THE
PUBLIC LIFE
OF
Capt. JOHN BROWN,
BY
JAMES REDPATH,
WITH AN
AUTO-BIOGRAPHY
OF HIS
CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

BOSTON:
THAYER AND ELDREDGE,
114 AND 116 Washington St.
Thirtieth Thousand.
1860.
IN the Canadian Provinces there are thousands of fugitive slaves. They are the picked men of the Southern States. Many of them are intelligent and rich; and all of them are deadly enemies of the South. Five hundred of them, at least, annually visit the Slave States, passing from Florida to Harper's Ferry, on heroic errands of mercy and deliverance. They have carried the Underground Railroad and the Underground Telegraph into nearly every Southern State. Here, obviously, is a power of great importance for a war of liberation.

Up to the period when the last chapter closes, John Brown, wherever he had lived, had acquired the reputation of a prudent man. In Kansas, although, by the Missourians, he was regarded as a reckless desperado, those who best knew him and his plans gave him credit for great caution and foresight. Nothing that he did or tried, however seemingly insane, but, when examined, gave proofs of his prudence no less than his courage. Recently, the nation saw him undertake the conquest of Virginia, with a band, seemingly, of twenty-one fol-
lowers only. People called the attempt an insane one; but they did not know that many hundreds of men, earnest haters of the Slavery whose terrors they had known, and drilled for the service, were eagerly awaiting, in the Canadian Provinces, for the signal to be given at Harper’s Ferry, to hasten southward and join the army of Immediate Emancipation.

To conquer the South, a small band only is needed: but it must have backers in the North, who shall send down recruits from time to time. It is requisite, also, in order to prevent unnecessary bloodshed, for the liberated negroes to be held under strict control. John Brown knew all these facts. To inspire the Canadian fugitives with confidence in his plan, and, at the same time, to indicate his intentions in order to induce them to participate in it, he called a secret Convention of the friends of freedom at Chatham, in Canada.

At this time he intended to attack Virginia within a very few months. Cook, in his Confession, thus writes of the Convention:

"While we were in Chatham, he called a Convention, the purpose of which was to make a complete and thorough organization. He issued a written circular, which he sent to various persons in the United States and Canada. The circular, as near as I can recollect, reads as follows:

CHATHAM, May —, 1858.

Mr. ——. Dear Sir: We have issued a call for a very quiet Convention at this place, to which we shall be happy to see any true friends of freedom, and to which you are most earnestly invited to give your attendance. Yours, respectfully,

JOHN BROWN.

"The names were left blank; but as they were directed by Captain Brown or J. H. Kagi, I do not know the parties to whom they were addressed. I do know, however, that they were sent to none save those whom Captain Brown knew to be radical Abolitionists. I think it was about ten days from the time the circulars were sent that the
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Convention met. The place of meeting was in one of the negro churches in Chatham. The Convention, I think, was called to order by J. H. Kagi. Its object was then stated, which was to complete a thorough organization and the formation of a Constitution. The first business was to elect a President and Secretary. Elder Monroe, a colored minister, was elected President, and J. H. Kagi, Secretary. The next business was to form a Constitution. Captain Brown had already drawn up one, which, on motion, was read by the Secretary. On motion it was ordered that each article of the Constitution be taken up, and separately amended and passed, which was done. On motion, the Constitution was then adopted as a whole. The next business was to nominate a Commander-in-Chief, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. Captain John Brown was unanimously elected Commander-in-Chief, J. H. Kagi, Secretary of War, and Richard Realf, Secretary of State. Elder Monroe was to act as President until another was chosen. A. M. Chapman, I think, was to act as Vice-President. Dr. M. K. Delaney was one of the Corresponding Secretaries of the Organization. There were some others from the United States, whose names I do not now remember. Most of the delegates to the Convention were from Canada. After the Constitution was adopted, the members took their oath to support it. It was then signed by all present. During the interval between the call for the Convention and its assembling, regular meetings were held at Barbour’s Hotel, where we were stopping, by those who were known to be true to the cause, at which meetings plans were laid and discussed. There were no white men at the Convention, save the members of our company. Men and money had both been promised from Chatham and other parts of Canada. When the Convention broke up, news was received that Colonel H. Forbes, who had joined in the movement, had given information to the Government. This, of course, delayed the time of attack. A day or two afterwards most of our party took the boat to Cleveland—J. H. Kagi, Richard Realf, William H. Leeman, Richard Robertson, and Captain Brown remaining. Captain Brown, however, started in a day or two for the East. Kagi, I think, went to some other town in Canada to set up the type, and to get the Constitution printed, which he completed before he returned to Cleveland. We remained in Cleveland for some weeks, at which place, for the time being, the company disbanded.”

