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THE CORNHILL
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John Brown

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BORN MAY 9, 1800.—DIED DECEMBER 2, 1859.

A MEMORIAL OF A HERO WHOSE HISTORY IS A PART OF SPRINGFIELD.

“ Writ in between the lines of his life-deed
We trace the sacred service of a heart,
Answering the Divine command in every part
Bearing on human weal: His love did feed
The loveless; and his gentle hands did lead
The blind, and lift the weak, and balm the smart
Of other wounds than rankled at the dart
In his own breast, that gloried thus to bleed.
He served the lowliest first—nay, them alone—
The most despised that ever wreaked vain breath
In cries of suppliciance in the reign whereat
Red Guilt sate squat upon her spattered throne,—
For those doomed there it was he went to death.
God! how the merest man loves one like that.”

James Whitcomb Riley.

THIRTY-FIVE years ago a nation's hero was translated to the life beyond with all the pomp and military show worthy of a brave man, and yet by some it was considered a disgraceful death.

Yes, it was disgraceful. A disgrace to the courts of justice, but to the man a living triumph, as the undimmed pages of time have shown.

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How well God bless you

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Your Friend

John Brown

On December 2, 1859, John Brown, a citizen of the United States of America, was publicly murdered. He may have committed a crime, certainly, but it was not fully proven and little chance was given him for defense. Yet, what matters it? He died willingly, knowing that his death would bring on the crisis that would rid his country of the curse of slavery. Then, too, time has shown the character of his murderers in their true light. Sentenced to death in a state which within two years disavowed allegiance to, and took up arms against its own nation; sentenced by officers who later proved themselves traitors to their country; his gal-

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lows surrounded by a military body, commanded by Robert E. Lee, who later commanded the Army of Northern Virginia, with John Wilkes Booth, the human brute who felt called upon to assassinate Abraham Lincoln for one of his minor officers.

Again, what matters it? He did not die, "His soul is marching on," and he will live forever in the hearts of every lover of human freedom and justice. His friend, Thoreau, said, "not for many days did I even *hear* that he was dead." Though the Virginia courts sent him to join his fathers and his God, yet John Brown, Ossawatimie Brown, continued to live until their most cherished institutions were thrown down and their idols broken in pieces and scattered to the four winds of heaven.

The history of the man possesses more than an ordinary local interest, for it was while a citizen of Springfield that John Brown fostered and matured his plans which were brought to such a disastrous culmination at Harper's Ferry in 1859.

He was born in Torrington, Ct., ninety-four years ago, May 9, 1800, springing from the old Puritan stock. The whole spirit of the ancestors of John Brown seems to have been imbued with the hatred of slavery, and the love of liberty was transferred in the very life blood from father to son. Peter Brown, the carpenter of the ship *Mayflower*, of whom John Brown was a descendant, came to this country

to escape religious persecution. Capt. Brown, the grandfather, died in New York while opposing the British in 1776, while Capt. John Brown died fighting an unjust people. The same idea seems to have urged each one on to what he considered his duty, and even the prospect of death left the idea unshaken that they should not live for themselves alone.

In the spring of 1846 a convention of Western wool growers prevailed upon Perkins and Brown of Akron, O., to open storage warehouses in Springfield as representatives of the Western farmers, and Brown, much against his will, was selected as agent. No vision of pecuniary gain tempted him, but ever thoughtful for the wronged he accepted the trust simply because he thought it would be the means of breaking up the New England combination of manufacturers and righting an organized wrong.

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So in June, 1846, Perkins and Brown opened business in the lofts of John L. King's old warehouse at the corner of Water and Railroad streets, Perkins furnishing the capital while Brown had entire supervision. Two cents a pound was charged for storing, grading and selling and one mill per pound additional covered such incidentals as postage and fire insurance. The firm represented the growers of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia and such was Brown's reputation for honesty and integrity that his business operations went unquestioned by his associates.

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As the business grew larger quarters were looked for. Chester W. Chapin was building a block with stores below and tenements above, just north of the Agawam bank, on what was then North Main street. Here Perkins and Brown moved, taking a store and a half for an office, and as the block was incomplete, the third floor was left out, making clear lofts up to the peaked roof.

It was about this time that Brown commenced telling his plans to negroes whom he thought he could trust, and incidentally he ran across Thomas Thomas, a fugitive from the eastern shores of Maryland, and offered to give him employment as porter in his warehouse. A bargain was struck and Thomas in-

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quired what time in the morning to commence work. "Seven o' clock" was the reply, "But I wish you would come earlier, as I have something to tell you." So Thomas went over about half past five and found Brown waiting to disclose his underground railway plans.

