

JOHN BROWN IN GRINNELL

By FLORENCE STEWART KERR

On the 25th of February, 1859, there came a knock at Josiah Bushnell Grinnell's door. At that time the Grinnell house stood on or near the site now occupied by the Monroe hotel. Mr. Grinnell was reading in the New York Tribune of John Brown's invasion of Missouri and his freeing of eleven negroes; and even then, the account continued, Brown was bringing these negroes across Iowa by wagon train on his way to Canada. When Mr. Grinnell opened the door in response to the knock, he stood face to face with John Brown, himself. The two had not met before, but each knew about the other. Mr. Grinnell was the most important abolitionist in Iowa, and Brown had been a noted and terrible figure in the Missouri-Kansas border troubles.

"He stood very erect for a man nearing sixty years, and wore a full, long beard, almost white, with hair parted and standing up, suggesting Andrew Jackson as pictured," Mr. Grinnell wrote later of Brown's appearance. "There were no spurs on his boots, and he was clad only in a plain, well-worn suit, with nothing to suggest border warfare save a wide-rimmed hat and half-concealed pistol."

Brown, without introducing himself by name, mentioned a mutual friend and was invited to stay for tea. "His attentions to the little girl, our prattling Mary," Mr. Grinnell wrote, "soon brought her playfully to his knees." This was Mary Grinnell Mears, for whom Mears cottage was named. Brown at

length asked Mr. Grinnell to come into the hall for a moment and there disclosed his identity. He had left his company in a grove and had ridden ahead to see what welcome they would receive. Although Iowa was free territory, not all the sentiment of the State was favorable to abolition. Slavery was protected by the most solemn legal enactments, and Brown had broken these and other laws and was subject to arrest. There were rewards amounting to several thousand dollars for his capture. Indeed, Brown's career in Kansas had been so dark and violent that he had become more of a danger than an aid to the free-soil cause. He had alienated numbers of abolitionists, and in one or more Iowa communities he had received but a cold welcome or none at all. Fear of attack or reprisal by Brown's enemies may explain this lack of cordiality; for wherever Brown went, trouble was quite sure to follow.

But his welcome in the town of Grinnell was warm and even enthusiastic. Mr. Grinnell gave him the use of the parlor for the storage of arms and for the use of part of his people. After that time this parlor was called the "Liberty room." The news of the arrival spread, and numbers of people gathered to see the wagons come into town. The party was so large that attempts at concealment were useless, and Brown depended for safety, so long as he traveled by wagons, upon the party's fighting ability. All the negroes, even the women, had been trained to shoot. The mounted guards were

armed, so Mr. Grinnell wrote, with Sharp's six-shooters purchased by Mr. Beecher's church.

People began to call, and there were suggestions of a reception at the church. Some feared an attack upon the town, and this was within the scope of possibility. Spies were supposed to be about, and there were rumors of the approach of the United States marshal from Iowa City with a large company of men. Excitement ran high; and all the while the party was in town friendly or curious people stayed about the wagons, examined the equipment as much as they were allowed to do and talked with the negroes. Brown was not to be frightened by rumors. He was too experienced in border warfare to be easily frightened. His defense was planned, and his people, white or black, were always armed and ready. And, for that matter, the nearer Osawatomie Brown came, the less anxious the marshal and his followers were to meet him.

Several hundred people attended the reception at the church that Saturday evening. Brown was calm in manner but showed that he was repressing strong emotions as he told of his experiences in Kansas. Mr. Grinnell's report indicates the intensity of the man and the specious reasoning of one made fanatical by his iron convictions and his terrible experiences. One son had been shot to death and another tortured into madness. He insisted that he was a man of peace and had gone to Kansas for peaceful settlement. What he had done was in self defense. He persuaded himself and tried to persuade his audience that a night attack upon unprepared men, such as the Pottawatomie murders, though the word "Pottawatomie" was not mentioned, was an act of self defense; both because it was an at-

tack upon men believed to have definite, murderous intentions and because the fear it would arouse would be a warning to their fellows. In Brown's opinion it was merely striking first in a battle already joined.

When Mr. Grinnell asked him privately for details of his experience, he said, "I have an aversion to talking about it; the deeds were so horrible and my brain almost reels over the pictures." He told Mrs. Grinnell that he loved a quiet life, but there could be no quietness for him. His wife and boys, he admitted, were full of fear. "But," he added, "they don't know my mission. It is direct from God Almighty, and I am discharging it." Mr. Grinnell recorded the fact that this gave him an indication that Brown was suffering from a kind of insanity, which was probably true. He begged the man to rest before his losses and sacrifices drove him mad, but Brown replied that there could be no rest for him.

In the course of the second meeting, on Sunday evening, Brown said, "You have a college started, and I hear your prayers, and this spirit will save the country." Who shall say that this was not an early recognition by John Brown of the famed Grinnell spirit?

There were further rumors of an attack by the federal marshal or the burning of the town by pro-slavery sympathizers. Brown would not listen to offers of volunteers in the event of an attack. Far from being terrified, he announced that he would wait over another day. On this day he visited the schools. Mrs. R. M. Haines recalls this visit and remembers having shaken hands with him. The party received gifts of food and money and on Tuesday continued its journey. Mr. Grinnell

went to Chicago and secured a car for them at West Liberty; from that point they journeyed to Chicago and Detroit by rail. After a journey of eleven hundred miles, lasting eighty-two days, the negroes reached Canada and freedom.

Brown wrote a quaint letter, expressing his gratitude for the reception and the gifts the town of Grinnell had given him. After his capture some of Mr. Grinnell's letters were found in his possession. A congressional investigation followed, and Mr. Grinnell went of his own accord to Washington to appear before the committee, but he was never called as a witness.

From Detroit, Brown, still burning with the passion of the idea that consumed his life, went eastward and prepared for the mad attempt

at Harper's Ferry. This time destiny used his failure to establish his cause. His capture, trial and execution crystallized anti-slavery feeling, and John Brown became at once a portentous, almost a legendary figure. His calmness and dignity and courage impressed the whole country; and this man who had flamed across the Grinnell sky became a martyr, even before he was hanged. The warning to Virginia and the prophecy in Stedman's poem, printed in the New York Tribune between Brown's conviction and execution, proved terribly true:

And Old Brown,
Osawatomie Brown,
May trouble you more than ever,
when you've nailed his coffin
down!

MOTH-MULLEN

By JOHN KEARNS

Aloft on slender, swaying spike
Beside the road I see
A tuft of blossoms crumpled-like
And fragile as can be.
Like moths they look to common view—
Ghost-revellers of night,
Surprised by morning sun and dew,
Ere they had thought of flight.