Another report, which was found among John Brown’s papers at Harper’s Ferry, gives some additional information respecting this assembly. The full
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reports, not only of this public Convention, but of many secret meetings, which are mentioned in Cook's Confession, and were written in phonography, and then translated into a secret cipher by Kagi, have happily not yet been discovered; or, it is probable that the scheme with which John Brown's name is now forever inseparably united, would have perished with his earthly life at Charlestown.

Chatham, Canada West, Saturday, May 8, 1858—10 A. M.

The Convention met in pursuance of a call of John Brown and others, and was called to order by Mr. Jackson, on whose motion Mr. W. C. Monroe was chosen President; when, on motion of Mr. Brown, Mr. J. H. Kagi was elected Secretary.

On motion of Mr. Delany, Mr. Brown then proceeded to state the object of the Convention at length, and then to explain the general features of the plan of action in execution of the project in view by the Convention. Mr. Delany and others spoke in favor of the project and plan, and both were agreed to by a general consent.

Mr. Brown then presented a plan of organization, entitled Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States, and moved the reading of the same.

Mr. Kinnard objected to the reading until an oath of secrecy be taken by each member of the Convention, whereupon Mr. Delany moved that the following parole of honor be taken by all members of the Convention:

"I solemnly affirm that I will not, in any way, divulge any of the secrets of this Convention, except to the persons entitled to know the same, on the pain of forfeiting the respect and protection of this organization."

Which motion was carried.

The President then proceeded to administer the obligation, after which the question was taken on reading of the plan proposed by Mr. Brown, and the same carried.

The plan was then read by the Secretary, after which, on motion of Mr. Whipple, it was ordered that it be now read by articles for consideration.

The articles from 1 to 45 were then read and adopted. On reading of the 46th, Mr. Reynolds moved to strike out the same. Reynolds spoke in favor, and Brown, Monroe, Owen Brown, Delany, Realf, Kennard, and Page against striking out. The question was then taken and lost, there being but one vote in the affirmative. The article was then adopted. The 47th and 48th articles, with the schedule, were then adopted in the same manner. It was then moved by Mr. Delany that the title and preamble stand as read. Carried.

On motion of Mr. Kagi, the Constitution, as a whole, was then unanimously adopted.

Mr. Whipple nominated John Brown for Commander-in-Chief, who was, on the seconding of Delany, elected by acclamation.

Mr. Realf nominated J. H. Kagi for Secretary of War, who was elected in the same manner. On motion of Mr. Brown, the Convention adjourned to nine P. M. of Monday, the 10th.

Monday, May 10th, 1859—9½ P. M.—The Convention assembled and went into balloting for the election of Treasurer and Secretary of Treasury. Owen Brown was elected to the former office, and George B. Gill to the latter.

The following resolution was then introduced by Mr. Brown, and unanimously passed:

Resolved, That John Brown, J. H. Kagi, Richard Realf, L. F. Parsons, C. H. Tied, C. Whipple, C. W. Moffit, John F. Cock, Owen Brown, Steward Taylor, Osborn Anderson, A. M. Ellsworth, Richard Richardson, W. H. Leeman, and John Lawrence, be, and are hereby, appointed a Committee, to whom is delegated the power of the Convention to fill by election all offices specially named in the Provisional Constitution, which may be vacant after the adjournment of the Convention. The Convention then adjourned sine die.

Signed, J. KAGI, Secretary of the Convention
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Names of the Members of the Convention, written by each Person.


J. H. KAGI, Secretary of the Convention.

Memorandum — Offices filled.


