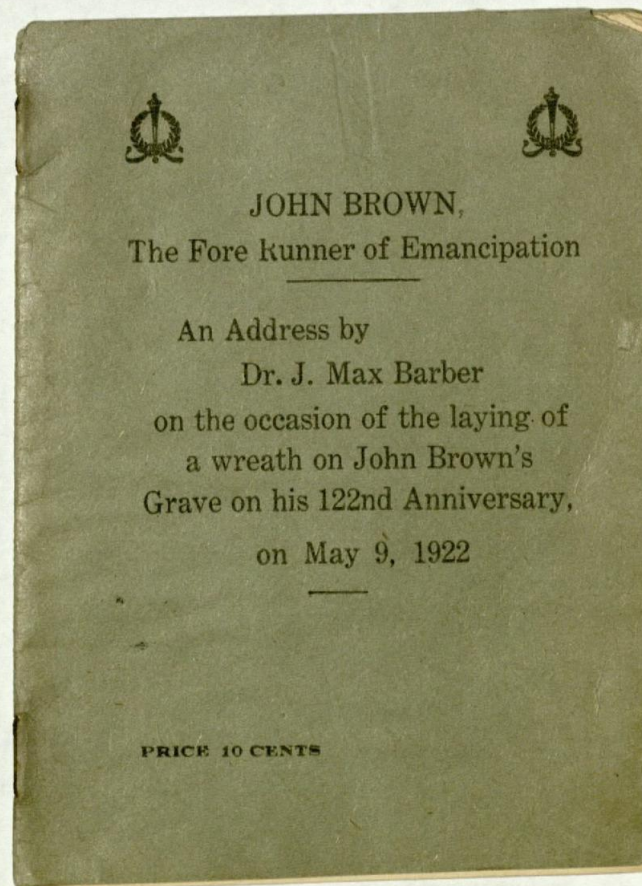
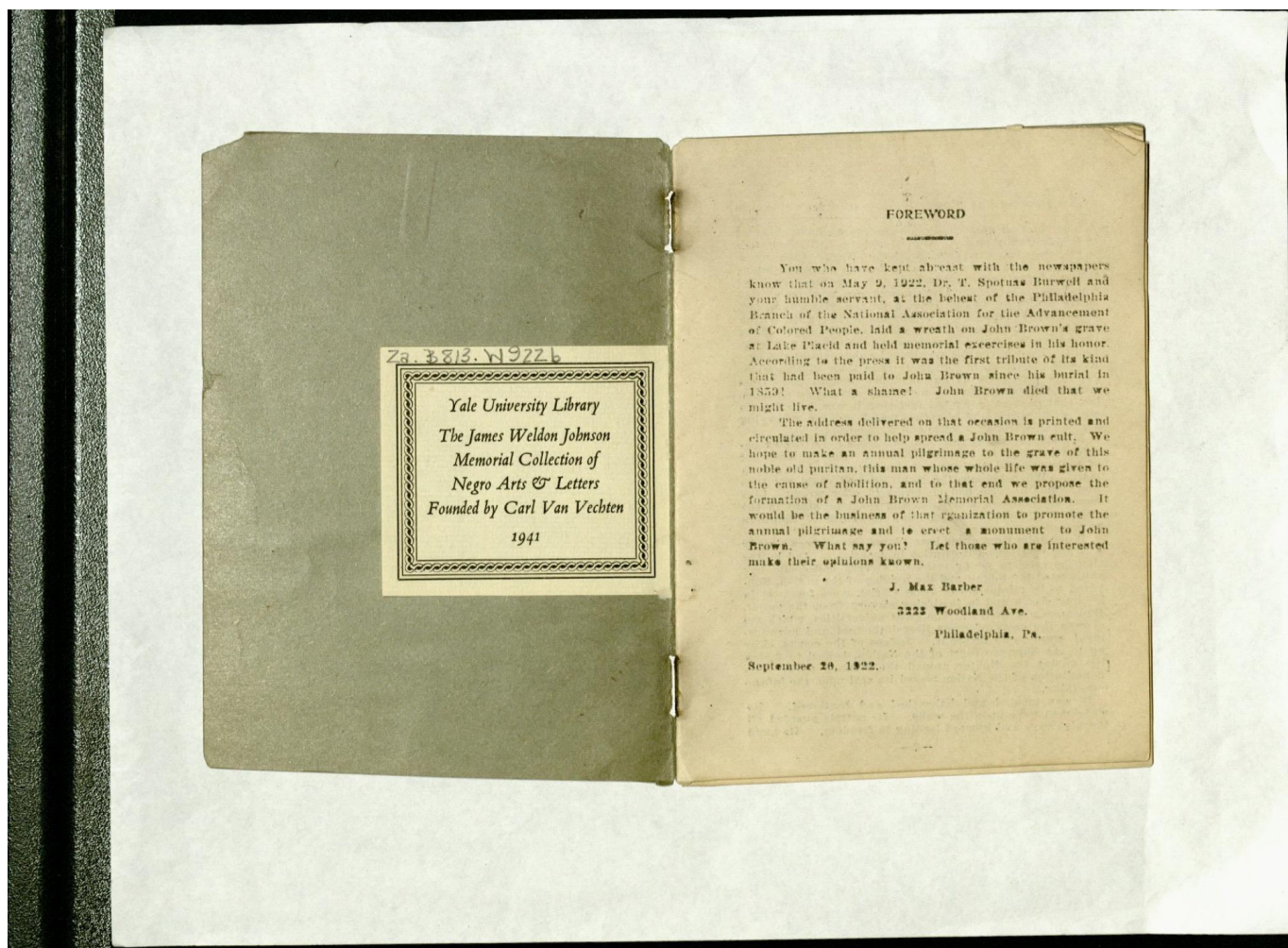


