. Dana, the counsel for various persons arrested as accomplices in the rescue of Shadrach, used to tell with delight this tale of a jurymen impaneled on that trial. To Dana's great surprise, the jury had disagreed concerning one client who had been charged with aiding in the affair and whose conviction he had fully expected; and this surprise was all the greater because new and especial oaths had been administered to the jurymen, pledging them to have no conscientious scruples against convicting, so that it seemed as if every one with a particle of anti-slavery sympathy must have been ruled out. Years after, Dana encountered by accident the very jurymen — a Concord blacksmith — whose obstinacy had saved his client; and learned that this man's unalterable reason for refusing to condemn was that he himself had taken a hand in the affair, inasmuch as he had driven Shadrach, after his rescue, from Concord to Sudbury.¹

I fear I must admit that while it would have been a great pleasure to me to have lent a hand in the Shadrach affair, the feeling did not come wholly from moral conviction, but from an impulse perhaps hereditary in the blood. Probably I got from my two soldier and sailor grandfathers an intrinsic love of adventure which haunted me in childhood, and which three-score and fourteen years have by no means worn out. So far as I can now analyze it, this early emotion was not created by the wish for praise alone, but was mainly a boyish desire for a stirring experience. No man so much excited my envy during my whole college life as did a reckless Southern law student, named Winfield Scott Belton, who, when the old Vassall House in Cambridge was all in flames, and the fire-men could not reach the upper story with their ladders, suddenly appeared from within at an attic window, amid the smoke, and pointed out to them the way to

follow. Like most boys, I had a passion for fires; but after this the trophies of Belton would not suffer me to sleep, and I often ran miles towards a light in the horizon. But the great opportunity never occurs twice, and the nearest I ever came to it was in being one of several undergraduates to bring the elder Professor Henry Ware out of his burning house. It was not much of a feat, — we afterwards risked ourselves a great deal more to bring some trays of pickle-jars from the cellar, — but in the case of the venerable doctor the object was certainly worth all it cost us; for he was the progenitor of that admirable race upon which, as Dr. Holmes said to Professor Stowe, the fall of Adam had not left the slightest visible impression.

This combination of motives was quite enough to make me wish that if there should be another fugitive slave case I might at least be there to see, and, joining the Vigilance Committee in Boston, I waited for such an occasion. It was not necessary to wait long, for the Shadrach case was soon to be followed by another. One day in April 1851, a messenger came to my house in Newburyport and said briefly, “Another fugitive slave is arrested in Boston, and they wish you to come.” I went back with him that afternoon, and found the Vigilance Committee in session in the “Liberator” office. It is impossible to conceive of a set of men, personally admirable, yet less fitted on the whole than this committee to undertake any positive action in the direction of forcible resistance to authorities. In the first place, half of them were non-resistants, as was their great leader, Garrison, who stood composedly by his desk preparing his next week’s editorial, and almost exasperating the more hotheaded among us by the placid way in which he looked beyond the rescue of an individual to the purifying of a nation. On the other hand, the “political Abolitionists,” or Free-Soilers, while personally full of indignation, were extremely anxious not to be placed for one moment outside the pale of good citizenship. The only persons to be relied upon for action were a few whose temperament prevailed over the restrictions of non-resistance on the

one side, and of politics on the other; but of course their discussion was constantly damped by the attitude of the rest. All this would not, however, apply to the negroes, it might well seem; they had just proved their mettle, and would doubtless do it again. On my saying this in the meeting, Lewis Hayden, the leading negro in Boston, nodded cordially and said, “Of course they will.” Soon after, drawing me aside, he startled me by adding, “I said that for bluff, you know. We do not wish any one to know how really weak we are. Practically there are no colored men in Boston; the Shadrach prosecutions have scattered them all. What is to be done must be done without them.” Here was a blow indeed!

What was to be done? The next day showed that absolutely nothing could be accomplished in the court-room. There were one or two hundred armed policemen in and around the Court-House. Only authorized persons could get within ten feet of the building. Chains were placed across the doors, and beneath these even the judges, entering, had to stoop. The United States court-room was up two high and narrow flights of stairs. Six men were at the door of the court-room. The prisoner, a slender boy of seventeen, sat with two strong men on each side and five more in the seat behind him, while none but his counsel could approach him in front. (All this I take from notes made at the time.) The curious thing was that although there was a state law of 1843 prohibiting every Massachusetts official from taking any part in the restoration of a fugitive slave, yet nearly all these employees were Boston policemen, act-from the mayor and aldermen. Under these mg, so the city marshal told me, under orders circumstances there was clearly nothing to be done at the trial itself. And yet all sorts of fantastic and desperate projects crossed the minds of those few among us who really, so to speak, meant business. I remember consulting Ellis Gray Loring, the most eminent lawyer among the Abolitionists, as to the possibility of at least gaining time by making away with the official record from the Southern court, a docu-

ment which lay invitingly at one time among lawyers' papers on the table. Again, I wrote a letter to my schoolmate Charles Devens, the United States marshal, imploring him to resign rather than be the instrument of sending a man into bondage, a thing actually done by one of the leading Boston policemen. It is needless to say to those who knew him that he answered courteously and that he reserved his decision. No other chance opening, it seemed necessary to turn all attention to an actual rescue of the prisoner from his place of confinement. Like Shadrach, Thomas Sims was not merely tried in the United States Court-House, but imprisoned there, because the state jail was not opened to him; he not having been arrested under any state law, and the United States having no jail in Boston. In the previous case, an effort had been made to obtain permission to confine the fugitive slave at the Navy Yard, but Commodore Downes had refused. Sims, therefore, like Shadrach, was kept at the Court-House. Was it possible to get him out?

There was on Tuesday evening a crowded meeting at Tremont Temple, at which Horace Mann presided. I hoped strongly that some result might come from this meeting, and made a vehement speech there myself, which, as Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe honored me by saying, was bringing the community to the verge of revolution, when a lawyer named Charles Mayo Ellis protested against its tone, and threw cold water upon all action. It was evident that if anything was done, it must be done by a very few. I looked round, during the meeting, for a band of twenty-five men from Marlborough, who had seemed to me to show more fighting quality than the rest, but they had probably gone home. Under this conviction half a dozen of us formed the following plan. The room where Sims was confined, being safe by reason of its height from the ground, had no gratings at the windows. The colored clergyman of Boston, Mr. Grimes, who alone had the opportunity to visit Sims, agreed to arrange with him that at a specified hour that evening he should go to a certain window, as if for air, — for he had the

freedom of the room, — and should spring out on mattresses which we were to bring from a lawyer's office across the way; we also providing a carriage in which to place him. All was arranged, — the message sent, the mattresses ready, the carriage engaged as if for an ordinary purpose; and behold! in the dusk of that evening, two of us, strolling through Court Square, saw men busily at work fitting iron bars across this safe third-story window. Whether we had been betrayed, or whether it was simply a bit of extraordinary precaution, we never knew. Colonel Montgomery, an experienced guerrilla in Kansas, used to say, “It is always best to take for granted that your Opponent is at least as smart as you yourself are. This, evidently, we had not done.

