

## Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

### JOHN BROWN AND FALLS CITY

I have already mentioned that John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, in Virginia, in the autumn of 1859, but only one of the distinctive events of the time covered by these reminiscences.

It was a far cry from the little hamlet in a western wilderness, to the historic shores of the Potomac, but in the drama that was being enacted in the spring time of that half a century old year, and which was to end in disaster and death running through years to come, before the snows of winter would whiten the earth, these two points had a mysterious connection, for they were both on the route of the irresponsible madman and his followers, who in their wild and unreasoning fanaticism, were soon to strike a blow in the world that would resound through the universe. That the so-called raid into the state of Virginia, by John Brown, precipitated the civil war in our country, there can be no doubt whatever.

But for that unfortunate circumstance, the conflict between the antagonistic ideas among the people, might have been determined in some peaceful way, or the evil day postponed, and possibly an appeal to arms been thus avoided entirely. This is mere conjecture, for the whole country was in such a state of suppressed irruption that little was needed to set off the mine that had been growing under the feet of the people through forty years of continuous and acrimonious agitation.

There is reason to believe that nothing in the realm of nature happens by chance, or accidental means, but that in all its operations, there is not only perfect harmonious action, controlled by fixed laws, which, if properly understood, would eliminate much of the mystery that now appears to shroud nature in the present, and lift the dark veil to some extent, that now hides the unknowable future from the knowledge of men. The prophet, who is a fatalist without knowing it, predicts events to occur much in the same way that events have occurred in the past, for without knowledge derived from the latter, he would have none whatever of the other. If an event in the future can be present in the consciousness of the seer as something certain, then the happening of that event as predicted, must have been predetermined by superior power, and if one future event is so determined, then all must be so, and fatalism becomes just as true as the mathematical proposition, that the sum of the angles of any triangle is equal to two right angles. Nevertheless the doctrine of fatalism is based on a false conception of cause and effect and is impossible to be true. All that can be said in favor of prophecy is, that the prophet who best knows the past, and can best interpret the philosophy of its history, is best qualified to tell us the secrets of the future. This involves one other reflection: could history have been different from what it is—that is—was it possible for events to have occurred in any other way than they actually did? I answer no.

It is not my intention to enter into an abstract philosophical disquisition, but simply to call attention to a few undoubted facts, which, I think will serve to make plain the idea I have in mind. I have said that

ed by fixed and unvarying laws, and is comprehensive of every object or thing in the whole wide expanse of the universe. It is an organism, a machine if you please, and works constantly and always in precisely the same way. If we could rightly understand those laws, we might know what "God and man is."

A threshing machine will only do the work it was designed to do, but nothing else. Its several parts move in harmony with each other, and perform their functions as though independent entities, but it requires the concurrent action of all to successful operation. The same is true of that mightier machine that makes and controls the world. Its every part is in restless but harmonious motion with every other, and together produce fixed results which, but for the admirable arrangement of that incomprehensible mechanism, would not be results at all.

It is not probable that Brown and his followers, when they passed through Falls City, knew that they would ultimately bring up at Harper's Ferry, in Virginia, or that any particular place beyond the Canadian frontier would be their destination. They were outlaws, criminals, possessed of but one controlling and fixed idea—deadly hatred of slavery and the holders of slaves. They held no commission from any human authority to make war on that deeply hated institution; nor were they incited by any hope of pecuniary reward. They knew their enterprise was unlawful, and they knew further, that their lives and their liberties were endangered at every step in its prosecution, but with a persistency born of the very madness of fanaticism, they went steadily and resistlessly on to their doom on a Virginia gibbet. It is probable that the people of any of the small towns through which they passed on their way to the Canada line, could have arrested them and given them over to justice had they been so disposed, but the fact is, the people in the free districts of the nation were either too indifferent or too much in sympathy with the fleeing black men from a life of bondage, to interfere, unless it was to aid the fugitives in their flight. This fact was well known to Brown, hence his careful avoidance of Missouri soil, where public sentiment was just the opposite to what it was in the free states. Brown could not have traveled ten miles into Missouri without having himself and all of his followers shot to death or hung on the nearest tree at hand.

That shows the state of public sentiment in the two sections of the country in that spring time in the closing years of the decade of 1850. What it was then, was what it had been for many years before, only it had grown in intensity with the flight of time, and was to still continue to do so till in the fullness of time the shock of arms came and then the bloody drama unequalled in the annals of the world.

Those misguided men were the ignorant instruments to an end of which they were no more conscious than if they had been children. Reasoning *a priori*, a cause may be easily comprehensible by the ordinarily intelligent, but the resultant effect cannot be measured by even wizard genius, except by knowledge acquired *a posteriori*—that is after the facts are all known. Only this postulate to the Har-

if all the people along the route pursued by Brown could have known that he and his associate criminals would invade the state of Virginia and attempt to incite insurrection among the slave population against their masters, it is not at all likely that they would have done anything to arrest their progress in that direction; but if those same people could have known, certainly, that such invasion would be made and that the occasion would be seized upon by the southern people as an excuse for dissolving the union, or attempting it by levying war, who will doubt that every one of them would have risen with fierce determination to stop that band of mischief makers if they had had to hang them to do so. Thus we observe that the knowledge imparted by cause is not reliable for all purposes of interpretation of the effect to follow—that is with our present imperfect understanding, but the transcendental philosophy plainly teaches that such knowledge is not only possible but to a very great extent is already possessed by many, hence the prophet and the seer.