So pleased was Brown with his new acquaintance that he afterward sent Thomas to look up Madison Washington, who had engineered an uprising on the vessel "Creole."

He is remembered by the older residents as a moderate, quiet sort of a man, orderly and systematic in his habits, particularly in his business. All his letters were filed with the comments "answered," "no time to read," or "no answer required," while his account books, all of which have been sacredly preserved, are models of neatness.

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Yet, with all his system a carelessness in money matters was very marked. Bill after bill would be paid by check, without having the bank book written up, till he had no idea whether he had a cent or not to his credit, and from sheer necessity the book was checked up. Either from carelessness or lack of time the character & was invariably used in his books and correspondence. He was deliberate, but an early riser and a hard worker; often commencing work at three in the morning, he accomplished much in a day.

Neatness was shown in his whole character. His entire suit was made of a snuff-colored cloth, out of fashion, perhaps, but of stock of the finest grade.

While in Springfield he was without the peculiar beard seen in the conventional pictures, but had a smooth face and his bushy hair cut about an inch long, standing straight out from all sides.

Peculiar notions followed even in regard to food. No coffee, simply plain milk or water for drinking, and no cheese or butter.

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For a time Brown and his two sons, John, jr. and Jason boarded at the American house of Morgan & Day, located just in the rear of the present Boston & Albany granite building, but as business prospered the remainder of the family came to live here.

Housekeeping was commenced in the second tenement of the brick house owned by Henry Gray on what was the corner of Gray's court and Ferry street, but now known as Gray's avenue and Cypress street. Very soon his nomadic instincts asserted themselves, however, and after wandering about, living on Main, Vine, and possibly some other streets, he finally settled on Hastings street early in 1848. "John Brown, wool dealer, opposite Massasoit house, Hastings street," says the Springfield directory of 1849. We have no Hastings street at the present time, but the early records show that in 1846 Dexter Allis and others cut a street through their land between Main and Chestnut streets, and built three houses, one on the south side and two on the north, naming it Hastings street in honor of Waitstill Hastings. Later, when it

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was accepted by the city and made a public way, it was named Franklin, in honor of Benjamin Franklin. Here in the frame dwelling, No. 31 Franklin street, lived John Brown. This was really his home. Here his daughter Ellen was born, March 20, 1848, and here his whole family lived in peace and prosperity. Hardly the home in which to find a prosperous merchant, this seemed. A two story and a half frame dwelling with a one-story addition connecting it with a small barn or wood shed in the rear, the front ornamented with a piazza supported by four fluted columns. But though the exterior was fairly good, inside everything was of the plainest. No servants, no cloth on the table, and only the bare necessities of life. (On moving in he took a vote of his family to see if they would furnish the parlor or use the money to buy clothing for the fugitive negroes in the colony at North Elba, and it is needless to say that the decision was unanimously in favor of the negroes.

In 1844 the dissenters and anti-slavery men of the Trinity church on Pynchon street built the Zion Methodist church building on Sanford street. The building stands there today with its marble tablet "Free Church, 1844," and its pulpit bible is still used by the Quincy street Mission. Here John Brown worshipped and of this church he was a member. Rev. Mr. Conkling of the North church, who became estranged from his congregation on account of his abolitionist ideas, was a great friend of his, and on that account he was an occasional visitor to that as well as to the First church.

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As Brown studied his plans and campaigns, he saw that a resort to arms was unavoidable and wishing to provide a home for his family and a place for his grave if he should be killed, he moved to North Elba, New York. Gerrit Smith, the abolitionist, had given 100,000 acres of land in the Adirondacks for the benefit of escaped slaves, and Brown proposed that he should live on one of these farms and help the fugitives. The slaves were not used to such hard labor as was needed to clear the land; the climate was hard for them and they needed some one to teach them to till the soil and be father to them. Smith saw the necessity of some such arrangement, and believing Brown to be the ideal person for such a position he gratefully accepted his offer, and in 1848 the family moved to the bleak woods.

A plot of land was selected where mountain peaks towered on every hand and a one-and-a-half story dwelling erected. Nearby is the

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little cemetery where sleep John Brown and his murdered sons: the little, white fence enclosing the ground where the bodies were laid to rest by Wendell Phillips, and the huge boulder,—God's grandest monument to his martyr. Shortly before his death Brown had the headstone brought from the grave of his grandfather in Connecticut so that it might be placed over his own grave: and when the bodies were buried, his name and that of his son were cut upon its face in addition to the name of Captain John Brown. Years later, some of the friends and admirers of the man visited the place, and being struck with the instability of the monument, determined upon erecting a more fitting memorial. Casting about for some design which should be not only simple but lasting, they hit upon the happy idea of cutting upon the boulder, on the side opposite the headstone, in letters covering nearly the whole face of the rock, simply the words "John Brown, 1859."