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John Brown The Fore Runner of Emancipation

The old Puritan around whose grave we have gathered to-day to tardily pay our meed of respect, really had more to do with the emancipation of the Negro than even Abraham Lincoln; for in the final analysis, public opinion—and that alone—counts in settling great national questions. Abraham Lincoln was not what one could call a leader of public opinion on the slave question. Perhaps the best that can be said of him is that he traveled abreast with the advanced opinion of the day. John Brown was a leader and a shaper of the opinions of mankind. Lincoln considered himself a delegate of the people and could go no further than their instructions. John Brown believed he held his commission from God. Of course the two men were differently situated, but that does not alter the fact that it was John Brown who first struck the blow that sent slavery scurrying across the world as a brute and a vagabond.

For strength of character I will place John Brown beside any figure in American history. Here, arising out of the murk and confusion of this abysmal night, was a man. When he saw the right, all hell could not turn him from it. He had no terms to offer wrong. Like mountain and oak and sheltering rock, he stood in the storm and defied the gathering elements of Southern anger.

When John Brown was born, Negro slavery was already a firmly established institution in America. And by the time he grew to young manhood slavery had completely subjugated the morals and the religion of the nation. Supposed to be ministers of Jesus Christ, were foremost in holding slaves and in justifying slavery from the pulpit. Educators approved it. The great universities, which are always the seats of great liberal thought and advancement, were dumb before it. Judges of the courts, clear up to the Supreme court of the Nation, helped to fasten the chains the tighter around the Negro's neck. The constitution of the Nation placed its seal upon the infamous thing.

It was moated and bulwarked and bastioned. Its watchmen were upon the walls. Its patrols guarded all the highways and byways leading to freedom. Its hand

was at the throat of the Nation. Thus when John Brown came to young manhood slavery tinged every phase of American life. Its maledor had stifled the morality of the Nation.

In the mountains people get clear visions. John Brown was always crossing and recrossing the mountains. Sometime during his young manhood in the mountains, he must have had a vision and heard a call. He must have looked over into Virginia and the Carolinas and down through Georgia, and the deltas of the wicked Mississippi. Here he was looking through the naked, quivering heart of the slave world. Like John on the isle of Patmos, he saw a vast multitude. Those John of the Gospel saw, were worshipping God in freedom. Those John Brown saw, were shut out from God, shut out from freedom and manhood, shut out from culture; tethered down in the manure pits of the world to hand up to the white race, wealth and leisure. They had been made the disinherited sons of Adam. They were not treated like men but like submen. And they, too, were made in the image of God. Brown saw the auction block where mothers and daughters were parted forever and which stood as the crowning mockery of marriage among slaves. He saw ten thousand overseers wield ten thousand cowhide lashes on ten thousand bowed black backs as the warm red blood trickled down their writhing bodies to the ground. He heard the agonizing wail of the slaves in the tobacco and cotton fields.