I knew that there was now no chance of the rescue of Sims. The only other plan that had been suggested was that we should charter a vessel, place it in charge of Austin Pearse, a Cape Cod sea-captain and one of our best men, and take possession of the brig *Acorn*, on which Sims was expected to be placed. This project was discussed at a small meeting in Theodore Parker's study, and was laid aside as impracticable, not because it was Piracy, but because there was no absolute certainty that the fugitive would be sent South in that precise way. As no other plan suggested itself, and as *I* had no wish to look on, with my hands tied, at the surrender, I went back to my home in deep chagrin. The following extract from a journal written soon after is worth Preserving as an illustration of that curious period:

“It left me with the strongest impressions of the great want of preparation, on our part, for this revolutionary work. Brought up as we have all been, it takes the whole experience of one such case to educate the mind to the attitude of revolution. It is so strange to find one's self outside of established institutions; to be obliged to lower one's voice and conceal one's purposes; to see law and order, police and military, on the wrong side, and find good citizenship a sin and bad citizenship a duty, that it takes time to prepare one to act coolly and wisely, as well as coura-

geously, in such an emergency. Especially this is true among reformers, who are not accustomed to act according to fixed rules and observances, but to strive to do what seems to themselves best, without reference to others. The Vigilance Committee meetings were a disorderly convention, each man having his own plan or theory, perhaps stopping even for anecdote or disquisition, when the occasion required the utmost promptness of decision and the most unflinching unity in action. . . . Our most reliable men were non-resistants, and some who were otherwise were the intensest visionaries. Wendell Phillips was calm and strong throughout; I never saw a finer gleam in his eyes than when drawing up that stirring handbill at the antislavery office.”

During the months which followed, I attended anti-slavery conventions; wrote editorially for the newly established “Commonwealth,” the Boston organ of the Free Soil party; and had also a daily “Independent Column” of my own in the “Newburyport Union,” a liberal Democratic paper. No other fugitive slave case occurred in New England for three years. The mere cost in money of Sims’s surrender had been vast; the political results had been the opposite of what was intended, for the election of Charles Sumner to the United States Senate practically followed from it. The whole anti-slavery feeling at the North was obviously growing stronger, yet there seemed a period of inaction all round, or of reliance on ordinary political methods in the contest. In 1852 I removed to Worcester, into a strong anti-slavery community of which my “Free Church” was an important factor. Fugitives came sometimes to the city, and I have driven them at midnight to the farm of the veteran Abolitionists, Stephen and Abby Kelley Foster, in the suburbs of the city. Perhaps the most curious case with which we had to deal was that of a pretty young woman, apparently white, with two perfectly white children, all being consigned to me by the Rev. Samuel May, then secretary of the Boston Anti-Slavery Society, and placed by him, for promptness of transportation to Worcester, under the escort of a Worcester merchant, thoroughly

pro-slavery in sympathy, and not having the slightest conception that he was violating the laws in finding a seat for his charge and holding the baby on his knee. We had them in our care all winter. It was one of those cases of romantic incident which slavery yielded. She was the daughter of her former master, and was the mistress of her present owner, her half-brother; she could scarcely read and write, but was perfectly lady-like, modest, and grateful. She finally married a tradesman near Boston, who knew her story, and she disappeared in the mass of white population, where we were content to leave her untraced.

All this minor anti-slavery work ended when, on Thursday evening, May 25, 1854, I had a letter by private messenger from the same Samuel May just mentioned, saying that a slave had been arrested, and the case was to be heard on Saturday morning; that a meeting was to be held on Friday evening at Faneuil Hall, and it was important that Worcester should be well represented. Mr. A. B. Alcott also came thither on the same errand. I sent messages to several persons, and especially to a man of remarkable energy, named Martin Stowell, who had taken part in a slave rescue at Syracuse, New York, urging them to follow at once. Going to Boston on the morning train, I found myself presently in a meeting of the Vigilance Committee, not essentially different from those which had proved so disappointing three years before. There was not only no plan of action, but no set purpose of united action. This can be imagined when I say that at one moment when there seemed a slight prospect of practical agreement, some one came in’ to announce that Suttle and his men, the slave-catchers, were soon to pass by, and proposed that we should go out and gaze at them, “pointing the finger of scorn,” — as if Southern slave-catchers were to be combated by such weapons. This, however, had an effect in so far that the general committee adjourned, letting those alone remain who were willing to act personally in forcible resistance. This reduced our sixty down to thirty, of whom I was chosen chairman. Dr. Howe was then called on to

speak, and gave some general advice, very good and spirited. Two things were resolved on, -to secure the names of those willing to act, and to have definite leadership. One leader would have been best, but we had not quite reached that point, so an executive committee of six was chosen at last, — Phillips, Parker, Howe, Kemp (an energetic Irishman), Captain Bearse, and myself; Stowell was added to these at my request. Even then it was inconceivably difficult to get the names of as many as twenty who would organize and obey orders. The meeting adjourned till afternoon, when matters were yet worse, — mere talk and discussion; but it seemed to me, at least, that something must be done; better a failure than to acquiesce tamely as before, and see Massachusetts henceforward made a hunting-ground for fugitive slaves.

All hopes now rested on Stowell, who was to arrive from Worcester at six P.M. I met him at the train, and walked up with him. He heard the condition of affairs, and at once suggested a new plan as the only thing feasible. The man must be taken from the Court-House. It could not be done in cold blood, but the effort must have behind it the momentum of a public meeting, such as was to be held at Faneuil Hall that night. An attack at the end of the meeting would be hopeless, for the United States marshal would undoubtedly be looking for just that attempt, and would be reinforced accordingly; this being, as we afterwards found, precisely what that official was planning. Could there not be an attack at the very height of the meeting, brought about in this way? Let all be in readiness; let a picked body be distributed near the Court House and Square; then send some loud-voiced speaker, who should appear in the gallery of Faneuil Hall and announce that there was a mob of negroes already attacking the Court - House; let a speaker, previously warned, — Phillips, if possible, — accept the opportunity promptly, and send the whole meeting pell-mell to Court Square, ready to fall in behind the leaders and bring out the slave. The project struck me as an inspiration. I accepted it heartily, and think now, as I thought then, that it was one of the very best plots that ever — failed.

“Good plot, good friends, and full of expectation.” Why it came within an inch of success and still failed will next be explained.

The first thing to be done — after providing a box of axes for attack on the Court-House doors, a thing which I personally superintended — was to lay the whole matter before the committee already appointed and get its concurrence. This committee was to meet in the ante-room of Faneuil Hall before the general meeting. As a matter of fact it never came together, for everybody was pushing straight into the hall. The moments passed rapidly. We caught first one member of the committee, then another, and expounded the plot. Some approved, others disapproved; our stout sea-captain, Bearse, distrusting anything to be attempted on land, utterly declining all part in it. Howe and Parker gave a hasty approval, and -only half comprehending, as it afterwards proved — were warned to be ready to give indorsement from the platform; Phillips it was impossible to find, but we sent urgent messages, which never reached him; Kemp stood by us and we had thus a clear majority of the committee, which although it had been collectively opposed to the earlier plan of an attack at the end of the meeting, was yet now committed to a movement half way through, by way of surprise. We at once found our gallery orator in the late John L. Swift, a young man full of zeal, with a stentorian voice, afterwards exercised stoutly for many years in Republican and temperance meetings. He having pledged himself to make the proposed announcement, it was only necessary to provide a nucleus of picked men to head the attack. Stowell, Kemp, and I were each to furnish five of these, and Lewis Hayden, the colored leader, agreed to supply ten negroes. So far all seemed ready, and the men were found as well as the general confusion permitted; but the very success and overwhelming numbers of the Faneuil Hall meeting soon became a formidable obstacle instead of a help.