Premising that the plan of the Liberators was not extradition into the North, but emancipation in the South, — not to run off negroes to Canada, but to free them in Virginia, and to keep them there,—the Constitution adopted at this time is at once divested of the ridicule with which it has hitherto been clothed. Special attention should be paid, as indications of the design of the Liberators, to Article 1st, from 28 to 38, and from 43 to 46, of as much of the Constitution as Virginia permitted to be published. It will be seen that, even in this its fragmentary state, it organizes a Government eminently adapted to preserve order amongst insurgent slaves, and to prevent unnecessary suffering and devastation. They sought no offensive warfare against the South, but only to restore to the African Race its inherent rights, by enabling it to demand them of its oppressors, with the power to enforce and maintain the claim. Not revolution, but justice; not aggression, but defence; not negro supremacy, but citizenship; not war against society, but for freedom: such were the beneficent objects which they designed to effect.

The following document is the Constitution as mutilated by the Virginians:

20 *
Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States.

PREAMBLE. — Whereas, Slavery, throughout its entire existence in the United States, is none other than the most barbarous, unprovoked, and unjustifiable war of one portion of its citizens against another portion, the only conditions of which are perpetual imprisonment and hopeless servitude, or absolute extermination, in utter disregard and violation of those eternal and self-evident truths set forth in our Declaration of Independence.

Therefore, We, the citizens of the United States, and the oppressed people, who, by a recent decision of the Supreme Court, are declared to have no rights which the white man is bound to respect, together with all the other people degraded by the laws thereof, do, for the time being, ordain and establish for ourselves the following Provisional Constitution and ordinances of organization, together with all minor children of such persons, shall be held to be fully entitled to protection under the same.

ART. II. Branches of Government. — The Provisional Government of this organization shall consist of three branches, viz.: the Legislative, the Executive, and Judicial.

ART. III. The Legislature. — The Legislative Branch shall be a Congress or House of Representatives, composed of not less than five, nor more than ten members, who shall be elected by all the citizens of mature age and sound mind connected with this organization, and who shall remain in office for three years, unless sooner removed for misconduct, inability, or death. A majority of such members shall constitute a quorum.

ART. IV. Executive. — The Executive Branch of the organization shall consist of a President and Vice-President, who shall be chosen by the citizens or members of this organization, and each of whom shall hold his office for three years, unless sooner removed by death, or for inability, or for misconduct.

ART. V. Judicial. — The Judicial Branch consists of one Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and four Associate Judges of the said Court, each of them constituting a Circuit Court. They shall each be chosen in the same manner as the President, and shall continue in office until their places have been filled in the same manner by an election of citizens.

ART. XIII, to XXV, provide for the trial of the President and other officers, and Members of Congress, the impeachment of Judges; the duties of the President and Vice-President, the punishment of crimes, Army appointments, salaries, &c., &c. These articles are not of special interest, and are therefore omitted.

ART. XXVI. Treaties of Peace. — Before any treaty of peace shall take full effect, it shall be signed by the President, Vice-President, Commander-in-Chief, a majority of the House of Representatives, a majority of the Supreme Court, and a majority of the general officers of the army.

ART. XXVII. Duty of the Military. — It shall be the duty of the Commander-in-Chief, and all the officers and soldiers of the army, to afford special protection, when needed, to Congress, or any member thereof, to the Supreme Court, or any member thereof, to the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary of War, and to afford general protection to all civil officers, or other persons having a right to the same.

ART. XXVIII. Property. — All captured or confiscated property, and all the property the product of the labor of those belonging to this organization, and of their families, shall be held as the property of the whole equally, without distinction, and may be used for the common benefit, or disposed of for the same object. And any person, officer or otherwise, who shall improperly retain, secrete, use, or needlessly destroy such property, or property found, captured, or confiscated, belonging to the enemy, or shall willfully neglect to render a full and fair statement of such property by him so taken, or held, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction, shall be punished accordingly.