If you will go back with me to the time when man-stealing was the chief commercial industry of the civilized world, you will see slavery as John Brown saw it. Brown knew slavery. He had seen how its prehensile grasp reached back to Africa and tore up all the roots of tribal culture.

All ties were disregarded by the slavecatchers. Tribes were torn to pieces, mothers were torn from husbands, children from fathers and even kings from subjects. The natives themselves were corrupted so that through rum and red beads they aided in the capture of their fellow-men.

Two great savage nations, Dahomey and Ashantee, on the West coast, through agreements with Europeans, made slave-catching their chief industry. These people were to all West Africa the very children of old Zeg Zeg, that

The standing armies of these nations, more than 100,000 strong, were used mostly in slave-catching. Whole tribes old iron jawed, even-mouthed slave-hound of Haussa, were captured as prisoners of war and sold to the white slave merchants and Christian sons of civilization. In one instance alone 200 towns and villages in the Ebba district, on the slave coast, were destroyed by the slave-catchers in 50 years. One hundred thousand refugees from these ruined towns gathered on a high hill and built the fortified city of Abeokuta.

Do not these figures tell an awful tale?

All the paths that wound to the sea during that awful era became congested with the slave traffic. In the harbors of the West coast, there hovered like vultures, the ships of civilization waiting for their human prey. The ships were packed with human beings very much as a sardine tin is packed. Crossing the ocean the crew of the ships would go down in the hold each morning and sort out the dead and half dead and throw them into the water. Never before nor since until the German ruthless submarine war, have the hungry sharks feasted on so much human flesh. And this monstrous crime, this diabolical rape of a continent went on for 400 years; this colossal cancer ate the heart out of Africa while Europe and America assumed to be a beacon of civilization to all the world! Holy God! It was during this period that Europe's greatest bards sang, her noblest painters gave voice to their inward idealism, the voices of her mightiest preachers thundered anathemas at sin and the American Declaration of Independence was written.

Probably 10,000,000 Negroes were brought to America during that time and perhaps 50,000,000 more died while being driven to the sea, or being captured or in the filthy slave ships. All told perhaps the infamous slave trade cost Africa in four centuries 100,000,000 souls! Is there any wonder that government and order ceased, that in their effort to flee the red fangs of slavery, men forgot culture and history, and to save their lives fled hither and yon in great swarming masses, trampling down, uprooting and thinking never of building? Men fled from cities to caves and huge forest fortresses and every vestige of ancient greatness was lost.

Imagine all the bleached bones of those who were killed

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in the chase or who dropped by the way while being driven down the West African winding paths to the sea piled and fire set to them! The pyre would make a bon fire that would reach to heaven. If all the dead and half dead bodies thrown into the sea at dawn and early day from the scurrying slave ships should suddenly, by some divine decree float to the top of the waters, a thousand square miles of the ocean would be covered with bloated, bobbing, black corpses. If all the chains that were forged on slave limbs were linked into one mighty chain it would make a belt that would girdle the globe. If all the blood drawn by the slave lash was poured into some awful gully, it would make a red river running through the land, all the energy and money and brains that have been spent to make cowards and slaves of Negroes had been spent in altruistic enterprises, in the uplift of man, in education and inspiration, my God! yesterday the fair fields of France and the sunny hills of Italy would not have been piled with ruins and the civilized nations of the world would not have been at each other's throats! The ships that crossed the singing seas would not have been burdened with soldiers and shells and all the implements and instruments of destruction, but rather with the fruits of research, with literature and paintings and all of those things which promote the amity of nations and the brotherhood of man.

Like a mighty murmur of the sea there drifted up to Brown from the steaming valleys of the South the weird old slave song:

"Go down Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go."