So long as the rock lasts, the inscription will last also, for the letters are cut deep enough to withstand the exposure of centuries.

Though by the world at large the man is considered a crank and a dreamer who threw away his life in a reckless way when he might have kept it for a better use: yet to the most careful students of his character this is far from being true. He well knew that sooner or later he should fall in campaigns, and every move he made was with that idea in mind. He was far from being a dreamer. His Harper's Ferry schemes failed only from a slight miscalculation. Had he left the armory in time he could have escaped to the mountains, where the country was better known to himself and his men than any one else. Here the slaves would have flocked to his standard and a successful uprising would have been the result. But he waited too long and history tells how dearly he and his little band paid for this neglect to take advantage of opportunities offered.

Bleeding and wounded, with his sons and friends dead around him, he was at last captured and after being carried into court on a stretcher, the miserable farce of a trial by jury was enacted and as all the world expected, the verdict was guilty, and the sentence, death. Though he knew that he was working against the inevitable yet life was dear to the old man and he made a brave fight in his defense. To his old friend, Judge Chapman of Springfield, he dictated the following letter, being too weak to write it himself, though he signed it with a trembling hand.

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HON. RUFUS CHAPMAN, Springfield, Mass.

DEAR SIR: I am here imprisoned with several saber cuts in my head and bayonet stabs in my body. My object in writing to you is to obtain able and faithful counsel for myself and fellow prisoners, five in all, as we have the faith of Virginia pledged through her Governor and numerous other prominent citizens to give us a fair trial. Without we can obtain such counsel from without the slave states, neither the facts in our case can come before the world, nor can we have the benefit of such facts as might be considered mitigating in the view of others upon our trial. I have money in hand here to the amount of \$250, and personal property sufficient to pay a most liberal fee to yourself or to any suitable man who will undertake our defense. If I can have the benefit of said property, can you or some other good man come immediately on for the sake of the young men prisoners at least? My wounds are doing well. Do not send an Ultra Abolitionist.

Very respectfully yours,

JOHN BROWN.

Brave and generous to the last he asked for counsel, not so much for himself as "for the sake of the young men."

But Judge Chapman was unable to render any assistance and on November 2, 1859, the sentence of death was pronounced. On being asked by the judge if there were any reasons why this sentence should not be carried out, Brown made that short, eloquent speech which Ralph Waldo Emerson says can be compared with only one other American speech: that of Lincoln at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery.

“ I have, may it please the court, a few words to say.

“ In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted—the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended, certainly, to have made a clean thing of this matter, as I did last winter, when I went into Missouri and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again, on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

“ I have another objection, and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proven (for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case)—had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends, either father, mother, brother, sister, wife or children, or any of that class, and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right, and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

“ This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least, the New Testament. That teaches me that all things “ whatsoever I would that men should do unto me, I should do even so to them.” It teaches me further, to “ remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.” I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done—as I have always freely admitted I have done—in behalf of his despised poor, was not wrong but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country, whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel and unjust enactments, I submit; so let it be done.

"Let me say **one** word further.

"I feel **entirely** satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.

"Let me say also a word in **regard** to the statements made by some of those connected with me. I hear it has been stated by some of them that I have induced them to join me; but the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part at their own expense. A number of them I never saw and never had a word of conversation with them till the day they came to me, and that was for the purpose I have stated.

"Now I have done."

In pronouncing his eulogium over the grave, in the mountains, on the eighth day of December, 1859, his friend, Wendell Phillips, said: "Who checked him at last? Not startled Virginia. Her he had conquered. In reality God said, 'That work is done: come up higher, and baptize by your martyrdom a million hearts into holier life.' As I stood looking at his grandfather's gravestone, brought here from Connecticut, telling as it does of his death in

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the Revolution, I thought I could hear our
hero-saint saying, 'My fathers gave their sword
to the oppressed; I gave my sword to the
slave my fathers forgot.' Fuller success than
his heart ever dreamed of God granted him.
He sleeps in the blessings of the crushed and
the poor, and men believe more firmly in virtue,
now that such a man has lived.'

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HARRY ANDREW WRIGHT.

May 4, 1894.