It was the largest gathering I ever saw in that hall. The platform was covered with men; the galleries, the floor, even the outer stairways,

were absolutely filled with a solid audience. Some came to sympathize, more to look on, — we could not estimate the proportion; but when the speaking was once begun, we could no more communicate with the platform than if the Atlantic Ocean rolled between. There was then no private entrance to it, such as now exists, and in this seemingly slight architectural difference lay the failure of the whole enterprise, as will be presently seen.

Those of us who had been told off to be ready in Court Square went there singly, not to attract attention. No sign of motion or life was there, though the lights gleamed from many windows, for it happened — a bit of unlooked-for good fortune — that the Supreme Court was holding an evening session, and ordinary visitors could pass freely. Planting myself near a door which stood ajar, on the east side of the building, I waited for the trap to be sprung, and for the mob of people to appear from Faneuil Hall. The moments seemed endless. Would our friends never arrive? Presently a rush of running figures, like the sweep of a wave, came round the corner of Court Square, and I watched it with such breathless anxiety as I have experienced only twice or thrice in life. The crowd ran on pell-mell, and I scanned it for a familiar face. A single glance brought the conviction of failure and disappointment. We had the froth and scum of the meeting, the fringe of idlers on its edge. The men on the platform, the real nucleus of that great gathering, were far in the rear, perhaps were still clogged in the hall. Still, I stood, with assumed carelessness, by the entrance, when an official ran up from the basement, looked me in the face, ran in, and locked the door. There was no object in preventing him, since there was as yet no visible reinforcement of friends. Mingling with the crowd, I ran against Stowell, who had been looking for the axes, stored at a friend’s office in Court Square. He whispered, “Some of our men are bringing a beam up to the west door, the one that gives entrance to the upper stairway.” Instantly he and I ran round and grasped the beam; I finding myself at the head, with a stout negro opposite

me. The real attack had begun.

What followed was too hurried and confusing to be described with perfect accuracy of detail, although the main facts stand out vividly enough. Taking the joist up the steps, we hammered away at the southwest door of the Court-House. It could not have been many minutes before it began to give way, was then secured again, then swung ajar, and rested heavily, one hinge having parted. There was room for but one to pass in. I glanced instinctively at my black ally. He did not even look at me, but sprang in first, I following. In later years the experience was of inestimable value to me, for it removed once for all every doubt of the intrinsic courage of the blacks. We found ourselves inside, face to face with six or eight policemen, who laid about them with their clubs, driving us to the wall and hammering away at our heads. Often as I had heard of clubbing, I had never before known just how it felt, and to my surprise it was not half so bad as I expected. I was unarmed, but had taken boxing lessons at several different times, and perhaps felt, like Dr. Holmes’s young man named John, that I had “a new way of counterin’ I wanted to try;” but hands were powerless against clubs, although my burly comrade wielded his lustily. All we could expect was to be a sort of clumsy Arnold Winkelrieds and “make way for liberty.” All other thought was merged in this, the expectation of reinforcements. I did not know that I had received a severe cut on the chin, whose scar I yet carry, though still ignorant how it came. Nor did I know till next morning, what had a more important bearing on the seeming backwardness of my supposed comrades, that, just as the door sprang open, a shot had been fired, and one of the marshal’s deputies, a man named Batchelder, had fallen dead.

There had been other fugitive slave rescues in different parts of the country, but this was the first drop of blood actually shed. In all the long procession of events which led the nation through the Kansas struggle, past the John Brown foray, and up to the Emancipation Proclamation, the killing of Batchelder was the

156 first act of violence. It was, like the firing on Fort Sumter, a proof that war had really begun. The mob outside was daunted by the event, the marshal's posse inside was frightened, and what should have been the signal of success brought, on the contrary, a cessation of hostilities. The theory at the time was that the man had been stabbed by a knife, thrust through the broken panel. The coroner's inquest found it to be so, and the press, almost as active as now, yet no more accurate, soon got so far as to describe the weapon, — a Malay kris, said to have been actually picked up in the street. For years I supposed all this to be true, and conjectured that either my negro comrade did the deed, or else Lewis Hayden, who was just behind him.²

157 Naturally, we never exchanged a word on the subject, as it was a serious *matter*; and it was not till within a few years (1888) that it was claimed by a well-known journalist, the late Thomas Drew, that it was Martin Stowell who shot, not stabbed, Batchelder; that Drew had originally given Stowell the pistol; and that when the latter was arrested and imprisoned, on the night of the outbreak, he sent for Drew and managed to hand him the weapon. which Drew gave to some one else, who concealed it till long after the death of Stowell in the Civil War. This vital part of the facts, at the one point which made of the outbreak a capital offense, remained thus absolutely unknown, even to most of the participants, for thirty-four years. As Drew had seen the revolver loaded in Worcester, and had found, after its restoration, that one barrel had been discharged, and as he was also in the attacking party and heard the firing, there can be no reasonable doubt that the revolver was fired. On the other hand, I am assured by George H. Munroe, Esq., of the “Boston Herald,” who was a member of the coroner's jury, that the surgical examination was a very thorough one, and that the wound was undoubtedly made by a knife or bayonet, it being some two inches long, largest in the middle and tapering towards each end, A similar statement was made at the time, to one of my informants, by Dr. Charles T. Jackson, the reported discoverer of etherization, who

was one of the surgical examiners. It is therefore pretty certain that Stowell's bullet did not hit the mark after all, and that the man who killed Batchelder is still unknown.

All this, however, was without my knowledge; I only knew that we were gradually forced back beyond the threshold, the door standing now wide open, and our supporters having fallen back to leave the steps free. Mr. Charles E. Stevens, in his “Anthony Burns, a History,” published in 1856, says that I said on emerging, “You cowards, will you desert us now?” And though his narrative, like most contemporary narratives, is full of inaccuracies, this statement may be true; it was certainly what I felt, not knowing that a man had already been killed, and that Stowell and others had just been taken off by the police. I held my place outside, still hoping against hope that some concerted reinforcement might appear. Meanwhile the deputy marshals retreated to the stairway, over which we could see their pistols pointing, the whole hall between us and them being brightly lighted. The moments passed on. One energetic young lawyer, named Seth Webb, whom I had known in college, ran up the steps, but I dissuaded him from entering alone, and he waited. Then followed one of the most picturesque incidents of the whole affair. In the silent pause that ensued there came quietly forth from the crowd the well-known form of Mr. Amos Bronson Alcott, the Transcendental philosopher. Ascending the lighted steps alone, he said tranquilly, turning to me and pointing forward, “Why are we not within?” “Because,” was the rather impatient answer, “these people will not stand by us.” He said not a word, but calmly walked up the steps, — he and his familiar cane. He paused again at the top, the centre of all eyes, within and without; a revolver sounded from within, but hit nobody; and finding himself wholly unsupported, he turned and retreated, but without hastening a step. It seemed to me that, under the circumstances, neither Plato nor Pythagoras could have done the thing better; and the whole scene brought vividly back the similar appearance of the Gray Champion in Hawthorne's tale.