ART. XXIX. Safety or Intelligence Fund. — All money, plate, watches, or jewelry captured by honorable warfare, found, taken, or confiscated, belonging to the enemy, shall be held sacred, to constitute a liberal safety or intelligence fund; and any person who shall improperly retain, dispose of, hide, use, or destroy such money or other article above named, contrary to the provisions and spirit of this article, shall be deemed guilty of theft, and, on conviction thereof, shall be punished accordingly. The Treasurer shall furnish the Commander-in-Chief at all times with a full statement of the condition of such fund, and its nature.

ART. XXX. The Commander-in-Chief and the Treasury. — The Commander-in-Chief shall have power to draw from the Treasury the money and other property of the fund provided for in Art. XXIX., but his orders shall be signed also by the Secretary
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of War, who shall keep a strict account of the same, subject to examination by any member of Congress or General Officer.

Art. XXXI. Surplus of the Safety or Intelligence Fund. — It shall be the duty of the Commander-in-Chief to advise the President of any surplus of the Safety or Intelligence Fund, and he shall have power to draw the same, his order being also signed by the Secretary of State, to enable him to carry on the provisions of Article XXII.

Art. XXXII. Prisoners. — No person, after having surrendered himself a prisoner, and who shall properly demean himself or herself as such, to any officer or private connected with this organization, shall afterwards be put to death, or be subjected to any corporal punishment, without first having had the benefit of a fair and impartial trial; nor shall any prisoner be treated with any kind of cruelty, disrespect, insult, or needless severity; but it shall be the duty of all persons, male and female, connected herewith, at all times, and under all circumstances, to treat all such prisoners with every degree of respect and kindness that the nature of the circumstances will admit of, and insist on a like course of conduct from all others, as in fear of the Almighty God, to whose care and keeping we commit our cause.

Art. XXXIII. Volunteers. — All persons who may come forward, and shall voluntarily deliver up slaves, and have their names registered on the books of this organization, shall, so long as they continue at peace, be entitled to the fullest protection in person and property, though not connected with this organization, and shall be treated as friends, and not merely as persons neutral.

Art. XXXIV. Neutrals. — The persons and property of all non-slaveholders who shall remain absolutely neutral shall be respected so far as circumstances can allow of it, but they shall not be entitled to any active protection.

Art. XXXV. No needless Waste. — The needless waste or destruction of any useful property or article by fire, throwing open of fences, fields, buildings, or needless killing of animals, or injury of either, shall not be tolerated at any time or place, but shall be promptly and peremptorily punished.

Art. XXXVI. Property confiscated. — The entire personal and real property of all persons known to be acting, either directly or indirectly, with or for the enemy, or found in arms with them, or found wilfully holding slaves, shall be confiscated and taken whenever and wherever it may be found, in either Free or Slave States.

Art. XXXVII. Desertion. — Persons convicted, on impartial trial, of desertion to the enemy after becoming members, acting as spies, of treacherous surrender of property, arms, ammunition, provisions or supplies of any kind, roads, bridges, persons, or fortifications, shall be put to death, and their entire property confiscated.

Art. XXXVIII. Violation of Parole of Honor. — Persons proved to be guilty of taking up arms, after having been set at liberty on parole of honor, or after the same to have taken any active part with or for the enemy, direct or indirect, shall be put to death, and their entire property confiscated.

Arts. XXXIX, XL, and XLI. require all labor for the general good, and prohibit immoral actions.

Art. XLII. The Marriage Relation — Schools — The Sabbath. — Marriage relations shall be at all times respected, and families shall be kept together as far as possible, and broken families encouraged to reunite, and intelligence offices shall be established for that purpose. Schools and churches shall be established as may be, for the purpose of religious and other instruction, and the first day of the week shall be regarded as a day of rest, and appropriated to moral and religious instruction and improvement, to the relief of the suffering, the instruction of the young and ignorant, and the encouragement of personal cleanliness; nor shall any person be required on that day to perform ordinary manual labor, unless in extremely urgent cases.

Art. XLIII. To carry Arms openly. — All persons known to be of good character, aged sound mind and suitable age, who are connected with this organization, whether male or female, shall be encouraged to carry arms openly.