The destiny of a race was calling him. It was God calling him to the work of emancipation. He answered, "I go Lord!" And be it said to his everlasting credit, he never once faulted, never once looked back. Every move in his career was directed towards this one object. Even his business was conducted for the cause of freedom. His family understood. He had gathered them around the fireside and showed them how vile was slavery. Then he swore them to a bloody feud with that institution. So that his family were willing to live in very meagre circumstances when the prosperity of his business justified

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luxury, in order that the income might be devoted to the cause of freedom. There was never a shadow of turning in his purpose. It was twenty years before the raid at Harper's Ferry that he and his family had sworn a blood feud with slavery and from that time forth the feud was really on. The slave power knew the war was on too. The night-mare of John Brown haunted it through Ohio and Missouri and Kansas and all the Southland. When John Brown went to Europe in 1849 it was ostensibly to sell wool but really to study the methods of guerilla warfare, to see how forts were built and to ascertain ways of marshalling military forces. He was getting ready for Harper's Ferry. He settled among the Negroes here in North Elba in order to teach them farming, cattle raising and co-operation, and above all self-respect.

Here is a real Knight-errant in history. This man knew how wretchedly helpless, how miserable and degraded was the Negro. He knew of the bulwarks of slavery, of its age-long entrenchments behind laziness and greed and pomp and pride. The bowed backs of the slaves were the pillars of the Southern aristocracy. He knew of the prehensile grasp of this octopus of slavery, of the dangers and difficulties which reached out to crush abolition. He was no fool. He accurately gauged the deep seated malignancy of the South at his work for freedom. He also knew of the lazy lethargy of the North. Soothed as it by an opiate, she did not wish to be disturbed. Her earlier impulses for freedom had been choked. The principles announced in the Declaration of Independence had become a dead dream of yesterday. Her christianity was hopelessly entangled with hypocrisy and cynicism. Everywhere there was a festering moral stagnation. People wanted to be left alone. What a zero hour in American History!

Brown saw and knew all of this. And yet he was neither discouraged by the moral stupidity of the North, nor daunted by the diabolical might and zest of the slave South. Like a knight of old, he rode forth and hurled his lance into its very heart. You can fancy the shudder, the nervous chill, which ran through the South at John Brown's raid. In all the big houses from Virginia to Texas there must have been whisperings and shakings of heads. The devil trembles when righteousness takes the

field. Even the North awoke and rubbed its drowsy eyes. Longfellow, George William Curtis, and Wendell Phillips spoke once more for freedom. It was less than two-years after that, that soldiers were marching while they sang:

"John Brown's body lies mouldering in the clay
But his soul goes marching on."

And indeed that was it. It was the soul of John Brown that freed America from the incubus of slavery. As Curtis said, "They planted Brown instead of burying him." It was the soul of Brown that fired the heart of the nation and finally nerved and bolstered the uncertain Lincoln.

They hung John Brown for treason. And yet no man had before nor has any man since, rendered the country a greater service. Slavery was incompatible with all our institutions. It was a cancer on the body politic—a stinking, festering cancer which was eating away the heart of American ideals and arresting the progress of civilization. Who could be scrupulous in dealing with it? The time had passed for temporizing and cajoling and playing with it. A blow had to be struck. Blood had to be drawn. The fester had to be lanced. John Brown saw this.

The purposes for which we are gathered here to-day do not call for historical details in connection with John Brown's life. A few high points in his career will suffice.

He was born 122 years ago—May 9th, 1800—in Torrington, Connecticut. Shortly after that his family migrated to Ohio, where, at the age of twelve, Brown saw his first slave boy. He was married twice—first at the age of 21 and twelve years later. His first wife lived eleven years after they were married. Already at the age of 34 he is becoming a staunch abolitionist. At 39 an escaped slave told him his story—a story which moved Brown deeply. It was at this time that he gathered his family about him and made them swear war forever on slavery. In 1847 he first met Frederick Douglass and discussed with him plans for liberating the slaves. Gerritt Smith, a rich abolitionist, offered to sell 100,000 acres of land, in the Adirondacks to Negroes, under Brown's supervision. In order to help the colored people Brown moved his family to these farms here in North Elba. He acted as father and teacher and preacher for these colored people. He even organized them into a League of Gli-cadites—a circle for mutual protection and self-respect.

It was about this time that Kansas was becoming a football between the slave forces and the North. Where ever the battle was the hottest for freedom was where Brown wanted to be. He could not wait. He sent five sons on ahead and a year later he joined them with a sixth son. See how the family kept the feud. They threw themselves into the fight in Kansas with relentless vigor. It was a tribute to John Brown's power in Kansas that he was nick-named Old Brown of Ossawatimie.