This ended the whole affair. Two companies of artillery had been ordered out, and two more of marines, these coming respectively from Fort Warren and the Charlestown Navy Yard. (Here again I follow Stevens.) Years after, the successor of the United States marshal, the Hon. Roland G. Usher, said to me that his predecessor had told him that the surprise was complete, and that thirty resolute men could have carried off Burns. Had the private entrance to the platform in Faneuil Hall existed then, as now, those thirty would certainly have been at hand. The alarm planned to be given from the gallery was heard in the meeting, but was disbelieved; it was thought to be a scheme to interrupt the proceedings. Phillips had not received notice of it. Parker and Howe had not fully comprehended the project but when the latter could finally get out of the hall he ran at full speed up to the Court-House, with Dr. William Francis Channing at his side, and they — two of our most determined men — found the field lost. Had they and such as they been present, it might have been very different.

The attempt being a failure and troops approaching, I went down the steps. There is always a farce ready to succeed every tragedy, and mine occurred when a man in the crowd sidled quietly up to me and placidly remarked, “Mister, I guess you’ve left your rumberill.” It flashed through my mind that before taking hold of the beam I had set down my umbrella for it was a showery day — over the railing of the Court-House steps. Recapturing this important bit of evidence, I made my way to Dr. W. F. Channing’s house, had my cut attended to, and went to bed; awaking in a somewhat battered condition the next morning, and being sent off to Worcester by my advisers. Then followed my arrest after a few days, — a matter conducted so courteously that the way of the transgressor became easy.

Naturally enough, my neighbors and friends regarded my arrest and possible conviction as a glory or a disgrace according to their opinions on the slavery question. Fortunately it did not disturb my courageous mother, who wrote, “I

assure you it does not trouble me, though I dare say that some of my friends are commiserating me for having a son ‘riotously and routously engaged,’” — these being the curious legal terms of the indictment. For myself, it was easy to take the view of my old favorite Lamennais, who regarded any life as rather incomplete which did not, as in his own case, include some experience of imprisonment in a good cause. (“Il manque toujours quelque chose à la belle vie, qui ne finit pas sur le champ de bataille, sur l’échafaud ou en prison.”) In my immediate household the matter was taken coolly enough to suggest a calm inquiry, one day, by the lady of the house, whether all my letters to her from the prison would probably be read by the jailer; to which a young niece, then staying with us, replied with the levity of her years, “Not if he writes them in his usual handwriting.”

It was left to my honor to report myself at the station in due time to meet the officers of the law; and my family, responding to this courtesy, were even more anxious than usual that I should not miss the train. In Boston, my friend Richard Henry Dana went with me to the marshal’s office; and I was seated in a chair to be “looked over” for identification by the various officers who were to testify at the trial. They sat or stood around me in various attitudes, with a curious and solemn depth of gaze which seemed somewhat conventional and even melodramatic. It gave the exciting sensation of being a bold Turpin just from Hounslow Heath; but it was on a Saturday, and there was something exquisitely amusing in the extreme anxiety of Marshal Tukey — a dark, handsome, picturesque man, said to pride himself on a certain Napoleonic look — that I should reach home in time for my Sunday’s preaching. Later the long trial unrolled itself, in which, happily, my presence was not necessary after pleading to the indictment. Theodore Parker was the only one among the defendants who attended steadily every day, and he prepared that elaborate defense which was printed afterwards. The indictment was ultimately quashed as imperfect, and we all got out of the affair; as it were, by the side-door.

I have passed over the details of the trial as I omitted those relating to the legal defense of Burns, the efforts to purchase him, and his final delivery to his claimant, because I am describing the affair only as a private soldier tells of what he personally saw and knew. I must, however, mention, in closing, a rather amusing afterpiece to the whole matter, something which occurred on October 30, 1854. A Boston policeman, named Butman, who had been active at the time of Burns's capture, came up to Worcester for the purpose, real or reputed, of looking for evidence against those concerned in the riot. The city being intensely anti-slavery and having a considerable colored population, there was a strong disposition to lynch the man, or at least to frighten him thoroughly, though the movement was checked by a manly speech to the crowd by George Frisbie Hoar; now United States Senator; but then a young lawyer; the ultimate result being that But-man was escorted to the railway station on Mr. Hoar's arm, with a cordon of Abolitionists about him, as a shelter from the negroes who constantly rushed at him from the rear, I was Que of this escort, and directly behind Butman walked Joseph Howland, a non-resistant of striking appearance, who satisfied his sensitive conscience by this guarded appeal, made at intervals in a sonorous voice: “Don't hurt him, mean as he is! Don't kill him, mean though he be!” At Howland's side was Thomas Drew, a vivacious little journalist, already mentioned, who compounded with his conscience very differently. Nudging back reprovingly the negroes and others who pressed upon the group, he would occasionally, when the coast was clear, run up and administer a vigorous kick to the unhappy victim, and then fall back to repress the assailants once more. As for these last, they did not seem to be altogether in earnest, but half in joke; although the scene gave the foundation for a really powerful chapter, called “The Roar of St. Domingo” in the now forgotten novel “Harrington,” by W. D. O'Connor.

Nevertheless, Butman was once knocked down by a stone; and when we reached the station just as the express train moved away, thus

leaving him behind, there began to come up an ugly shout from the mob, which seemed to feel for a moment that the Lord had delivered the offender into its hands. As a horse with a wagon attached was standing near by, it was hastily decided to put Butman into the wagon and drive him off, -a proposal which he eagerly accepted, I got in with him and took the reins; but the mob around us grasped the wheels till the spokes began to break. Then the owner arrived, and seized the horse by the head to stop us. By the prompt action of the late William W. Rice, since member of Congress, — a hack was at once substituted for the wagon; it drove up close, so that But-man and I Sprang into it and were whirled away before the mob fairly knew what had happened. A few stones were hurled through the windows, and I never saw a more abject face than that of the slave-catcher as he crouched between the seats and gasped out, “They'll get fast teams and be after us.” This, however; did not occur; and we drove safely beyond the mob and out of the city towards Grafton, where Butman was to' take a later train. Having him thus at my mercy, and being doubtless filled with prophetic zeal, I took an inhuman advantage of Butman, and gave him a discourse on the baseness of his whole career which would perhaps have made my reputation as a pulpit orator had my congregation consisted of more than one, or had any modern reporter been hidden under the cushions. Being overtaken a mile or two out of town by Lovell Baker; the city marshal, with a “fast team” such as Butman had dreaded, the man was transferred to him, and was driven by him, not merely to Grafton, but at Butman's urgent request to Boston and through the most unfrequented streets to his home. I meanwhile returned peacefully to Worcester, pausing only at the now deserted station to hunt up my wife's india-rubber overshoes, which I was carrying to be mended when the *émeute* broke out, and which I had sacrificed as heroically as I had nearly relinquished my umbrella at the Boston Court-House.