Art. XLIV. No Persons to carry concealed Weapons. — No person within the limits of conquered territory, except regularly appointed policemen, express officers of army, mail carriers, or other fully accredited messengers of Congress, the President, Vice-President, members of the Supreme Court, or commissioned officers of the Army, and those under peculiar circumstances, shall be allowed at any time to carry concealed weapons; and any person not specially authorized to do so, who shall be found so doing, shall be deemed a suspicious person, and may at once be arrested by any officer, soldier, or citizen, without the formality of a complaint or warrant; and may at once be subjected to thorough search, and shall have his or her case thoroughly investigated, and be dealt with as circumstances on proof shall require.

Art. XLV. Persons to be seized. — Persons living within the limits of territory held by this organization, and not connected with this organization, having arms at all, concealed or otherwise, shall be seized at once, or be taken in charge of by some vigilant officer, and their case thoroughly investigated; and it shall be the duty of all
citizens and soldiers, as well as officers, to arrest such parties as are named in this and
the preceding section or article, without formality of complaint or warrant; and they
shall be placed in charge of some proper officer for examination, or for safe keeping.

Art. XLVI. These Articles not for the Overthrow of Government. — The foregoing
articles shall not be construed so as in any way to encourage the overthrow of any
State Government, or of the General Government of the United States, and look to no
dissolution of the Union, but simply to amendment and repeal, and our flag shall be
the same that our fathers fought under in the Revolution.

Art. XLVII. No Plurality of Offices. — No two offices specially provided for by this
instrument shall be filled by the same person, at the same time.

Art. XLVIII. Oath. — Every officer, civil or military, connected with this organi-
zation, shall, before entering upon the duties of office, make a solemn oath or affirmation
to abide by and support the Provisional Constitution and these ordinances. Also,
every citizen and soldier, before being recognized as such, shall do the same.

Schedule. — The President of this Convention shall convene, immediately on the
adoption of this instrument, a Convention of all such persons as shall have given their
adherence by signature to the Constitution, who shall proceed to fill by election all
offices specially named in said Constitution — the President of this Convention pres-
siding and issuing commissions to such officers elect; all such officers being hereafter
elected in the manner provided in the body of this instrument.

There are many things, not yet clear to the public,
and sometimes quoted as proofs of insanity, but,
rightly understood, giving evidence of a comprehen-
sive and penetrating intellect, which it is impossible, at
this time, fully to explain, in justice to the Cause for
which John Brown died, and to the noble friends by
whom he was supported. Among these mysteries must
be placed some parts of the Constitution; for, apart
from the explanation already given, there are portions
of it which still require a further elucidation. The or-
ganization behind the letter of the Constitution cannot
now be described. To persons familiar with it there
is neither insanity nor inconsistency in the instrument;
but, on the contrary, every evidence of a judicious and
humane statesmanship. The day will yet come when
John Brown’s name will stand first in the list of
American statesmen.

Why John Brown did not at once proceed to Har-
per’s Ferry, is thus stated by Cook in his Confession:

“We staid about two weeks in Chatham — some of the party staid
six or seven weeks. We left Chatham for Cleveland, and remained
there until late in June. In the mean time, Captain Brown went East
on business; but, previous to his departure, he had learned that Colonel Forbes had betrayed his plans to some extent. This, together with the scantiness of his funds, induced him to delay the commencement of his work, and was the means, for the time being, of disbanding the party. He had also received some information which called for his immediate attention in Kansas. I wished to go with him; but he said that I was too well known there, and requested me and some others to go to Harper's Ferry, Va., to see how things were there, and to gain information.

"In his trip East, he did not realize the amount of money that he expected. The money had been promised bona fide; but, owing to the tightness of the money market, they failed to comply with his demands. The funds were necessary to the accomplishment of his plans. I afterwards learned that there was a lack of confidence in the success of his scheme. It was, therefore, necessary that a movement should be made in another direction, to demonstrate the practicability of his plan. This he made about a year ago by his invasion of Missouri, and the taking of about a dozen slaves, together with horses, cattle, &c., into Kansas, in defiance of the United States Marshal and his posse."

The news of the massacre of the Marais-des-Cygnes was the immediate cause of John Brown's return to Kansas; although it is also true, that the action of Colonel Forbes rendered it imperatively necessary to divert the attention of the Government from his original plan.