In 1857 he came back East and toured New England for abolition.

The time was drawing near for the climax of his life and work. He had definitely decided to strike at the monster of slavery by way of Harper's Ferry. This he revealed to Fred Douglass, to Sanborn and to Kagi. Hereafter in all his fittings to and fro, in the east and west, he was completing his plans for a raid on the slave power.

It was on a Sunday night, October 16, 1859 that Brown and his party moved on Harper's Ferry and the next day at four in the morning the arsenal was captured. At eight o'clock Tuesday morning Brown himself was captured. He had refused to surrender. Since his plans had miscarried so that he did not get away to the mountains, he said he and his men would die like men. When he was taken all his men had been captured or killed, save two or three who had fled. Two of his sons lay at his feet bleeding and dying. The pulsant old lion himself had been knocked down by a young Southern hot-blood and his head was a mass of wounds where a soldier had tried to split his skull with his sword. It had taken Federal troops, state troops and local citizens two days to capture this old man.

John Brown was captured on October 18th. So morbidly anxious was Virginia about the fate of this old man that he was brought into court on a cot and tried nine days later. He was only forty days in prison all told and was hanged December 2nd. Six days later all that was mortal of John Brown was laid to rest here in this quiet little grave, in the shadow of these mighty mountains.

But let us thank God that the soul of John Brown lives! They could not kill that. On that wintry day that they hung him they also hung that vile thing called slavery.

He lives in the hearts of millions of grateful Negroes. His old band of Gileadites lives again in the activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He lives in the hearts of all those who love their fellow-man. Even to-day his soul goes marching on.

Here, if ever, was a real Knight-errant. Not since paleolithic man swarmed over the rim of Asia and covered the plains of Europe, not even during the Crusades or the so called age of chivalry have we had a truer, nobler knight than John Brown. He expected no reward. He looked to no King or Emperor to dub him Sir Knight or appoint him ruler of some rich Satrapy. He was willing to take grim hazards for his faith. He perilled life and fortune again and again and finally gave both for the helpless, the oppressed, the downtrodden. It is easy to work for the rich and powerful, but to challenge the cause of the slave and the underdog, especially when that underdog is of another race, to pit one's self against might and power and bastioned wickedness—that is true courage.

When they asked Brown at Charleston: "Why are you here?" he answered, "The cry of distress of the oppressed called me."

John Brown was a man with a mission. He believed he was divinely called to follow the course he followed and he went on his way like an agent of the Almighty. Faith alone lighted his soul on his lonely way. The Divine voice rang through all his course. When his friends tried to discourage him he answered, "If God be for us who can be against us?" Time and time again he gave utterance to his belief that God meant to use him to awaken the nation against slavery. Even while he lay wounded and sore in jail in Charlestown he thought it over and decided that though his plans had failed, God had ruled otherwise because in death he might do more than even in life for freedom. "I feel astonished," he said, "that one so vile and unworthy as I am would even be suffered to have a place anyhow or anywhere amongst the very least of all who, when they came to die were permitted to pay the debt of nature in defense of the right."

In that last great speech when the puny little Pilate of a judge asked him if he had anything to say before sentence was pronounced, though weak and wounded and surrounded by a nervous, hostile mob, the old imprisoned

lion stood up and said, "I admit, the design on my part in coming here was to free the slaves. I see a book blessed 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 to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me to remember those in bonds as if bound with them. I endeavored to act up to those instructions. I am too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believed 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!"

How the judge must have squirmed in his chair! Hear his dying message to the world.

"My love to all those who love their neighbors. I have asked to be spared from having any weak or hypocritical prayers made over me when I am publicly murdered; and that my only religious attendants be poor little dirty, ragged bareheaded and barefooted slave boys and girls, led by some grey-headed slave mother. Farewell! Farewell!"

One insensibly thinks of Stephen being stoned, of Solon and his poisoned chalice, of bonfires and the martyred saints and of Jesus Christ and his cross.