The Burns affair was the last actual fugitive slave case that occurred in Massachusetts, al-

161566 though for some years we kept up organizations and formed plans, and were better and better prepared for action as the call for it disappeared. I was for some years a stockholder in the yacht *Flirt*, which was kept in commission under the faithful Captain Bearnse, and was nominally let for hire, though really intended either to take slaves from incoming vessels, or, in case of need, to kidnap the claimant of a slave and keep him cruising on the coast of Maine until his claim should be surrendered. It all now looks very far off, and there has been time for the whole affair to be regarded in several different aspects. After the Civil War had accustomed men to the habitual use of arms and to military organization, the Burns riot” naturally appeared in retrospect a boyish and inadequate affair enough; we could all see how, given only a community of veteran soldiers, the thing might have been more neatly managed. And again, now that thirty years of peace have almost extinguished the habits and associations of war, still another phase of feeling has come uppermost, and it seems almost incredible that any condition of things should have turned honest American men into conscientious law-breakers. Yet such transitions have occurred in all periods of history, and the author of the “Greville Journals” records the amazement with which he heard that “Tom Grenville, so mild, so refined, adorned with such an amiable, venerable, and decorous old age,” should be the same man who had helped, sixty years

before, to carry the Admiralty building by storm in the riots occasioned by the trial of Admiral Keppel, and had been the second man to enter at the breach. Probably, if the whole truth were told, the sincere law-breakers of the world are the children of temperament as well as of moral conviction, and at any period of life, if the whirligig of time brought back the old conditions, would act very much as they acted before.

- ¹ See Adams’s *Lift of Dana*, i. 217. The story there is related from Mr. Adams’s recollection, which differs in several respects from my own, as to the way in which Dana used to tell it. Possibly, as with other good raconteurs, the details may have varied a little as time went on. I write with two MS. narratives before me, both from well-known Concord men.
- ² Lewis Hayden apparently fired a shot in my defense, after entrance had been made, but this was doubtless after the death of Batchelder; and the bullet or slug was said to have passed between the arm and body of Marshal Freeman. When Theodore Parker heard this statement, he wrung his hands and said, “Why. did he not hit him?”

VII

KANSAS AND JOHN BROWN

196ff

Coming into Boston Harbor in September, 1856, after a long and stormy passage in a sailing vessel from the island of Fayal, the passengers, of whom I was one, awaited with eager interest the arrival of the pilot. He proved to be one of the most stolid and reticent of his tribe, as impenetrable to our curiosity as were his own canvas garments to raindrops. AT last, as if to shake us off, he tugged from some remote pocket a torn fragment of a daily newspaper, — large enough to set before our eyes at a glance the momentous news of the assault on Charles Sumner in the United States Senate, and of the blockading of the Missouri River against Free State emigrants. Arrived on shore, my immediate party went at once to Worcester; and the public meeting held by my friends to welcome me back became also a summons to call out volunteer emigrants for Kansas. Worcester had been thoroughly wakened to the needs of the new Territory through the formation of the Emigrant Aid Society, which had done much good by directing public attention to the opportunities offered by Kansas, though the enterprise had already lost some momentum by the obvious limitations of its method of “organized emigration.” It had been shown that it was easy to get people to go together to a new colony, but hard to keep them united after they got there, since they could not readily escape the American impulse to disregard organization and go to work, each for himself; this desire being as promptly visible in the leaders as in anybody else. Moreover, it seemed necessary to arm any party of colonists more openly and thoroughly than had been the policy of the Emigrant Aid Society; and so a new movement became needful. A committee was appointed, of which I was secretary, with a view to sending a series of parties from Worcester and of these we in the end furnished three.

First, however, I was sent to St. Louis to meet a party of Massachusetts emigrants, under

Dr. Calvin Cutter, who had been turned back from the river by Missourians, or “Border Ruffians,” as they had then begun to be called. I was charged with funds to provide for the necessities of this body, and was also to report on the practicability of either breaking the river blockade or flanking it. A [198] little inquiry served to show that only the latter method would as yet be available. Events moved rapidly; a national committee was soon formed, with headquarters at Chicago, and it was decided to send all future emigrants across Iowa and Nebraska, fighting their way, if necessary, into Kansas. Our three parties, accordingly, went by that route; the men being provided with rifles, revolvers, and camp equipage. Two of these parties made their rendezvous in Worcester, one under command of my friend Stowell; the third party was formed largely of Maine lumbermen, recruited in a body for the service. I never saw thirty men of finer physique, as they strode through Boston in their red shirts and rough trousers to meet us at the Emigrant Aid Society rooms, which had been kindly lent us for the purpose. The rest of the men came to us singly, from all over New England, some of the best being from Vermont, including Henry Thompson, afterwards John Brown’s son-in-law, killed at Harper’s Ferry.

I have never ceased to regret that all the correspondence relating to these companies, though most carefully preserved for years, was finally lost through a casualty, and they must go forever unrecorded; but it was all really a rehearsal in advance of the great enlistments of the Civil War. The men were personally of as high a grade as the later recruits, perhaps even higher; they were of course mostly undisciplined, and those who had known something of military service — as in the Mexican War, for instance — were usually the hardest to manage, save and except the stalwart lumbermen, who were from the beginning a thorn in the flesh to the worthy Orthodox Congregational clergy-

man whom it became necessary to put in charge of this final party of emigrants. He wrote back to me that if I had any lingering doubts of the doctrine of total depravity, I had better organize another party of Maine lumbermen and pilot them to Kansas. Sympathy was certainly due to him; and yet I should have liked to try the experiment.

Being appointed as an agent of the National Kansas Committee, I went out in September, 1856, to meet and direct this very party, and others — including several hundred men — which had been collected on the Nebraska border. The events of the six weeks following were described by me in a series of letters, signed “Worcester,” in the “New York Tribune,” and later collected in a pamphlet entitled “A Ride through Kansas.” It was a period when history was being made very rapidly, — a period which saw a policy of active oppression at last put down and defeated, although backed [200] by the action or sustained by the vacillation of the national government. The essential difference between the Northern and the Southern forces in Kansas at that period was that the Northern men went as *bona fide* settlers, and the Southerners mainly to break up elections and so make it a Slave Territory. Every member of our Worcester parties signed a pledge to settle in Kansas, and nearly all kept it. On the other hand, the parties from South Carolina and Virginia, whom I afterwards encountered, had gone there simply on a lark, meaning to return home when it was over, as they freely admitted. This difference of material, rather than any superiority of organization, was what finally gave Kansas to freedom.

The end of the Western railway communication was then Iowa City, in Iowa, and those who would reach Kansas had six hundred miles farther to walk or ride. I myself rode across Iowa for four days and nights on the top of a stage-coach, in the path of my emigrants, — watching the sun go down blazing, and sometimes pear-shaped, over the prairie horizon, just as it goes down beyond the ocean, and then seeing it rise in the same way. When the stage at last rolled

me into Nebraska City, it seemed as if I had crossed the continent, for I had passed through Council Bluffs, which in my school geography had figured as the very outpost of the nation. Once arrived there . . . one of the first needful duties was to visit our party of lumbermen and restore peace, if possible, between them and their officers. For this purpose I made my first stump speech, in a literal sense, standing on a simple pedestal of that description, and reasoning with the mutineers to the best of my ability. . . . As I was fortified by the fact of having all their means of subsistence in a money-belt about my waste, the advantage was clearly on my side, and some order was finally brought out of chaos.