They are just as plentiful now as they ever have been—probably more so. We are all wise after the event, but the wisdom that precedes it—anticipates it so to speak, is the wisdom the world needs most. When the future effect can be known in the present cause, the prophet will go out of business, no matter by what name he is known. It has been done to a limited extent, which proves that it can be, to a greater extent; and if approach can be made to final success in the smallest degree, its ultimate attainment must surely follow. I conclude therefore, that to the far seeing philosophical statesman, every movement made in these United States, after the Mexican war, affecting the institution of slavery in it, presaged the war that finally broke upon the country in actual conflict, in 1861. Up to the time of the Harper's Ferry raid the hostility of the northern sentiment against slavery had been directed to efforts to prevent its spread in the newly acquired territories of the union. The fact is that effort to circumscribe the area of slavery territory, was first brought to the fore in the trouble over the admission of the state of Missouri, but when this band of lawless men broke into the state of Virginia and attempted to interfere with it in one of the states of the union where all parties had agreed that it should not be disturbed, the south became alarmed, and the election of Mr. Lincoln the year following, on an avowed anti-slavery platform, confirmed them in the belief that the institution in the states was to be attacked and destroyed. That precipitated the war, and it came, with what results everybody now knows.

It was peculiarly unfortunate for our little town that these lawless people should have passed through it at that particular juncture. We were asking the people of the county to help us get hold of the seat of government, and it is a fact of general knowledge that a considerable majority of the people of the county at that time were not favorable to the abolition sentiment. We were not to blame that Brown and his people passed through the town. Certainly we were not to blame for not trying to stop him by arresting the whole crowd, for it is very doubtful whether we would have been able to do it, and it is very certain that many lives would have been lost in the effort. Our people were glad indeed when he left the place, and would have been better pleased if he had given the town a wide berth in his journey to the north.

mer was to elect the delegation from this county to the lower house of the legislature, three in number. Dundy was a hold-over in the council, and with that force as a starter, we hoped to again have the county seat question submitted to the people under such restrictions as to make it impossible for a prejudiced officer to defeat us by an adverse, one-sided decision. The John Brown visit was troublesome, and it was really out of the question to convince the people that we not only did not know of his coming but were in no sense in sympathy with his unlawful proceedings.

To those who did not want to believe the slander that was put on foot in that connection, it was not difficult for us to prove to their satisfaction that Brown's visit came about solely because Falls City lay on the only direct route he could follow from his place in Kansas to a point on the Missouri river in Nebraska opposite the south line of the state of Iowa, where a crossing was made to Mount Tabor, in that state. That point was above Peru and a few miles south of Nebraska City.

Who should we select as candidates? There were no party organizations in the county, but in a way there were *quasi* party affiliations, many democrats and some republicans, though there was no attempt to draw party lines, certainly none on the part of Falls City, as it would have been the most ill-advised thing we could possibly do. It was our policy to furnish one of the candidates, St. Stephen another and the third from some quarter in the west end of the county. A certain Dr. Carter, from what is now known as Franklin precinct, had been selected by our people for the western member, but shortly before the nominations were made public, he was arrested on a charge of rape, and that was the last of him as a possible coming statesman. His place was filled by one Nate Meyers, a resident of a town I forgot to mention, named Monterey, but nobody ever lived in it but Nate and his family. He was something of an orator and talked eloquently of the "iron horse," by which he meant railroads, and proved himself something of a prophet, as such a horse, in days to come, did make its appearance in the country and is here yet. Houston Nickells, a harum-scarum, four-bottle democrat at St. Stephen, was selected from that quarter, and our own J. Edward Burbank was selected for the third fellow. Nothing of unusual interest occurred during the

campaign, but the result was all that we could desire, our men were elected and the fur was to fly shortly, and it is no figure of speech to say that it did. A bill was passed locating the county seat at Falls City, and providing for a resubmission of the question of its permanent location to a vote of the people upon the same plan adopted for the last election for the same purpose.

In the meantime our little city had steadily grown in population. Most of the young men who came up from Kansas to help us out at the first election, became permanent residents, and many others came to us from the east and from other parts. The Ware family and that of Judge Marvin came from Wisconsin, and later the Glines brothers, relatives of the Wares and Marvins. One of them, Mr. Ed. Glines, with his family, is still a resident of this city. The Ware family have all passed away, and only Frank Marvin, of Oklahoma City, Ok., and the children of his deceased brother George, are all that survive of the Marvin family.

In the latter part of the winter or early in the spring, John R. Dowty, who is still here, came down from Nemaha county, and E. W. Hutchinson and family came from Plattsmouth. Some others I have already mentioned. Mrs. Hutchinson was a finely educated lady, with ability much above the average. It was to her I owe my first introduction to the Waverley Novels, by Sir Walter Scott. She had a complete set and I managed to go through all of them while an inmate of the family the following winter. They enabled me to pass many an hour that otherwise would have hung heavily upon me in those long winter nights, and for which I have always been grateful to that excellent lady. She has long been at rest with the great army of the dead, along with nearly everybody else I knew at the time, but the many acts of kindness she did me, supplemented by kindly words of encouragement when I most needed them, will remain in my remembrance among the cherished things of my life, to the end of it—and after.

A theory vaguely hinted at in this paper will receive a more critical examination hereafter, when I have the leisure for the purpose, and inclination for the work. It has no doubt been observed, that, in writing these desultory papers, I have followed no system, but have mixed up with the recital of particular incidents that yet dwell in my memory, some philo-

sophical abstractions that have occurred to me as pertinent to my general purpose, and in a measure, explanatory of things obscure that surround and permeate all the transactions of men. What they are however, they were intended to be, and are given for what they are worth.

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