John Brown in Pennsylvania

By Rev. John S. Duncan, D. D.

Almost from my childhood I have been interested in the somewhat puzzling character, the strange career, and the tragic fate of "Old John Brown" of Ossawatomie and Harper's Ferry fame. Because of this deep and abiding interest I was led to read much concerning him and had visited many of the places associated with his career. Strangely enough, until recently, one period of his life, a period of special interest to those who live in this western section of Pennsylvania, had escaped me. As I have talked with others I have found that they, too, like myself, have missed it. I feel, therefore, that it is fitting to give the story of this little-known period of John Brown's life to the readers of this magazine.

In May of 1825 (some say 1826), John Brown moved his family from Hudson, Ohio, to Crawford County, Pennsylvania. He was then only twenty-five years old. He bought a farm in what is now Richmond township, at a point about twelve miles east of Meadville. Here he built a tannery and engaged in the business of making leather, he having learned that trade. Ten years, or about one-sixth of his life, were spent on the farm.

The first wife of John Brown was Dianthe Lusk. While he and his wife lived in Ohio three sons were born, John, Jr., July 25, 1821, Jason on January 19, 1823, and Owen on November 24, 1824. The first child born in Crawford County, this state, was Fred, who died at the age of four. The second child born here was Ruth, the date of whose birth was February 18, 1829. Ruth grew to womanhood, and on September 26, 1850 married Henry Thompson. A second son, also named Fred, was born December 31, 1830. This second Fred lived to manhood, fought with his father in Kansas, and was murdered at Ossawatomie August 30, 1856. The last child of this marriage was born August 7, 1832. Both mother and child died three days later, the mother being only thirty-one years old.
Of this first great sorrow in the life of John Brown Elbert Hubbard wrote: "In the thirteenth year of her marriage she died. The neighbors robed her in her wedding dress. Pillowed on her arm they placed her baby boy—tired after three days of life. And so they slept!" And so they still sleep, for the bodies were buried in a little plot on the highest point of the farm, where also the four-year-old Frederick had been buried.

Later John Brown married a girl who was only seventeen years old, Mary Ann Day. To this union one daughter, Sarah, was born, May 11, 1834. In all Mary Day became the mother of thirteen children, and among these were sons who fought and died with their father, some in Kansas and others at Harper's Ferry. With the exception of Sarah, born in Crawford County, and Ellen, born at Springfield, Massachusetts, all of the children of the second wife were born at various places in Ohio.

During these years spent at New Richmond, as the place is now called, John Brown was interested in all that pertained to the welfare of the community. He surveyed new roads and helped to establish schools, his own house being used at time for school purposes. For a time he served as post-master in charge of an office named Randolph, and in various parts of Crawford County are still shown worn and faded letters bearing John Brown's frank. He is said to have been the first to introduce blooded cattle in that section. Deeply and earnestly religious, he brought ministers to preach to the people, and as a result of his efforts in this direction a Congregational Society was established.

Among the neighbors of John Brown in those days of long age were some whose descendants are the best known and most highly respected families in all that section of our state. By these neighbors he was in such esteem that it became almost a proverb to say of an aggressive man that he was "as enterprising and honest as John Brown and as useful to the community."

A few years ago the farm at New Richmond was bought by a wealthy citizen of Bradford, Pennsylvania, Mr. John C. Looker, who has spent considerable money in restoring the farm and beautifying it. His intention is to make it a shrine and throw it open to the public. The house
now on the farm is to be used as a museum. Recently citizens of Crawford County organized a John Brown Memorial Association, and on the first Saturday of July each year a celebration is held in the beautiful grove not far from the house.

This year it was my privilege to be present and to speak at this celebration. There was a large gathering of people from various parts of this northwestern section of the state. I found the old spot one of great interest. I did some exploring with my Graflex camera and got some good pictures. One was of the foundation stones of the old tannery, a foundation which was laid by John Brown himself. Later the building was used as a creamery and was burned down in 1907. On the highest post on the farm, as already said, are the graves of the first wife, her baby of three days, and little boy Frederick who was four years old. The stones of the foundation are well preserved and the inscriptions on the grave stones are very plain. These read: "Dianthe, Wife of John Brown, Died August 10, 1832, Aged 31 years; Frederick, Son of John and Dianthe Brown. Died March 31, 1831, Aged 4 years."

During these earlier years John Brown showed the same strength of character and the same courage of conviction which marked his later life. He became a member of the Masonic fraternity, but withdrew from the order in 1826 when William Morgan, having threatened to expose Masonic secrets, suddenly disappeared. Brown upheld Morgan and denounced the order. So outspoken was he that on one occasion in Meadville he was threatened by a mob of Masonic sympathisers, who surrounded the hotel in which he was staying.

Leaving New Richmond he moved again to Ohio. Several times he returned to the Crawford County farm, and on the occasions of these visits friends discerned in him a growth of the abolition spirit and saw evidence of his deep conviction—a conviction which remained with him to the end of his life—that God had called him to make war on human slavery. To a friend, Mr. George McFadden, a tanner doing business in Meadville, he spoke of this conviction and said that sometime he meant to strike a blow in behalf of the slave. "If you do," McFadden said,
"you will hang for it." "Well then," was Brown's answer, "I will hang." And hang he did, as all the world knows. But as Amerson said of him, "he made the gallows glorious like the cross," and when his worn and scarred body was laid in the grave which he himself had chosen, it was said of him, "He was not buried, he was planted," and from that planting came as harvest the freedom of a race, a nation united and purged of its sin and shame.

Such are, in brief, the facts as to the career of John Brown within the borders of our own state. With the recital of these facts this article might fittingly close. As I talk with men I find that not only are many not acquainted with the facts recited, but many are unacquainted with another interesting matter as to John Brown: the place of his burial. A year ago this summer it was my privilege to visit the grave of John Brown, that grave at which Wendell Phillips said: "He sleeps in the blessing of the crushed and the poor, and men believe more firmly in virtue now that such a man lived. Standing here, let us thank God for a firmer faith and a fuller hope."

The burial spot is on a farm, the gift of an admiring friend and helper, a few miles from Lake Placid, New York, and is a place of wondrous beauty. A few rods in front of the farm house lies a huge boulder. By this boulder John Brown requested that he be buried. On one end of the boulder he himself had carved the initials "J. B.," and there they are to this day. The foot of the grave is only a few feet away. By his side sleeps his son Watson, and on another side of the great stone lies the bodies of fourteen of the men who fought with him at Harper's Ferry, these last having been brought there some years after that historic struggle. The boulder and some ground about it have been enclosed with a fine fence of wrought iron. Trees have grown up and a bronze tablet has been placed on the end of the stone. On the top of the stone, in great letters, is inscribed, "John Brown—1859." In one corner of the burial plot is a tall and graceful flag staff, from which there floats at all times, and at half-mast, the flag of the republic.

With the mighty mountains all about and looking down, the spot is one of entrancing beauty, and as I stood by the grave of this man of martyr stuff, whose march-
ing soul made music for the embattled hosts of freedom and union, my heart was touched and stirred, and "while I was musing the fire burned." At Ossawatomie he said to one of his men, "Take more care to end life well than to live long." He did not live long, for he was less than sixty when a great people doomed him to die as a traitor, but he ended his life well. Let his epitaph be that which Victor Hugo suggested, "Pro Christo sicut Christus."

Mercer, Pennsylvania