Soon after arriving I had to drive from Nebraska [202] City to Tabor on an errand, over about twenty miles of debatable ground, absolutely alone. It had been swept by the hostile parties of both factions; there as no more law than in the Scottish Highlands; every swell of the rolling prairie offered a possible surprise, and I had some of the stirring sensations of a moss-trooper. Never before in my life had I been, distinctively and unequivocally, outside of the world of human law; it had been ready to protect me, even when I disobeyed it. Here it had ceased to exist; my Sharp’s rifle, my revolvers, — or, these failing, my own ingenuity and ready wit, — were all the protection I had. It was a delightful sensation; I could quote to myself from Browning’s magnificent soliloquy in “Colombe’s Birthday:” —

“When is man strong until he feels alone?” and there came to mind some thrilling passages from Thornbury’s “Ballads of the Cavaliers and Roundheads” or from the “Jacobite Minstrelsy.” On this very track a carrier had been waylaid and killed by the Missourians only a few days before. The clear air, the fresh breeze, gave an invigorating delight, impaired by nothing but the yellow and muddy streams of that region, which seemed to my New England eye such a poor accompaniment for the land of the free. Tabor itself was then known far and wide as Free State town, from

the warm sympathy of its people for the struggles of their neighbors, and I met there with the heartiest encouragement, and had an escort back.

The tavern where I lodged in Nebraska City was miserable enough; the beds being fearfully dirty, the food indigestible, and the table eagerly beset by three successive relays of men. One day a commotion took place in the street: people ran out to the doors; and some thirty rough-riders came cantering up to the hostelry. They might have been border raiders for all appearance of cavalry order: some rode horses, some mules; some had bridles, other had lariats of rope; one man had on a light semblance of uniform, and seemed a sort of lieutenant. The leader was a thin man of middle age, in a gray woolen shirt, with keen eyes, smooth tongue, and a suggestion of courteous and even fascinating manners . . . This was the then celebrated Jim Lane, afterwards Senator James H. Lane, of the United States Congress; at this time calling himself only “Major-General commanding the Free State Forces of Kansas.” He was now retreating from the Territory with his men, in deference to the orders of the new United States governor, Geary, who was making [204] an attempt, more or less serious, to clear Kansas of all armed bands. Lane stopped two days in Nebraska City, and I did something towards renewing the clothing of his band. He made a speech to the citizens of the town, — they being then half balanced between anti-slavery and pro-slavery sympathies, — and I have seldom heard eloquence more thrilling, more tactful, better adjusted to the occasion. Ralph Waldo Emerson, I remember, was much impressed by a report of this speech as sent by me to some Boston newspaper. Lane went with me, I think, to see our emigrants, encamped near by; gave me some capital suggestions as to our march into the Territory; and ended by handing me a bit of crumpled paper, appointing me a member of his staff with the rank of brigadier-general.

As I rode out of Nebraska City on the march, next day, my companion, Samuel F. Tappan, riding at my side, took occasion to

exhibit casually a similar bit of paper in his own possession . . . We accompanied and partially directed the march of about a hundred and sixty men, with some twenty women and children. There were twenty-eight wagons, all but eight being drawn by horses. The nightly tents made quite an imposing encampment; while some of the men fed and watered the stock, others brought wood from far and near, others cleaned their rifles, others prepared the wagons for sleeping; the cooks fried pork and made bread; women with their babies sat round the fire; and a saddler brought out his board and leather every night and made belts and holsters for the emigrants. Each man kept watch for an hour, striding in thick boots through the prairie grass heavy with frost. Danger had always to be guarded against, though we were never actually attacked; and while we went towards Kansas, we met armed parties day after day fleeing from it, hopeless of peace. When at last we reached the Kansas River, we found on its muddy banks nineteen wagons with emigrants, retreating with heavy hearts from the land of promise so eagerly sought two years before. “The Missourians could not conquer us,” they said, “but Governor Geary has.”

On my first morning in Lawrence, Kansas, [206] I waked before daybreak, and looking out saw the house surrounded by dragoons, each sitting silent on his horse. This again was a new experience in those ante-bellum days. A party of a hundred and fifty of these men had been sent to intercept us, we learned, under the command of Colonel Preston and Captain Walker of the United States Army; the latter luckily being an old acquaintance of my own. As a result, I went with Charles Robinson, the Free State governor, and James Redpath for a half-amicable, half-compulsory interview with the actual governor, Geary; and we parted, leaving everything undecided, — indeed, nothing ever seemed to be decided in Kansas; the whole destiny of the Territory was one of drifting, until it finally drifted into freedom. Yet in view of the fact that certain rifles which we had brought, and which had been left at Tabor, Iowa, for fu-

ture emergencies, were the same weapons which ultimately armed John Brown and his men at Harper’s Ferry, it is plain that neither Governor Geary’s solicitude nor the military expedition of Colonel Preston was at all misplaced.

I formed that day a very unfavorable impression of Governor Geary, and a favorable one of Governor Robinson, and lived to modify both opinions. The former, though vacillating in Kansas, did himself great credit afterwards in the Civil War; while the latter did himself very little credit in Kansas politics, whose bitter hostilities and narrow vindictiveness he was the first to foster. Jealousy of the influence of Brown, Lane, and Montgomery led him in later years to be chiefly responsible for that curious myth concerning the Kansas conflict which has wholly taken possession of many minds, and has completely perverted the history of that State written by Professor Spring, — a theory to the effect that there existed from the beginning among the Free State people two well-defined parties, the one wishing to carry its ends by war, the other by peace. AS a matter of fact there was no such division. In regard to the most extreme act of John Brown’s Kansas career, the so-called “Pottawatomie massacre” of May 24, 1856, I can testify that in September of that year there appeared to be but one way of thinking among the Kansas Free State men, this being precisely the fact pointed out by the Colonel William A. Phillips, in his “Conquest of Kansas,” which is altogether the best and fairest book upon the confused history of that time and place. I heard of no one who did not approve of the act, and its beneficial effects were universally asserted, — Governor Robinson himself fully endorsing it [208] to me, and maintaining, like the rest, that it had given an immediate check to the armed aggressions of the Missourians.

It is certain that at a public meeting held at Lawrence, Kansas, three years alter (December 15, 1859), Robinson supported resolutions saying that the act was done “from sad necessity;” that on August 30, 1877, at the unveiling of Brown’s monument at Osawatomie, he compared Brown to Jesus Christ; and that on

February 5, 1878, he wrote in a letter to James Hanway, “I never had much doubt that Captain Brown was the author of the blow at Pottawatomie, for the reason that he was the only man who comprehended the situation and saw the absolute necessity of some such blow and had the nerve to strike it.” Personally, I have never fully reconciled myself to this vindication of “the blow;” but that Charles Robinson, after justifying it for nearly thirty years, and after the fighting men of the Territory (Brown, Lane, Montgomery) were dead, should have begun to pose as a non-resistant, and should later have spoken of “the punishment due Brown for his crimes in Kansas,” — this appears to me to have been either simply disgraceful, or else the product of a disordered mind. . . .