Had this man been a Catholic and suffered for that church what he suffered for the Negro and for the freedom of this Nation, he would have been canonized. Had he worked and died like this for the Irish, or the French, or the Germans or any other branch of the white race, or for any of the classes of those races, scores of cities would have vied with each other in the rearing of monuments and memorials to him. Had John Brown lived when Homer sang, literature would have known him as one of the heroes of the golden age. Perhaps Pindar would have dedicated a song to his name. Pausanias would have seen and written of his statue in Athens among the earthborn gods. Perhaps Phidias or Pathagoras or old Alcmenes would have chiselled his form in marble. It is high time this Nation was appreciating the greatness of this man.

John Brown was a Prophet. In what was perhaps

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his last letter he says, "I, John Brown, am quite certain now that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

He had seen the throbbing misery of slavery and its soul dwarfing effect on the master. Not since the days of the old Roman Empire had the world seen slavery on such a gigantic scale and not since the Egyptians enslaved the Jews had the world seen such brutal, heartless slavery. A vampire people had accomplished the complete ravishment of a race. The holy places of religion were fouled by hypocritical preachers who justified slavery. Justice was debauched and corrupted and prostituted by it. Brown saw all this. He saw how deep down the roots of slavery reached. He saw the South turn venomous and hiss like a serpent, at his effort to free the slave. He saw blood! This thing was gangrene on the body politic and surgery was required.

And to-day we know this old prophet of stark and sheer vision was right. Within less than two-years his name became the marching song of the blue clad army of the North and was heard above the tread of unnumbered hosts on the blood-soaked mire of the battle-fields.

Other men shrank back and trembled. Garrison preached non-resistance. Lincoln wanted to save the Union if he could with slavery. Even Fred Douglas drew back from Harper's Ferry. But not Brown. He went forward always to action and freedom and to God.

Surely, surely he stands somewhere in the Kingdom as companion to Savanarola and Stephen and Martin Luther and John Huss, and he is a friend to our elder brother, Jesus Christ, for this man died that a race might live.

And though, John Brown, thou hast been received into the Kingdom and heard the "well done" fall from the lips of God, can you rest content while the South is still a snakes' den of race hate and brutality and the North is again afflicted with moral myopia? Don't you see how badly we need you? We are still "the despised and rejected of men." The oppressed still cry in agony and have none to deliver them. The valleys of Georgia and Mississippi are still the land of a thousand hells for the black men. Peonage, a new form of slavery, has raised its awful head in the Yazoo delta. There are two-million black people back behind the veil in that section of the country who are practically in slavery. Jim-crowism

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has come to daily crucify the soul of a race. Our so-called Democracy has settled down to become a stratified, Jim-Crow Democracy. Disfranchisement has bound the freed man hand and foot again. He has no voice in the courts, no voice in the legislatures, no voice in Congress. He stands dumb and bound before his traducer and oppressor. Lynching has become a cherished institution for which men fight on the floors of Congress. The old infamous Ku Klux Klan is hooded and booted and parades like a ghost of evil through the land again. A black man is roasted ever so often in Dixie to make a Southern holiday. Philadelphia and Boston are no longer whispering galleries of American idealism. A great moral dumbness is on the people. Justice is gagged and bound and dragged at Mammon's chariot wheels.

Do you remember that last day at Charlestown, John Brown? When you climbed the scaffold, bayonets bristled everywhere. Among those who watched you with rifle and sword were John Wilkes Booth, the assassin Robert E. Lee, the aristocrat, and Stonewall Jackson, the bold arrogant soldier. Your majestic tread up the scaffold steps shook the foundation of their rickety and damnable social system. But it did not shatter it. Forces representing those characters are still watching at the grey scaffold. They think they have crushed the truth and hauged the upward impulse of the people for whom you gave your life. Snarling and insatiate old Malice and clandestine Murder, suave, sinister, Aristocracy, sitting astride bowed backs, and Dashing Super-Arrogance still wait at the scaffold.

In the white world's scheme of human destinies the Negro is still a sub-man—a kind of dog-man. The country is still blind and deaf: blind to the qualities that make people free and nations great, and deaf to the cry of distress which lured you to Harper's Ferry. Somebody must come to focus the Nation's attention to the open nullification of the constitution in the South and to the misery and fear which rises like smoke from every Negro hovel in that section. Somebody has got to stick a lance in blind bigotry and foul prejudice and let the fester drain once more. We have called and there are none to answer. We have cried aloud and the echo of our wailing cry has come down the highways.

O, John Brown! Don't you hear them calling you?