[210] As I had been urged to preach to the people of Lawrence, it seemed well to take for my text that which was employed by the Rev. John Martin on the Sunday after he had fought at Bunker Hill: “Be not yet afraid of them; remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” Riding a few days after to Leavenworth, then a “Border Ruffian” town, to witness an election under the auspices of that faction, I found myself in a village provided with more than fifty liquor shops for two thousand inhabitants, while the doors of the hotel were almost barricaded with whiskey casks. Strangers were begged to take a hand in the voting, as if it were something to drink; I was several times asked to do this, and my plea that I was only a traveler was set aside as quite irrelevant. Many debated on the most available point at which to cast their pro-slavery votes — for the Free state men denied the validity of the election and would not vote at all — as coolly as a knot of villages shopkeepers might debate whether to go to Boston or New York for purchases. Once the conversation began to grow rather personal. Said one man, just from Leocompton, “Tell you what, we’ve found out one thing: there’s a preacher going about here preaching politics.” “Fact?” and “Is that so?” were echoed with virtuous indignation

on all sides. “That’s so,” continued he, “and he fixes it this way: first, he has his text and preaches religion; then he drops that and pitches into [212] politics; and then he drops that too, and begins about the sufferin’ niggers” (this with ineffable contempt). “And what’s more, he’s here in Leavenworth now.” “What’s his name?” exclaimed several eagerly. “Just what I don’t know,” was the sorrowful reply, “and I shouldn’t know him if I saw him; but he’s here, boys, and in a day or two there’ll be some gentlemen here that know him.” (At my last speech in Lawrence I had been warned that three Missouri spies were present.) “It’s well we’ve got him here, to take care of him,” said one. “Won’t our boys enjoy running him out of town?” added another affectionately; while I listened with dubious enjoyment, thinking that I might perhaps afford useful information. But the “gentlemen” did not appear, or else were ins search of higher game; and I was to leave town that night, at any rate, for St. Louis.

I took the steamer *Cataract* on October 9, 1856, and went down the river; . . . The few Free State men on board were naturally not aggressive, although we spent a whole day on a sand-bank, a thing not conducive to serenity of mind; but the steamer which pulled us off had on board the secretary of the Kansas Sate Committee, Miles Moore, [214] and there had been an effort to lynch him, prevented only by Governor Cobb, of Alabama, who was on the boat. Renewal of hostilities being threatened, I invited Moore on board the *Cataract* at Jefferson City, where we lay overnight. He and I barricaded ourselves in my stateroom, with our revolvers ready, but heard only occasional threats from outside; there was no actual assault. When we reached St. Louis, — after more than four days on board the steamboat, . . . civilization reassumed its force, and Kansas appeared as far off as Colloden.

After returning home, I kept up for a long time an active correspondence with some of the leading Kansas men, including Montgomery, Hinton, my old ally Martin Stowell, and my associate brigadier, Samuel F. Tappan, after-

wards lieutenant-colonel of the First Colorado Cavalry. Some of these wrote and received letters under feigned names, because many of the post-offices in the Territory were in the hands of pro-slavery men who were suspected of tampering with correspondence. I also spoke on Kansas matters by request, before the legislatures of Massachusetts and Vermont, and was nominated by the Worcester Republicans for the state legislature on the issue of Kansas sympathy; but declined, feeling that I must at length recognize the claim of the Free Church on my attention. I was brought much in contact with that noble and self-devoted man, George Luther Stearns, of Medford, who gave, first and last, ten thousand dollars to maintain liberty in the new Territory; and also with Dr. Howe and Frank Sandborn, then the leading men in the Massachusetts Kansas Committee. In looking back on the inevitable confusion of that period, and the strange way in which men who had been heroic in danger brew demoralized in politics, I have often recalled as true the remark made by Sanborn, that it was difficult for a man to have much to do with the [216] affairs of Kansas, even at long range, without developing a crack in his brain.

It will doubtless seem to some readers a very natural transition to pass from this assertion to the later events which brought some of the above-named men into intimate relations with Captain John Brown. It has never been quite clear to me whether I saw him in Kansas or not; he was then in hiding, and I remember to have been taken somewhat covertly to a house in Lawrence, for an interview with a fugitive slave who was being sheltered by a white man; and though this man’s name, which I have forgotten, was certainly not Brown, it may have been one of Brown’s aliases. My first conscious acquaintance with that leader was nearly a year and a half later, when I received from him this communication, implying, as will be seen, that we had met before: —

Rochester, NY. 2d Feb’y, 1858

My dear sir, — I am here *concealing my whereabouts* for good reasons (as I think) not

however from any anxiety about my personal safety. I have been told that you are both a true *man*: and a true *abolitionist*; “and I partly believe,” the whole story. Last fall I undertook to raise from \$500 to \$1000, for *secret service*, and succeeded in getting \$500. I now want to get for the *perfecting* of by far the most *important* undertaking of my whole life; from \$500 to \$800 within the next sixty days. I have written Rev. Theodore Parker, George L. Stearns and F. B. Sanborn Esqrs. on the subject; but do not know as either Mr. Stearns or Mr. Sanborn are abolitionists. I suppose they are. Can you be induced to operate at Worcester and elsewhere during that time to raise from *anti-slavery men* and *women* (or any other parties) some part of that amount? I wish to keep it entirely still about where I am; and will be *greatly obliged* if you will consider this communication *strictly confidential*: unless it may be with such as you are sure will *feel and act and keep very still*. Please be so kind as to write N. Hawkins on the subject, Care of Wm. I Watkins, Esqr. Rochester, N.Y. Should be most happy to meet you again; and talk matters more freely. Hope this is my last effort in the begging line.

Very respectfully your Friend,,
John Brown.

This name, “N. Hawkins,” was Brown’s favorite alias. The phrase “partly believe” was a bit of newspaper slang of that period, but came originally from Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (xi.18) whence Brown may well [218] have taken it. I wrote in return, wishing for farther information, and asking if the “underground railroad” business was what he had in view. In a few days came this reply: —

Rochester, N.Y. 12th Feb’y, 1858.

My dear sir, — I have just read your kind letter of the 8th inst., and will now say that Rail Road business on a *somewhat extended* scale is the *identical* object for which I am trying to get means. I have been connected with that business as *commonly conducted* from my boyhood and *never* let an opportunity slip. I have been

operating to some purpose *the past season*; but I now have a measure on foot that I feel *sure* would awaken in you something more than a *common interest* if you could understand it. I have just written my friends G. L. Stearns and F. B. Sanborn asking them to meet me for consultation at Gerrit Smith’s, Peterboro’ [N. Y.] I am very anxious to have *you come along*; *certain as I feel*, that you will never regret having been one of the council. I would most gladly pay your expenses had I the means to spare. *Will you come on?* Please write as before.

Your Friend John Brown.

As I could not go to Peterboro’, he made an appointment in Boston, and I met him in his room at the American House in March, 1858. I saw before me a man whose mere appearance and bearing refuted in advance some of the strange perversions which have found their way into many books, and which have often wholly missed the type to which he belonged. In his thin, worn, resolute face there were the signs of a fire which might wear him out, and practically did so, but nothing of pettiness or baseness; and his talk was calm, persuasive, and coherent. He was simply a high-minded, unselfish, belated Covenanter; a man whom Sir Walter Scott might have drawn, but whom such writers as Nicolay and Hay, for instance, have utterly failed to delineate. To describe him in their words as “clean but coarse” is curiously wide of the mark; he had no more of coarseness than was to be found in Habakkuk Mucklwath or in George Eliot’s Adam Bede; he had, on the contrary, that religious elevation which is itself a kind of refinement, — the quality one may see expressed in many a venerable Quaker face at yearly meeting. Coarseness absolutely repelled him; he was so strict as to the demeanor of his men that his band was always kept small, while that of Lane was large; he had little humor, and none of the humorist’s temptation towards questionable [220] conversation. Again, to call him “ambitious to irritation,” in the words of the same authors, is equally wide of the mark. I saw him afterwards deeply disappointed and

thwarted, and this long before his final failure, but never could find in him a trace of mere ambition; he lived, as he finally died, absolutely absorbed in one idea; and it is as a pure enthusiast — fanatic, if you please — that he is to be judged. His belief was that an all-seeing God had created the Alleghany Mountains from all eternity as the predestined refuge for a body of fugitive slaves. He had traversed those mountains in his youth, as a surveyor, and knew points which could be held by a hundred men against a thousand; he showed me brought charts of some of those localities and plans of connected mountain fortresses which he had devised.

Of grand tactics and strategy Brown knew as little as Garibaldi; but he had studied guerrilla warfare for himself in books, as well as in Europe, and had for a preceptor Hugh Forbes, an Englishman who had been a Baribaldian soldier. Brown’s plan was simply to penetrate Virginia with a few comrades, to keep utterly clear of all attempt to create slave insurrection, but to get together bands and families of fugitives slaves, and then be guided by events. If he could establish them permanently in those fastnesses, like the Maroons of Jamaica and Surinam, so much the better; if not, he would make a break from time to time, and take parties to Canada, by paths already familiar to him. All this he explained to me and others, plainly and calmly, and there was nothing in it that we considered either objectionable or impracticable; so that his friends in Boston — Theodore Parker, Howe, Stearns, Sanborn, and myself — were ready to cooperate in his plan as thus limited. Of his wider organization and membership afterwards formed by him in Canada we of course knew nothing, nor could we foresee the imprudence which finally perverted the attack into a defeat. We helped him in raising the money, and he seemed drawing toward the consummation of his plans, when letters began to come to us Massachusetts supporters from Hugh Forbes, already mentioned, threatening to make the whole matter public unless we could satisfy certain very unreasonable demands for money. On this point our committee was at once divided,

not as to refusing the preposterous demands, but because the majority thought that this threat of disclosure made necessary an indefinite postponement of the whole affair; while Howe and myself, and Brown also, as it proved, thought otherwise.

He came again to Boston (May 31, 1858), [222] when I talked with him alone, and he held, as I had done, that Forbes could do him no real harm; that if people believed Forbes they would underrate his (Brown’s) strength, which was just the thing he wished; or if they overrated it, “the increased terror would perhaps counterbalance this.” If he had the means, he would not lose a day. But as I could not, unaided provide the means, I was obliged to yield, as he did. He consented to postpone the enterprise and return to Kansas, carrying with him \$500 in gold, and an order for certain arms at Tabor, which had belonged originally to the State Kansas Committee, but had since been transferred, in consideration of a debt, to our friend Stearns, who gave them to Brown on his own responsibility. Nearly a year now passed, during which I rarely heard from Brown, and thought that perhaps his whose project had been abandoned. A new effort to raise money was made at Boston in the spring of 1859, but I took little part in it. It had all begun to seem to me rather chimerical. The amount of \$2000 was, nevertheless, raised for him at Boston, in June, 1859, and I find that Sanborn wrote to me (June 4), “Brown has set out on his expedition;” and then on October 6, “The \$300 desired has been made up and received. Four or five men will be on the ground next week for these regions and elsewhere.” Brown’s address was at this time at West Andover, Ohio, and the impression was that the foray would begin in that region, if at all. Nobody mentioned Harper’s Ferry.

Ten days later the blow came. I went into a newspaper shop in Worcester one morning, and heard some one remark casually, “Old Osawatimie Brown has got himself into a tight place at last.” I grasped eagerly at the morning paper, and read the whole story. Naturally, my first feeling was one of remorse, that the men

who had given him money and arms should not actually have been by his side. In my own case, however, the justification was perfectly clear. Repeated postponements had taken the edge off from expectation, and the whole enterprise had grown rather vague and dubious in my mind. I certainly had not that degree of faith in it which would have led me to abandon all else, and wait nearly a year and a half for the opportunity for fulfillment; and indeed it became obvious at last that this longer postponement had somewhat disturbed the delicate balance of the zealot's mind, and had made him, at the very outset, defy the whole power of the United States government, and that within easy reach of Washington. Nothing of this kind was included in his original plans.

[224] At any rate, since we were not with him, the first question was what part we were now to take. It will be remembered that the explosion of the Brown affair caused at once a vast amount in inquiry at Washington, and many were the threats of prosecuting Brown's previous friends and supporters. There was some talk of flight to Canada, and one or two of these persons actually went thither or to Europe. It always seemed to me undesirable to do this; rather it looked as if, having befriended Brown's plans so far as we understood them, it was our duty to stand our ground and give him our moral support, at least on the witness-stand. this view was perhaps easier for me to take, as my name was only incidentally mentioned in the newspapers; and it is only within a few months that I have discovered that it had been early brought, with that of Sanborn, to the express attention of Governor Wise, of Virginia. Among his papers captured at Charlestown, Va., by Major James Savage, of the Second Massachusetts Infantry, was this anonymous letter, received by the Virginia governor, and indorsed by him for transmission

to some one else, probably in Congress, — but perhaps never forwarded. It read as follows: “There are two persons in Massachusetts, and I think only two, who, if summoned as witnesses, can explain the whole of Brown's plot. Their names are Francis B. Sanborn, of Concord, and T. W. Higginson, of Worcester, Mass. No time should be lost, as they may abscond, but I do not think they will, as they think you would not think it best to send for them. A Friend of Order.” This was indorsed “A Friend to Gov. Wise, Oct., 1859. Call attention to this.” And just below, “Sent to me, now sent to you for what it is worth. Richmond, Oct. 29, H.A.W. [Henry A. Wise.] A. Huntin [presumably the name of a secretary].”

This communication was written during the trial of Captain Brown, and a few days before his sentence, which was pronounced on November 2. It is hard to say whether it had any direct bearing on the arrest of Sanborn at Concord in the following April. It is very probable that it had, and if so, his arrest, had it been sustained by the court, might have been followed by mine; but it would have been quite superfluous, for I should at any time have been ready to go if summoned, and should, in fact, have thought it rather due to the memory of Brown. I could at least have made it plan that anything like slave insurrection, in the ordinary sense of the word, was remote from his thoughts, and that his plan was wholly different. He would have limited himself to advising a [226] fugitive slave, if intercepted, to shoot down any one who attempted to arrest him; and this advice would have been given by every Abolitionist, unless a non-resistant.

There was, of course, an immediate impulse to rescue Brown from prison. I do not know how far this extended, and can only vouch for myself.